

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE CHINESE CANADIAN ARTISTS:
AN ARTS-BASED VISUAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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Abstract

Grounded in narrative inquiry and arts-based research, this qualitative study examines the complex ways in which female Chinese Canadian artists conceptualize their hybrid, transnational, and plural identities and how they represent themselves in their art practices. It explores what pursuing a career in the arts mean for Chinese Canadian women and the ways they see their practices in relationship to cultural roots or family values and Western values. Using data from interviews, an arts-based collage creation focus group, and an image-based visual narrative inquiry focus group, three artists' interpretation of their race, ethnicity, and gender labels are revealed through storytelling about art production, the pieces they create, and how they think viewers see their work, and consequently their identity. The results show that generalizations cannot be made about Chinese Canadian women, who feel that they are often unknown or misknown due to homogenization based on race, ethnicity, or gender.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Figures	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
A Story and an Introduction to the Introduction	1
Research Problem and Questions	6
Research Context	10
Why Study Chinese Canadians?: Growing up as Chinese Canadian	10
Value of the Arts for Chinese Canadians at Home, Supplementary School, and School	12
The Importance of Studying Artists: Challenging Systems and Values of Schooling	15
Literature and Theoretical Framework	16
Theorizing Culture, Race and Ethnicity, Gender, Intersectionality and Identity	17
Transnationalism and Fragmented Diasporic Consciousness	22
Overview	24
Chapter 2: Description of Methodology and Research Design	29
Methodological Framework	29
Arts-Based Research	30
Narrative Inquiry	32
Data Gathering Procedures	35
Description of Participants	36
Semi-Structured One-on-One Interview	37
Arts-Based Focus Group: Collages	38
Image-Based Focus Group: Photo Elicitation	41
Data Analysis Procedures	45
Visual Analysis of Collages and Photographs	45
Narrative Analysis on Interviews and Image-Based Focus Group	48
Case-Based Analysis	51
Example of Case-Based Visual Narrative Analysis	54
Data Representation: Poetic Representations	59

Conclusion.....	62
Chapter 3: Conformity and Resistance in the Journey of Art Education.....	65
Early Artistic Training	66
Post-Secondary: Conformity and Resistance	68
Art Practice, Teaching Practice	72
Navigating Chinese Canadian Female Identity.....	76
Being Chinese.....	77
Being Canadian.....	84
Femininity and Womanhood	89
Conclusion.....	93
Chapter 4: The Struggle for Control over Process, Product, and Identity	98
Art Education	98
Art Practice.....	100
Being Chinese	102
Being Canadian	114
Being Female.....	121
Conclusion.....	125
Chapter 5: Loss of Identity and the Construction of a Transnational Self.....	129
Art Education	130
Art Practice: Illustration and Art.....	131
Weeaboo: Fascination with Asian cultures	133
Being Hakka-Chinese.....	138
Being Canadian	146
Femininity and Womanhood.....	149
Holistic Identity and Final Thoughts.....	154
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	157
Art Practice as a Reflection of Identity	157
Navigating the Hyphenated Space	161
Having an Art Career as a Chinese Canadian Woman.....	167
Implications of the Research and Next Steps.....	171
Works Cited	174

Appendix A: One-on-One Semi-Structured Interview Questions	180
Interview Questions (1.5 hours)	180
Show and Tell (15 minutes)	180
Appendix B: Focus Groups Prompts and Questions.....	181
Arts-based Focus Group: Collage Prompts (2 hours)	181
Image-based Focus Group (2 hours)	181

List of Figures

Figure 1: Nicole Lee's collage on "being Chinese"	55
Figure 2: Nicole Lee's collage on "being Canadian"	55
Figure 3: Nicole Lee's collage on "being female"	57
Figure 4: Nicole Lee's collage on "holistic identity"	58
Figure 5: Gladys Lui's collage on "being Chinese"	80
Figure 6: Gladys Lui's photograph on "being Chinese" of a traditional dancer	82
Figure 7: Gladys Lui's photograph on "being Chinese" of a Chinese soldier	82
Figure 8: Gladys Lui's collage on "being Canadian"	85
Figure 9: Gladys Lui's photograph on "being Canadian" of crowd with flags	87
Figure 10: Gladys Lui's photograph on "being Canadian" of Canadian symbols	87
Figure 11: Gladys Lui's collage on "being female"	90
Figure 12: Gladys Lui's photograph on "being female" of her mother	92
Figure 13: Gladys Lui's photograph on "being female" of Amal Clooney	92
Figure 14: Gladys Lui's collage on "holistic identity"	95
Figure 15: Gladys Lui's photograph on "holistic identity" of herself and a llama	97
Figure 16: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being Chinese" of Eddie Huang	105
Figure 17: Cardy Lai's collage on "being Chinese"	108
Figure 18: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being Chinese" of Maya Lin	112
Figure 19: Cardy Lai's collage on "being Canadian"	115
Figure 20: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being Canadian" of a vernissage	119
Figure 21: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being Canadian" of cottage country	120
Figure 22: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being Canadian" of flowers in road	120
Figure 23: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being female" of Amy Poehler	122
Figure 24: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being female" of Prada vs. Miu Miu article	122
Figure 25: Cardy Lai's collage on "being female"	124
Figure 26: Cardy Lai's photograph on "holistic identity" of pod suit in bush	126
Figure 27: Cardy Lai's photograph on "holistic identity" of pod suit in snow bank	126
Figure 28: Cardy Lai's collage on "holistic identity"	127
Figure 29: Ness Lee's photograph on "holistic identity" of a sumo wrestling match	134

Figure 30: Ness Lee's collage on "being Chinese"	136
Figure 31: Ness Lee's photograph on "being Chinese" of a black burger	144
Figure 32: Ness Lee's photograph on "holistic identity" of a self portrait.....	144
Figure 33: Ness Lee's photograph on "being Chinese" of a campsite	145
Figure 34: Ness Lee's collage on "being Canadian"	146
Figure 35: Ness Lee's photograph on "being Canadian" of a social gathering.....	148
Figure 36: Ness Lee's photograph on "being Canadian" of her painted illustration	148
Figure 37: Ness Lee's collage on "being female"	150
Figure 38: Ness Lee's photograph on "being female" of student pottery project	152
Figure 39: Ness Lee's photograph on "being female" of a Japanese restaurant.....	154
Figure 40: Ness Lee's collage on "holistic identity"	155

Chapter 1: Introduction

A Story and an Introduction to the Introduction

My earliest memory of being engaged with any sort of “art” practice was in Hong Kong, when my parents would get me to draw and play with crayons at the dinner table to distract and prevent me from messing around with the delicate tableware. The table would usually be cleared of any breakable objects, revealing a pristine surface that I would then fill up with my carefully laid out colouring pads, sketchbooks, and drawing tools. Praise would be given for the doodles that resulted from these brief sketching sessions before mealtimes, which I now suspect was largely because I did not break any tableware, rather than a genuine appreciation for my talent in art. Nevertheless, it was always fun for me to play with materials and I have considered myself “artistically inclined” ever since. Immigrating to Canada at the age of eight, I took private art lessons and was part of group classes on Saturdays growing up. In school, I actively participated in art councils and took art electives whenever possible to explore different forms of art and design, receiving the visual arts award in 2004 in middle school and 2007 in high school.

Entering university, I focused my studies and specialized in Visual Arts. My parents thought my career choice was not practical and were doubtful about my job prospects, so they persuaded me to take up Education as well so that I might provide for myself teaching the craft I was practicing. While preparing to become an in-service Art and English teacher, learning how to plan, prepare, and deliver lessons for K-12 students, I became critically aware of the content and the delivery of my own art education. I became aware of what was included and excluded in the art school curriculum, how the content and objectives were structured in courses, and how this content was taught in class. After each seminar discussion, art critique, art history exam, and group presentation, I became increasingly conscious of what is assumed to be important by

Canadian degree granting institutions in the training and development of a Canadian visual artist and what factors make works of art “excellent” or “mediocre.” As art sociologist Sarah Thornton (2009) writes while citing Howard Singerman, “the most important thing that students learn at art school is ‘how to be an artist, how to occupy that name, how to embody that occupation’... even though many students don’t feel 100 percent comfortable calling themselves ‘an artist’ upon graduation” (p. 56). I believed that art school was going to further my artistic confidence and creative voice, but I finished the program only to find that I no longer feel comfortable calling myself an artist at all. My confidence in my work and my ability to operate sustainably in the Canadian context plummeted because I was told over and over again, directly or indirectly, that I would not be successful in the art world as a female Chinese Canadian artist.

The longer I was immersed in the art school environment, the more I learned about the importance of being White in order to attain the endorsement of dealers, museum or gallery shows, and teaching jobs, and the less I felt comfortable calling myself an artist. It turned out that instead of learning what Thornton (2009) refers to as the “most important thing that students learn at art school,” I picked up and internalized a “hidden” curriculum – a lesson that was “not intended [and] transmitted through the everyday, normal goings-on in schools” (McCutcheon, 1988, p. 188). I learned, from my post-secondary education, how much I did not fit in the art world as a Chinese Canadian woman. Most of the artists we studied in Western Art, Canadian Art, and Modern Art history courses were White and male, reflecting a Eurocentric view of the world in the programme of study. The most non-traditional breakthrough of my art training was the expansion of the curriculum to include women in light of feminism’s growing prominence, but racialized people like me largely did not exist and continue to be marginalized.

Perhaps the only courses that were available to me and came close to being relevant to reflecting my identity were titled “Art of Asia” and “Art, Migrancy, and Transnational Asia,” distinctly separate from Western Art, Canadian Art, and Modern Art history courses. Embedded within this separation is another “hidden” lesson of how Asians are separate entities from what it means to be Canadian and what it means to be modern. This separation reflects Willinsky’s (1998) discussion about how “the West’s hold on history” has become part of what we regard as “a commonsense historical understanding” (p. 116), where participation in history depends upon fulfilling Western constructs of freedom, progress, and modernity. According to this logic, Orientals are seen as “mired in a state of perpetual despotism, which is played against the West’s historical achievements of liberty,” and thus deserve “to be excluded from the progress of World History” (Willinsky, 1998, p. 117). Due to the colonial history of Canada, the Canadian education system continues to teach a Eurocentric curriculum, which maps out and understands the world through Western lenses. Despite efforts to be inclusive of diversity, the art of non-dominant groups are placed in silos that lie outside of what is deemed important in the training of an artist operating in Canada. My Asian identity seems to only be accepted, relevant, and beneficial in discussions of Asian art, but never in discussion of Canadian or Modern art.

Each week of the two courses on “Asian art” focused on a different part of East Asia, including Korea, Japan, and China. Within the context of the courses, students would read about Korean, Japanese, and Chinese modern art, but no connections are ever made in relationship to the Modern Art history course and how Western contexts relate to Asian contexts. Sometimes these countries would be discussed together in a transnational context. It was challenging to get a grasp on the art and visual culture of one country within the span of a full year course, let alone all three countries. The art, visual material, and cultural artifacts studied include painting, art

installation, photography, anime, monuments, murals, graffiti, mega-events, drama, and popular music. There just simply was not enough time to pack everything into the frame of the course so materials had to be general enough to capture the scope of all three countries. As a result, the art, cultural practices, and people of countries are grouped together and discussed homogenously as one, then contrasted with the practices of another country in comparative essays and articles.¹

Even though I am Asian and Chinese, I still could not find myself in these courses, as I did not fully identify with the way Chinese people were represented and discussed. I identify as Hong Kongese Chinese Canadian and this dual, hybrid, or in-between space of being and specificity in the location of origin lead me to see myself differently from the mainland Chinese experiences and histories described in most of the texts in the course readings. These texts either describe dynastic Chinese art in courts, tombs, and the market place (Clunas, 1997; Hung, 1988) or Buddhist art and architecture in temples (Clunas, 1997; Fisher, 1993) or speak about more contemporary political happenings such as the Tiananmen Square monument (Hung, 1991). All of these examples reference the mainland experiences of “domestic rebellions, foreign invasions and the establishment of treaty ports, and in the twentieth century, over-throw of the imperial system, urban industrialization, conquest by Japan, civil war, the Communist revolution, the Cultural Revolution, and the recent openings of China's economy and culture to the international community” from 1850 to 1998 (Andrews, 1998, p. 2). Colonialism by the British Empire significantly contributed to Hong Kong's establishment as a major international trade city in Asia with a free market economy that advanced urban development and locals' quality of life. At the same time, however, the colonial history created complex political, social, and cultural

¹ The tension I present here seems to lie in the need for a more integrated and holistic approach to the (re)crafting, (re)telling, and (re)framing of histories so that all voices are heard but also the need for an awareness against grouping different peoples or individuals together and discussing them as a singular body. On an individual level, the need I have to be part of a community at times conflict with the preservation of my individuality, and vice versa. It is a paradox that I have not completely settled.

dilemmas between Hong Kong and mainland China upon the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to China in 1997. The Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong operates under a different system than the one used in mainland China. The Hong Kongese people speak Cantonese rather than Mandarin, the official language of China. The citizens' historical, political, social, and cultural consciousness and practices are vastly different from the course literature on Chinese culture and art. While they serve as good reading materials, they do not reflect the transnational identity and the fragmented diasporic consciousness (Vertovec, 2009) I hold and embody.

In the age of globalization where there are progressively more transnational linkages between social groups, or “sustained cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, affiliations, and social formations spanning nation states” (Vertovec, 2009, p. 2), the multilocality of my identity produces a feeling of being both Chinese and Canadian at the same time, creates an opportunity to draw and learn from values, belief systems, and cultural practices of both “here” and “there,” but also generates a feeling of belonging nowhere. In that vein, I always feel different, othered, and alienated. In Hong Kong, I am seen as Canadian because I do not share the community's behavioural mannerisms nor do I have a comprehensive command of the colloquialism used in everyday speech and so cannot chime in to casual conversations with locals despite being able to speak Cantonese. Modes of behaviour in interactions and relationships, as well as the norms and models of being there are different than the ones I am used to living in Canada. Particularly relevant to this thesis research are the standards of beauty, the ways in which femininity is constructed, and the manner in which people differentiate themselves based on their ethnicity and the loyalties associated with it. In Canada, I am seen as Chinese because I am racialized and considered an immigrant. Canada has been my physical

home for two-thirds of my life, yet I still feel like an outsider. My parents want to move back to Hong Kong, a place they still feel is home because of the memories they hold, but the place they had left years ago has slowly changed and moved on without them. While it can be distressing to not have a sense of belonging, this othered position can also be valuable to occupy, as one is able to see with different perspectives in cultural conflicts or situations that come up.

Research Problem and Questions

After graduating with a Fine Art degree and an Education degree, I was looking for a job in the art and culture sector and came across a posting from South Asian Visual Arts Centre (SAVAC), “the only non-profit, artist-run centre in Canada dedicated to the development and presentation of contemporary visual art by South Asian artists... [in order] to produce innovative programs that critically explore issues and ideas shaping South Asian identities and experiences (“About – South Asian Visual Arts Centre – SAVAC”). I became increasingly curious about issues of representation – how individual artists represent their identities through the visual arts and who is included or excluded in ethnic categories like “South Asian.” Does the ethnic grouping seek to bring in works that talk about South Asians or feature South Asian subjects? Does the category seek to bring together works from individuals who “look” South Asian, born in South Asia, or self-identify as South Asian? What does this identity label mean to those who belong in the community and those who are outside of it? With a visual arts centre that groups the experiences of people by race and ethnicity, I wondered what kinds of themes, issues, or narratives make the artwork particularly “South Asian.” The same kinds of questions arise when I think about the ethnic group I belong to – East Asians. Furthermore, how do identities, loyalties, and one’s sense of belonging to an ethnic category change in a Canadian context? As a

female Chinese Canadian artist troubled by my ambiguous and hybrid identity, I was looking for an East Asian version of SAVAC that might provide models to shape who I can become, where my art, my work, and I can fit in, and where my contributions would be of value.

While there are Chinese Cultural Centres in Vancouver, Toronto, and Calgary, they seem to perpetually follow and exhibit the dichotomies of “traditional = Chinese [and] non-traditional = Western = Foreign” (Tsang, 1991, p. 8). Unlike the approach of SAVAC which critically address contemporary issues shaping South Asian identities and experiences, Chinese Cultural Centres seem to “hold tight to their identities defined by the home-country nationalism or the ‘traditional culture’” (Shi, 2005, p. 58), which essentializes, teaches, and re-enacts Chinese culture as a traditional construct that remains unaffected, uninfluenced, and untouched by European and North American avant-garde movement. A brief survey of their websites show a focus and dedication to the training and dissemination of artistic skills like Chinese brush painting, Cantonese opera singing, Chinese calligraphy or cultural competences like language, culinary arts, and health exercises. There seems not to be a cultural or art institution in Canada that operates to address contemporary issues shaping Chinese Canadian identities and experiences.

Instead, I turned to the academic literature in an attempt to situate myself in a contemporary social and cultural context. My investigation began with “female artists in Canada” because the terms “Chinese artist” or “Chinese art” kept bringing me to traditional art forms. Despite the current body of literature about the experiences and works of female artists in Canada (Huneault, 2012; Walters, 2005; McTavish, 2000; O’Brian, 2000; Lambton, 1994), virtually absent are studies that address the complex dynamics for women artists living in the Chinese Canadian diaspora. This may in part be because the active participation of Chinese-

Canadian women in the contemporary art scene is relatively new. Historically, ancient Chinese ideals of femininity were linked to the arts as a mode of entertainment for male counterparts in a patriarchal society. Chinese families have continued to support a working knowledge of the arts today, particularly for girls, but only as a supplement to core subjects. Art is still seen as an unfavourable career choice due to the possibility of financial strain in the future (Li, 2004). Nevertheless, many Chinese Canadian women battle family objections and have an active engagement within the contemporary art scene.

In the course of my research on the history of Chinese Canadians' participation in the contemporary art scene, one of the only instances where their works have been featured in an exhibition that honours traditional elements and how they relate to contemporary Canadian art is in a 1991 exhibition titled "Self Not Whole." The exhibition was organized by the Chinese Cultural Centre in Vancouver to address the issues of cultural identity, race, and heritage through a series of artworks, essays, performances, and recordings. One of the objectives of the exhibition was to "focus solely on 'contemporary' (= western?) forms of art production [by Chinese Canadian artists to]... complicate the fixed notion of a valid 'Chinese art'" (Tsang, 1991, p. 8). At the time this exhibition was staged, the "'Chinese art' normally displayed at the Chinese Cultural Centre ha[d] been traditional not only in the subject matter but also in its culturally signified form; that is, calligraphy, brush painting, and occasional anthropological depictions (usually through photography) of minority groups in Mainland China" (p. 8). The shift from primarily community-based arts practice, such as dragon dances, Cantonese operas, folk dance, brush painting, and calligraphy, to Western art forms such as film, theatre, visual and media art first began in the late 1960s when Chinese-Canadian artists started entering art schools (Li & Lee, 2005). The efforts of the organizers of "Self Not Whole" to "showcase the talents of

the local Chinese-Canadian visual arts scene to both the Chinese-Canadian community and to a general audience” (Tsang, 1991, p.8) reflected the experience of this growing community of artists and seem to have made an impact at the time, but not a lasting one. The essays in the exhibition catalogue only appear as a record in the Asia Art Archive and e-artexte and are not accessible even with university library access.

This Master’s thesis aims to address the absence of female Chinese Canadian artists’ experiences in scholarly research and academic literature. This project challenges the ahistoric and essentialized notion of what it means to be Chinese. I investigate how the art practices of female Chinese Canadian artists draw from traditional ideas and situate them in a relevant contemporary context. My work seeks to examine the ways in which female Chinese Canadian artists conceptualize their plural identities and how their artistic practices and representation(s) of the self emerge from the diverse transnational and multicultural contexts they occupy. This study asks:

- 1) How are ideas of race, ethnicity, and gender from cross-cultural contexts interpreted?

How do these artists come to understand their transnational and hybrid identities and navigate the hyphenated space between being Chinese and being Canadian that is “a zone of contact and change, a collision of cultures” (Gagnon, 2000, p. 128)?

- 2) How is identity translated and reflected in their artistic practice? In what ways do

Chinese Canadian female artists see their practices as diverging from or conforming to cultural roots and family values, as well as Western values?

- 3) What does pursuing a career in the arts mean for Chinese Canadian women?

I investigate the standards of excellence, success, and artistic achievement across the different environments that the Chinese Canadian artist inhabits (e.g. in the family, at school, and in other

social spaces), and how criteria of success are applied in the course of their education in various learning environments such as public education, private lessons, and extracurricular group classes. I explore these questions through a series of one-on-one semi-structured interviews, an arts-based focus group, and a photo elicitation focus group with three female Chinese Canadian artists.

Research Context

In this section, I provide context to the research questions and outline why the study of Chinese Canadian artists is important through scholarship on the following: 1) the circumstances in which Chinese Canadian youth grow up choosing to become artists (Alphonso, 2013; Toronto District School Board, 2011; Pon, 2000; Li, 2004), 2) the value of the arts for Chinese Canadians in the various socio-cultural spheres they occupy (Robinson, 2008; Li and Lee, 2005; Li, 2004; McCutcheon, 1988), and 3) the importance of studying artists (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2008).

Why Study Chinese Canadians?: Growing up as Chinese Canadian

According to the spring 2011 Census Portrait report *Understanding Our Students' Ethno-racial Backgrounds* from the Toronto District School Board, East Asians make up 17% of the student population, which is around 45,000 students. 70% of this group of students have parents who were born in China and Hong Kong. Compared to the overall population, Chinese students are more likely to say they enjoy school, achieve well academically, and are more likely to be expected to attend university by their parents or guardians (Toronto District School Board, 2011). Seeming to succeed within the Canadian education system, Chinese students are not usually at the forefront of attention in discussions that inform policies made to address students'

learning needs and achievement gaps, because they are often racially framed as “model minorities” (Li, 2004). The essentialist discourse constructs Asians in general as an exotic, collectivist, uniform, highly successful, and well-adjusted population with supportive families that embrace Confucian cultural values and philosophy, such as respect for education and discipline, belief in hard work, and family obligation, and deferred gratification (Pon, 2000; Li, 2004). While there are shared community traditions and values, there are also profound differences in experience. What it means to be Chinese in Canada is fluid, constantly shifting, and always in the process of reframing due to the rapid social, cultural, and political changes happening in China, as well as how these events are being framed within the Chinese diasporic community and Canadian mainstream media. Even within the Chinese diaspora, individuals with heritages from different parts of China have vastly disparate ideologies, values, and allegiances informed by distinct sets of personal experiences and family histories.

In constructing Chinese Canadians as a homogeneous “model minority,” their individual “struggles with issues such as poverty, racism, dislocation, sexuality, housing, employment, second-language acquisition, and intrafamilial conflict” (Pon, 2000) can easily be overlooked. The discourse of success is often used to disregard the impact of racism on Chinese Canadian communities and to suggest, at the same time, that those groups who blame racism for their social and economic struggles are just not working hard enough, which conceals the social and structural barriers that are deeply rooted in our Canadian society. “The ‘model minority’ discourse essentializes a static and ahistoric notion of ‘Asian culture’... ostensibly unattuned to the dynamics of globalization and the actual experiences and interests of today's Chinese Canadian youth” (Pon, 2000). Chinese students, as a racial group, feel less accepted, less confident in many of their abilities, and less comfortable participating in class than their peers

despite their apparent success (Toronto District School Board, 2011). While “East Asian students have the highest graduation rate [of 85%, they] suffer from the greatest levels of emotional distress... One in three high-school students in this group say they are lonely, worried about the future or lack self-esteem” (Alphonso, 2013). In our multicultural Canadian society, there is a need for the experience and voice of all peoples to be heard, particularly racialized groups that have been further marginalized by the discourse of success and homogeneity.

Value of the Arts for Chinese Canadians at Home, Supplementary School, and School

Growing up as a Chinese Canadian youth, I remember that much of my emotional distress came from my uncertainties about the future, a sense of ambiguity about what I wanted in life, a lack of support systems in place to rely on, and particularly, a set of parental expectations from home. Parental expectations play a significant role in shaping the way Chinese Canadian youth make decisions around their careers. Though individual experiences may vary, many Chinese families have a “parent-children relationship rooted in Confucian traditions [where] parents try to provide children with better opportunities and tend to be overly protective” (Li and Lee, 2005, p. 651). Children are likely to be encouraged to pursue science and technology related pathways, but discouraged to target careers in the liberal arts and particularly fine arts because of the possibility of financial instability in the future for being an artist (Li, 2004). A qualitative study on mainland Chinese immigrants’ preference for their children to build a career in science and technology is part of an adjustment strategy to cope with their visible minority status within a society that continues to treat White culture and knowledge as the standard, and that “they generally discouraged their children to specialize in fields that would compete with mainstream society” (Li, 2004, p.173) in fear of the disadvantages that racism would bring.

On the other hand, Chinese families seem to support a working knowledge of the arts, specifically for girls. I hypothesize that this might be partly due to the ideals of femininity from ancient China that were structured around the arts in order to entertain male counterparts in the patriarchal society. Though we no longer live in an ancient Chinese social context, remnants of this tradition can still be seen in the way Chinese Canadian parents socialize girls through the four channels that symbolized what it meant to be a cultured lady: the abilities to play an instrument, play board games, do calligraphy, and paint. All four of the activities involve some degree of self-contained work that aim to cultivate sensibility, understanding, and expressiveness without necessarily being vocal. From my own upbringing and the knowledge gained from Hong Kong and mainland Chinese historical dramas that my family watches together, activities are believed to refine “feminine” character traits such as being gentle, empathetic, sensitive, and passive. However, in a contemporary context, these skills can only be pastimes that supplement the core academic subjects – what “really matters.”

From my experiences as an art student in high school and post-secondary school, and from my teaching practice as an Art teacher at a supplementary school in Toronto for three years, I have been aware of a popular discourse that students who study art do so as an escape from reality because they are unable to excel academically. I have been the student in this discourse and the teacher navigating concerns from parents who accept this notion as truth. When seeing a student create beautiful works of art, part of the responsibility of my profession as an educator involves working with parents and informing them of the child’s progress and potential. Upon hearing about the child’s potential, however, I often get uncomfortable smiles from parents or guardians while they tell me that art is “just for fun,” that it is “not serious,” or that it is “just an opportunity for the child to relax.” When suggesting that students spend time honing artistic

skills, parents have told me that the child “is too busy with their other (math, English, and science) homework.” While my commitment to student growth seems to be appreciated, implied in these short exchanges is an idea that art does not lead to a profitable career so I need to avoid excessively encouraging children to practice art, in case they become too inspired and want to take it up in post-secondary school. Underlying this popular discourse and impression is an assumption that students who choose art as a career path do so because they lack the capacity to pursue science-related professions that are held in higher regard in the positivist paradigmatic value system.

Even within our Ontario curriculum, it seems that the arts are not highly valued. Budget cuts of \$66 million in 2012-2014 for arts education aside, students are only required to take one credit in the broadly defined “arts” category to graduate and obtain their Ontario Secondary School Diploma, which includes dance, drama, integrated arts, media arts, music, and visual arts. The bulk of the eighteen compulsory credits in the curriculum focus on “core subjects”: English, mathematics, and science. There seems to be a “hidden” curriculum (McCutcheon, 1988) in the way policy makers and curriculum writers place less emphasis in the arts than other subjects that are considered to be more “academic.” As Ken Robinson (2008) expresses, what counts as academic ability today still operates from the “intellectual model of the mind, which was essentially the Enlightenment view of intelligence, that real intelligence consists in the capacity for a certain type of deductive reasoning and a knowledge of the classics.” The future that Canadian government bodies and policy makers seem to envision for students is one driven by science and technology. The emphasis on science and technology reflects a positivist view of the world, which conceptualizes knowledge as factual information derived from verifiable, “objective,” and proven scientific investigation (Hinchey, 2010). This above branch of thinking

relates to the philosophy of knowledge, or epistemology, which involves a series of questions about what constitutes as knowledge, what it means to “know” something, and how one comes to “know” this. These questions influence the very notions of what we believe is truth.

The Importance of Studying Artists: Challenging Systems and Values of Schooling

The desire to become an artist directly comes in conflict with the expectations of Chinese parents and Canadian society on youth to succeed academically in science and mathematics. Undeterred by all the factors that dissuade Chinese Canadian youth from pursuing the fine arts, many do end up studying in art-related fields in post-secondary school and go onto making art careers. The students who do not fit the accepted ideologies of value challenge the current model of schooling that continues to follow Enlightenment views of intelligence and divide the arts and sciences. Female artists, in particular, navigate artistic professionalism as a complex, historically contingent construct that functions based on a masculinist and Eurocentric ideological structure, which also becomes a site of struggle for individuals who do not fit the White settler narrative (Huneault, 2012). Professional art practice entails a resistance of minimal funding opportunities from institutional structures, social classifications of what “counts” as important, cultural expectations of whom one should be, and the probability of a financially challenging future.

Given the context I have outlined, there is a narrative of resistance embedded within a Chinese Canadian woman’s journey to becoming an artist and continuing artistic practice professionally. These stories resist against the pressures that popular and dominant discourse place on Chinese individuals to pursue careers in science and maths, against the categorizing and discussion of all Chinese in one homogenous group, against the belief that important artworks are made by White males, and against the label of Chinese as construct of tradition that is unable

to move forward to become what it means to be contemporary and modern. Artists are cultural producers and social agents who take active roles as thinkers and exist in a web of cultural dynamics. As visual cultural producers, they are able to reflect and represent the complex dynamics of the world around them in pictorial form. The study of Chinese Canadian female artists and their art practices is important to understanding the drives and motivations of individuals who choose a career in the arts and how these factors challenge preconceived notions about systems and values of schooling, so that ideas of what matters in schooling can be broadened to reflect more diverse ways of thinking and seeing the world.

Literature and Theoretical Framework

While there is little research on the experiences of female Chinese Canadian artists, there is a range of scholarly work that helps frame my exploration of these experiences and the experience of identity formation in the transnational context, more broadly. According to Eng (2006), the transnational self identity, made up of a communal self and a private self, is affected by the global culture, the localised diasporic culture, and the host society. The resulting identity is “globalised, localised, hybridised, sexualised and gendered” (p. 227), and thus becomes a site of conflict. Our understandings of self are shaped by memory, identity, a sense of belonging, and connections with both local and transnational communities (Vertovec, 2009; Eng & Davidson, 2008; Waters, 2008; Guo & DeVoretz, 2006; Ma & Cartier, 2003). In this section I address these complexities through scholarship on the following: 1) how culture, race, and gender shape identity formation (James, 2010; Straub, 2002; Yon, 2000; Hall, 1996) for individuals in the Chinese Canadian diaspora and 2) the transnational fragmented diasporic consciousness (Vertovec, 2009).

Theorizing Culture, Race and Ethnicity, Gender, Intersectionality and Identity

This research on the identity of female Chinese Canadian artists is located within cultural studies, particularly in relation to theories of identity formation and representation. When discussing identity, different social markers are evoked and people are grouped together based on assumed common attributes. Identity, race, and culture are different concepts but are not easily separable when they are being defined, as “race may function as culture, culture as identity, and identity as race” (Yon, 2000, p. 5).

Culture is a significant concept as I investigate the thoughts, values, beliefs, and motivations that shape the practices of female Chinese Canadian artists. Culture is used when discussing attitudes, behaviour characteristics, and the human organization of a particular social group. Full of competing discourses mediated by power relations, culture is an open-ended construct and its meaning is elusive, shifting, and unstable (James, 2010; Yon, 2000). Since culture is not a unitary, constant, and knowable construct, it cannot be absolutely defined. Instead, culture might be better described as a set of partial truths and beliefs about how individuals choose to represent their relationships (Yon, 2000). Culture is not a set of attributes of a social group, but an ongoing discursive process that is constantly changing depending on how the members of the group see, understand, and utilize the artifacts and symbols associated with the culture. The members of groups are not only influenced by culture but are actively shaping it every day.

An example to illustrate the elusiveness and flux of culture is the conversation around a photograph of a black burger that was shared in the photo elicitation focus group. It led to a discussion about the cultural practice of taking photographs of food. Participants agreed that it is a well-known stereotype of Asians to document their meals and all three partake in this cultural

practice. Despite this, it cannot be generalized that their engagement with this cultural practice is a defining characteristic of the group, as many people of different ethnicities take photographs of food as well. Additionally, all three of the participants view their involvement with the practice dissimilarly from each other because their thoughts, values, beliefs, and motivations behind the act are unique. The act of taking photographs of food is described in a wide variety of ways: as making a fun souvenir of their experience, as a record so the food can be recreated later, as a guilty pleasure, as a functional process of documenting personal culinary achievements, as a rebellion, and, strikingly, as a way to “feel Asian.” Their involvement is mediated by power dynamics of who can see them do it because she does not want to be judged and labelled by others. It even causes one of them to avoid taking photographs of food, particularly in public. Culture is constantly changing depending on the narratives being told about artifacts and everyday practices.

From this example, it is evident that culture cannot be precisely described, classified, or characterized by an examination of their artifacts (i.e. photographs of food) or practices (i.e. the act of taking photographs of food) because it is much more complex than that. Culture cannot be known simply from a showcase during Multicultural Day at school or even a trip to the museum. Rather, because it is “dynamic ambiguous, contradictory, conflicting, and full of contending discourses, all of which are mediated, in part, by power” (James, 2010, p. 36). This circulation and negotiation of power can be seen in tensions between the self and family, peer groups, institutional structures, community, and larger society. This project investigates how participants navigate these tensions and construct cultural distinctions, and where they situate themselves in relation to dominant discourses about who they are.

My research deploys the concepts of *race* and *ethnicity* because it gathers certain participants together based on their ethnic identification as “Chinese” to describe their experiences as a collective group working within Canada. Race, historically used in the classification of human beings, refers to a group of “individuals who are identified by particular physical characteristics... which come to represent socially constructed meanings and expectations that correspond to their ascribed status within the social hierarchy” (James, 2010, p. 31). Race can be used to suggest the categories of shared lineage, genotypes, ethnicity, religion, nationality, language, history, and geography (James, 2010; Yon, 2000). Though race is commonly used interchangeably with ethnicity, ethnicity does not refer to physical characteristics but instead to the state of having a common historical and ancestral origin (James, 2010).

Gender, like race, is a social construct historically used in the classification of human beings into feminine and masculine categories based on biological sex, gender identity, sexuality, and social roles. Increasingly in contemporary times, gender is no longer constructed as a binary, but as a range of identifications across a continuum of feminine, masculine, and transgender experiences. Part of my investigation is about how female Chinese Canadian artists situate themselves living between two cultures, both of which traditionally value patriarchy and heteronormativity, and both of which are at times more or less accepting of sexual diversity and feminist ideologies. This comes from a belief that one’s ideas about gender do not exist in a vacuum and should not be studied in isolation from race and ethnicity, as identity markers of race and ethnicity influence the ways in which we conceptualize gender.

Race and gender have similar tensions at stake between physiology and culture. Discussions about the behaviours and cultures of people, categorized by race and gender, are

often based on naturalistic explanations rooted in biology, such as the identified or perceived characteristics (i.e. skin colour) and the biological sex one is born with. Yet, race and gender are both socially constructed classifications of human beings informed by historical contexts rather than biological classifications. Physical characteristics and biological sex have no meaning until cultural interpretation or signification is placed upon them. As Butler (1988) writes, the body is “an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities” (p. 521). To become Chinese, to become Canadian, or to become a woman is to make the body act according to historical ideas of what it means to have those labels. Recall the example of the participant who said she took photographs of food because it made her feel Asian. This process of embodiment or becoming means turning the body into a cultural sign by repeating a series of historically delineated and stylized acts (Butler, 1988). Race and gender are not stable or factual but performative and social in nature.

This study is grounded in *intersectionality*, which is the multidimensional interconnectedness of social categorizations such as race, ethnicity, and gender. The way that individuals are oppressed or disadvantaged is not the same in all the social categorizations they are a part of. They are not experienced in the same way between individuals because everyone has a unique mixture of social labels placed upon them. In the development of the theory of intersectionality, Crenshaw (1988) writes with reference to the experiences of Black women that to address “racial subordination... theories and strategies purporting to reflect the Black community's needs must include an analysis of sexism and patriarchy [and] ...feminism must include an analysis of race if it hopes to express the aspirations of non-white women” (p. 166). Traditionally, analyses have focused on a single categorical axis of difference, which produced clear dichotomies of the privileged and the discriminated. However, each individual’s unique set

of social categorizations produce an interdependent system of advantages and disadvantages.

There is a need to move towards a more nuanced view of privilege and discrimination that not only considers race, ethnicity, and gender, but expands to include vocation as well, since it makes up part of our identity.

Identity, on a personal level, is the “unity and self-evidence of a person that derives from the active cognitive acts of synthesis and integration, by which persons try to ascertain the continuity and coherence of their life praxis” (Straub, 2002, p. 57). It involves a process of identification – of articulating and connecting qualities or characteristics that the individual accepts as one’s own. Through comparing and contrasting intersecting and conflicting discourses, identification operates based on a play of difference, as we seek to include certain features in our identity while leaving other characteristics outside of ourselves (Hall, 1996). Fragmented and fractured, *social identity* is formed through a process of constructing and situating the self within cultural narratives, of making identifications with social groups based on shared experiences and memories, real or imagined (Yon, 2000; Hall, 1996). The formation of social identity is “a process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ 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” (Hall, 1996, p.4). Since identity is formed in relation to the cultural narratives that individuals encounter, part of my research is to explore the multiple and nuanced narrative discourses at play within the categories of “Chinese” and “Canadian,” and how they influence identity formation for my participants.

Transnationalism and Fragmented Diasporic Consciousness

This research on the identity of female Chinese Canadian artists is also located within diaspora and transnational studies. Among the literature on transnationalism, many are broadly about Asian rather than specifically about Chinese and about the experiences of individuals living in the United States of America (Silbergeld & Liu, 2009; Machida, 2008; Kim, Machida & Mizota, 2003) rather than Canada. This research addresses the absence of Chinese Canadian diasporic peoples in academic literature. The experiences of participants are diasporic narratives that are “fraught with contentions over belonging, difference, and diversity” (Eng & Davidson, 2008, p. 2). While some choose to avoid identifying with the diasporic community in exchange for inclusion in the wider community or society, others engage in the remembering and reconstruction of cultural and social memories and practices. The negotiations and interplay of memory and identity politics is a daily struggle that diasporic peoples have to navigate. Many have multiple connections with people from their historical and ancestral origin that traverse the boundaries of nations, and these ties make it challenging to construct a full sense of belonging in one place. The diasporic person or a transnational individual is constantly trying to find a comfortable place of being in a weave of cultures, memories and identities (Eng & Davidson, 2008). It is about making a home in the present and in the current location, when one is far away from an original home or when one no longer knows where home is.

Vertovec (2009) outlines three approaches of describing the dynamics of transnationalism within cultural studies that are relevant to this research: as type of consciousness, as mode of cultural reproduction, and as a (re)construction of ‘place’ or locality. The transnational individual has a “‘diaspora consciousness’ marked by dual or multiple identifications” (p. 6) with different places, groups of people, and cultural practices. The participants of this study identify as both

Chinese and Canadian and have real or imagined attachments to Canada and their historical and ancestral origin. Because of their hybrid identity, the participants socialize within cross-cultural spaces, which influence the production of cultural artifacts or artworks. Transnationalism can be observed in the ways in which the artists select cultural elements to be included in their art practice and the collages produced for this research. In the investigation of the artists' practice, transnationalism becomes evident in how they borrow and regroup signs and meanings from their real or imagined heritage in order to "reterritorialize themselves as Chinese, however defined" (Eng & Davidson, p. 3). These three approaches help us ground the participants experience within a framework of transnationalism that is characterized by fluidity, hybridity, fragmentation, but also marked by individuals' constant attempts to locate, make sense of, and represent their identities within a larger social environment.

Due to the fragmentation of the diaspora consciousness, the feeling of belonging to a collective Chinese community in Canada is perhaps an imaginary one. Borrowing Tsang's (1991) words, "the term *Chinese* is vague, floating, and perhaps undefinable" (p. 8). In Canada, the Chinese, regardless of which ethnic group they belong to and which location their family heritages can be traced back to, are categorized together as one people believed to share the same histories, experiences, and loyalties. The search for a cultural centre, a "pure essence" of what it means to be Chinese may be a futile one because "the diasporic peoples' perceptions of themselves, their 'home' cultures, and of their fellow people are muddled with paradoxes" (Shi, 2005, p. 69). Their sense of identity is messily marked by "multiple identifications... of individuals' awareness of de-centred attachments, of being simultaneously 'home away from home', 'here and there'" (Vertovec, 2009, p. 6). Perhaps the link that draws territorially dispersed diasporic peoples together is the imagined ethnic community they self-identify as

belonging to, while physically located in a place away from the homeland context where their heritages can be traced. While individuals identify as “Chinese,” they may often be seen as lacking or “not Chinese enough” because they are missing elements of what it means to be Chinese based upon understandings from the homeland, whether it be “fluency in certain languages or dialects, proper training in a particular art, or knowledge of traditional rituals and myths” (Tsang, 1991, p. 8). The collective label of the community seems to involve a mythical construction based on cultural artifacts, traditional values, family histories, personal experiences, and memories rooted in another place.

Overview

In this thesis project, I investigate how female Chinese Canadian artists come to locate, navigate, make sense of, and represent their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities. Throughout the women’s stories, I found a deep sense of ambivalence about who they are and who they should be in front of certain audiences, such as friends, family, colleagues, and authority figures, as they struggle to navigate the hyphenated space between being Chinese and being Canadian. Their identities slip and slide depending on whom they are performing and representing themselves for and which identity benefits them more at the time. Even though they seem successful in convincing others of their participation of being Chinese and being Canadian, it is challenging for them to convince themselves they are fully one or another. Many of them feel that they are Chinese and Canadian, but not Chinese enough or Canadian enough to own those labels fully. They succinctly express, what being Chinese, being Canadian, and being female means to them through stories, emotions, and popular iconography, their holistic identity is not a simple addition of their understandings of the three labels. Their holistic identity, rather, is made

up of everyday tensions that arise from their racial, ethnic, and gendered identifications, such as having a shortage of time due to a perceived need to accommodate multiple parties, feeling uncomfortable, out of place, or sidelined during group social interactions, and feeling unknown or misknown as a person who strides the in-between space of cultures. I also investigated how these understandings of self are translated and reflected in their artistic practice. “Artistic practice” is conceptualized differently by each artist, with their ideas shaped primarily by family views about the function of art and the values instilled in their art training. Growing up in a family and trained in an environment where art practice is viewed as an ability to create visually, the artist collects techniques and skills. When art is deemed as an impractical craft by the family but considered a useful tool to address social issues, the artist engages abstractly with concepts and forms with themes of social activism. Brought up in a family where art practice is regarded as a profession or trade and trained to satisfy client needs, the artist sells and markets work produced. The artistic practices of female Chinese Canadian artists integrate common elements from cultural roots and Western values.

The artistic practices of female Chinese Canadian artists reflect their transnational and hybrid ethnic identities as they draw iconographic, conceptual, and cultural influences from the different social space that they inhabit. As “border crossers,” much of the artists’ work mix together a variety of symbols, art forms, and modes of thinking that can be traced to cultural roots and Western visual art training, which questions and challenges the boundaries of “social location, articulation, meaning, and socially bound stylistic conventions” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2008, p. 245). The theme of finding a home or a space to be comfortable in is repeated in many of the stories that were shared. Finding a home or a space to be comfortable means locating where one feels a sense of belonging and community of individuals who are like-

minded or in similar situations in order to share experiences. Trained in Canada, the female Chinese Canadian artists in this study do not situate or relate their practices within the framework of traditional Chinese art history, nor, the framework of Canadian art history. This is because of their ambivalence about fully identifying as Chinese or Canadian. They feel that they do not know enough about their Chinese heritage to claim identification, but they also feel they cannot fully participate in Canadian society either due to racial marginalization. Race and ethnicity, along with associated stereotypes of behaviour, are always at the forefront of how Chinese Canadian women believe they are perceived by others, which they constantly have to navigate through and find ways to resist being unknown or misknown.

Pursuing a career in the arts has various implications of resistance for Chinese Canadian women. It can mean struggling against racial stereotypes and parental expectations of pursuing a career in science and mathematics. It can mean challenging gender norms of starting a family and working to support it through a stable job, due to the prevalence of part-time and contract positions in the art world (although one participant found a compromise working as a full-time secondary school art teacher). Becoming an artist requires an individual to have a strong sense of who they are in order to carve out an artistic style that the creator can be known for. One of the strategies to making a unique signature is to use one's racialized identity as a selling point, yet this exoticizes the individual and puts race back in the forefront of how the individual is identified. The tension regarding the ownership of identity, whether one is exhibiting aspects of the self or delivering an image of self that others want to see, is often at play when creating work or even going through everyday life.

In Chapter 2: Description of Methodology and Research Design, I outline the methodological frameworks for this research: art-based research and narrative inquiry. I provide

a description of participants and an explanation about the data gathering procedures during the semi-structured one-on-one interviews, the arts-based focus group, and the image-based focus group I conducted. This chapter includes an overview of the analysis procedures I took to interpret the interview transcripts, collages, photographs, narratives, and field notes gathered in the interviews and focus groups, which consists of visual analysis for collages and photographs, narrative analysis for interviews, collages, and photographs, and case-base analysis of the participants as individuals. I also discuss the data representation method I used to turn excerpts in the interview transcripts into research poetry.

Using methodological frameworks of arts-based research and narrative inquiry, I produced case studies on the visual artists Gladys Lui, Jia Chen Cardy Lai, and Ness Lee. The three chapters on these visual artists pick up on the themes of the transnational and hybrid identity, the translation and reflection of identity in artistic practice, and what pursuing a career in the arts means to these women. These chapters are structured in six parts to trace the development of the artist and to weave a narrative about how they conceive of their identity through their art practice: art education, art practice, being Chinese, being Canadian, being female, and holistic identity.

In Chapter 3: Conformity and Resistance in the Journey of Art Education, I present a case study on Gladys Lui's process of becoming an art teacher in Toronto and her negotiations between her own motivations and the expectations of authority figures in her life (i.e. family), and how these factors form her notions of success within her art practice and career. In this narrative, tensions between selfhood and authority figures lurk about but are not always evident, as she often finds a way to accommodate others and achieve her own goals, through embracing and adopting notions of success from others as her own or finding alternative solutions that

satisfy all parties. In her art and teaching practice, she conforms and resists all at once in her constant search for middle ground.

In Chapter 4: The Struggle for Control over Process, Product, and Identity, I offer a case study on Jia Chen Cardy Lai's process of becoming an emerging fibre and ceramic artist. While she contends with similar tensions as Gladys, between the needs of the self and responsibilities within the family, her strategies of negotiation are the opposite. Instead of embracing and adopting others' ideas, she actively resists external definitions of her due to her experiences of not fitting in at home and at school. This narrative reflects the struggles of a transnational individual being an outsider within the home because she is not Chinese in the way that is expected of her but also an outsider within Canadian society due to racial marginalization. Her art practice seeks to regain control and agency over her identity and who she wants to be.

In Chapter 5: Loss of Identity and the Construction of a Transnational Self, I provide a case study on Ness Lee's process of becoming an emerging illustrator and her construction of an Asian self identity as a marketable product for Canadians. As a transnational Hakka-Chinese woman whose family has migrated from China to India, and to Canada in the span of a century, she wrestles with others' assumptions of her being a specific type of Chinese – particularly Cantonese-Chinese and Mainland-Chinese. In this narrative, the artist struggles with the loss of cultural heritage due to intergenerational migration. This loss makes it challenging for her to learn what it means to be Chinese and to identify as Chinese. Her art practice allows her to draw from popular culture and other available channels to create her own version of what it means to be a Chinese Canadian woman.

Chapter 2: Description of Methodology and Research Design

The aim of this research is to investigate female Chinese Canadian artists' experience in navigating the hyphenated space between two cultures through artistic modes of expression. The study is grounded in qualitative methods of arts-based research (Brushwood Rose & Low, 2014; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Sullivan, 2010; Leavy, 2009; Eisner, 2008), narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008), and photo elicitation (Luttrell, 2010; Harper, 2002; Kuhn, 1995). This chapter offers a review of the methodological framework, a discussion of the sample demographics, an outline of the research design, and an explanation of the representation of data.

Methodological Framework

My research involves blurred genres of arts-based research and narrative inquiry, and can be identified within the genre of visual anthropology, which historically involves using visual images as data for research or as representation of research (Leavy, 2009). More specifically, it is a visual narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) that seeks to “tell a story *with* images... [and] tell a story *about* images that themselves tell a story” (p. 141). An arts-based research methodology was chosen because art is a significant language through which members of the group under study see the world and express themselves. Without it, my research would miss a crucial part of the group's identity. Sullivan (2010) and Eisner (2008) caution researchers against diminishing the arts as ornamental elements to decorate the project, and encourage placing creative and critical processes at the central foundation for inquiry to critically extend and expand upon scholarly thought, contribute to the discussion of the area of study, and find answers to questions that people in the community may have. Art is not to be created for art's sake or for novelty in research, but must have function to achieve research goals. Drawing from the key components of

an artist's professional practice, which involves the recursive process of creating art, analyzing visual images, and reflection upon arts practice (Sullivan, 2010), the three methods of data collection (the one-on-one interviews, arts-based focus group, and photo elicitation focus group) all engage in a combination of creation, analysis, and reflection.

Arts-Based Research

While arts-based research methods provide rich spaces to enter the multifaceted world of another, it is important to note that the account of reality is filtered through the biased lenses of the story producer. The insights gathered from these methodologies are about how the author /artist experiences the world and creates meaning from them. Following postmodern thought, this qualitative work rejects a unitary, universal, and objective reality, and instead takes up a multiple and plural way of seeing that seeks to include different voices. Although I recognize that everyone's voice is unique, this is not to claim extreme relativism by suggesting that there is no space to achieve understandings and agreements because we all have our own subjectivities. Instead, this work is based upon an intersubjectivity that is "influenced by contexts and relationships as much as they are by personal perspectives... [which] reflects a sense of consensus that characterizes how individuals and cultures construct meanings that are consistent and understood by all" (Sullivan, 2010, p. 39). To strengthen the reliability of the conclusions generated from the arts-based component, insights garnered from participants during the one-on-one interviews and the photo elicitation focus group will provide anchors to ground the research within a community context.

This project is based on the feminist social epistemological model of situated knowledge, where "the knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and

original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another” (Haraway, 1988/2013, p. 359). All of the voices in this study are partial and they come together to create an image of diversity and multiplicity within a group that is often homogenized based on their race, ethnicity, and gender. What we come to know is the accumulation and coming together of the particular. Haraway’s (1988/2013) model of intertextuality and pastiche of elements is applied to my arts-based research, which involves creating collages. The joining of paper fragments in creating collages act as a metaphor for the diasporic consciousness because fragmented and partial pieces of cultural practices are stitched together to make up the transnational identity. When participants gather “fragments together as possible elements for a collage, [they are] looking for connections and ruptures where they might collide” (Holbrook & Pourchier, 2014, p. 759). This process of crafting an art object, or a collage in the context of this study, involves what Brushwood Rose and Low (2014) refer to as the aesthetics of “craftedness,” which is “the emotional or affective dimensions of representation... cultivated through an attention to how a particular image or expression communicates experiences of beauty, harmony, dissonance, ambivalence and so on” (p. 31). Through putting pieces together and constructing a visual narrative, the collages help to draw out how participants are feeling about their transnational self and the identity labels that they embody. The results of collaging, finding connections and ruptures between elements, and weaving a narrative of the interactions of visual elements can be surprising because it can reveal challenging emotions and something we were not consciously aware of before (Brushwood Rose & Low, 2014).

Research that involves aesthetic considerations has inherent tensions that offer possibilities and limitations for inquiry. The two primary tensions that my study will encounter are related to

how artistic styles shape knowledge and understanding, which come from an assumption that some styles, like representational art, are closer to truth than other styles, like abstraction. First, Eisner (2008) suggests that if one of the purposes of research is to illuminate or find an explanation for an issue, imaginative and ambiguous artistic interventions may seem like a counterintuitive method to adopt if all it does is further obscure the investigation. Despite this, creative works have the potential to address “complex and often subtle interactions and... provide an image of those interactions in ways that make them noticeable” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 3), given that there are appropriate framework(s) to interpret, analyze, and evaluate them. How a piece is depicted is just as important and informative as the content of the work. Second, the artist may value aesthetic considerations more than the degree to which it references our reality, which may be interpreted as a deviation from truth (Eisner, 2008). It is important to keep in mind that realism in art is a style and a mode of representation – not itself reality. Though surrealism and abstraction may not seem to adhere to our quest for verisimilitude, they are, like realism, modes of representation. As Leavy (2009) suggests, “all art regardless of medium is a product of the time and place in which it was created, as well as the individual artist who is embodied actor situated within the social order” (p. 216), and therefore are useful in helping us understand the world around us.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative is an important concept in this study because I conducted interviews and focus groups to collect participants’ stories about how they understand their identities. The classic narrative structure has a clear beginning, middle, and end, but narrative can be any consequential series of events that are purposefully ordered to drive a plot that is performed by the characters in

the story (Riessman, 2008). Narrative strings together disconnected events and creates meaning about what happens. When telling stories, the speakers reveal their perspective, subjectivities, situatedness, and positionality, and it is a way in which we remember the past and come to understand what we remember. The narrative can be focused on a mixture of elements: events, experiences, and emotions. The self and personal-experience stories are never produced within a vacuum, but begin in group, cultural, ideological and historical contexts that the speaker is situated in, and therefore have the potential to capture the intricacies of how race, ethnicity, gender/sex, education, and career intersect to make up an individual's identity. Through remembering and storying, narratives provide an opportunity "to enhance existing understandings of lived experiences enacted within social locations situated within larger systems of power, oppression and social privilege" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 19). In other words, it is through reflecting upon everyday encounters and folding theoretical frameworks into such stories that we can reveal what subjective realities and cultural contradictions mean in relationship to the social, historical, and cultural contexts within which they play out. These narratives of lived subjectivities are all fictional, incomplete, and partial truths that make up one perspective of the whole story.

With the crafted and fictional nature of narrative, there are many factors that can affect the narrative, of what gets included and omitted in the stories and of how they are told. These factors include who the narrative is storied for, what the purpose of the story is, and who is listening. Who the narrative is storied for determines its function and purpose, which can be to make an argument, to persuade the listener, to entertain an audience, to mislead others, and to inspire change (Riessman, 2008). The listeners in the room influence the power relations of the people gathered, which shapes the content, the level of sensitivity given to topics of relevance to

listeners, and the intensity of the emotions. These elements of narrative are constantly at play during the interview and focus groups. Interviews were conducted before the focus groups to assess which pieces of lived experiences the participants were comfortable sharing and which themes they struggled with. This initial assessment gave me an opportunity to map their narratives, allowing me to identify which issues to probe further as follow up questions or as a question for everyone in the focus groups. The narratives collected from the interviews and focus groups are then analyzed based on recurring themes and crafted into case studies that read with a beginning, middle, and end. The chapters of this thesis are structured around the case studies of three participants.

Narrative inquiry focuses on the depth of each case rather than the breadth of a large sampling pool. Despite having a relatively small sample size in this study, the findings of arts-based research and narrative inquiry can create theoretical concepts and inferences that are transferable to other social contexts and conditions, particularly ones about the social process of understanding and constructing identity (Riessman, 2008). While the statistical approach may insist that the small sample size and depth of the case studies are too situated and particular to be generalized, part of the argument of this thesis is that female Chinese Canadian artists are unique individuals who should not be grouped homogenously together in discussions based on race, ethnicity, or gender, and therefore summarizing and generalizing their situated experiences to a larger group or an entire population is not desirable since it contradicts the argument to resist homogenization. Case-centered studies are particularly useful in uncovering everyday situations and narrative details that reveal dominant social practices and discourses. It is not the situated contexts but the themes and ideas that can be transferred and applied to other contexts.

Data Gathering Procedures

This qualitative arts-based research study used three methods of data collection to conduct a visual narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) – semi-structured in-depth interviews, arts-based focus groups, and photo elicitation. Visual, spoken, and observational data was collected.

Using intensity sampling (Morse, 1994), participants were selected who are “experiential experts” (p. 229) on navigating the hyphenated space between being Chinese and being Canadian and on being a female artist working in Canada. I recruited three participants who self-identify as female and as Chinese Canadian for this qualitative study through social media channels that are used to keep in contact with acquaintances, colleagues, and friends. Participants were selected based on their professional engagement with artistic practices, which involve arts education and/or the production of visual works including but not limited to photography, sculpture, printmaking, painting, drawing, design, and time-based media. Care was taken in the selection process to ensure that participants interact with different social circles so that it would be less likely for them to refer to mutual colleagues, peers, or friends during the focus group discussions. This ensures minimal risk of conflict or damage of reputation if participants tell stories about the norms and social practices of their social networks that involve arguments that have happened in the past. It was anticipated that participants are likely to share more openly in this context. Participants were given a copy of the questions that would be asked prior to the one-on-one semi-structured interview in case they would like to prepare answers, but it was not necessary that they do so.

Description of Participants

The three participants in this study, Gladys Lui, Cardy Lai, and Ness Lee are my colleagues and classmates from high school or post-secondary school. Gladys and I met in 2007-2008 as she was studying to be an art teacher and I first started my visual arts degree program at York University. Cardy and I met in 2005-2006 in a high school art class. Ness and I met in 2007-2008 at a York University painting class, the only year she was there studying visual arts before transferring to the Ontario College of Art and Design (now OCAD University) for illustration. Below is a brief description of their demographic information.

All of the Chinese Canadian women are in their late twenties and have lived in Canada since childhood. They share transnational ties with China in the form of extended family, ancestral origin, and/or cultural identity. Gladys came to Canada from Hong Kong with her family at eight years old. She lives at home with her family, which consists of her parents and a younger brother. Cardy arrived from Guangzhou, China at five years old to join her parents and a younger sister who had settled in Canada when her younger sister was born. Her parents have separated and she was living with her mother and younger sister at the time of the study. Ness was born in Canada; her family moved from China, to India, to Canada over the span of a century. She has moved out from her intergenerational family home, which is made up of her parents, an older brother, and a maternal grandmother, into a downtown Toronto studio.

They all received early extracurricular training in art and earned bachelor degrees with some type of art focus. They chose to pursue art-related careers after post-secondary school. Gladys Lui holds a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Education with a teachable in Visual Art in the Intermediate and Senior divisions. She is a Markham-based art teacher in a local high school. Cardy Lai has a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a focus in Fibres and Material Practices and

is an emerging fibre and ceramic artist who was based in North York at the time of the study.

Ness Lee holds a Bachelor of Design with a specialization in illustration and is an emerging artist and illustrator based in downtown Toronto.

Semi-Structured One-on-One Interview

A semi-structured one-on-one interview (Seidman, 1998; Weiss, 1994) was conducted with each participant in the artists' studios, which are located in their respective homes in various parts of the Greater Toronto Area, downtown Toronto, North York, and Markham, to examine their individual artistic processes. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half to two hours. Entering each artist's workspace allowed the researcher to momentarily experience and become immersed in the environment that inspires the participants' individual practice. An interview guide that includes a list of topics and questions (see Appendix A for reference) was used to direct the line of inquiry and to check if everything has been covered in the interview (Weiss, 1994). The interview was semi-structured because the questions were open-ended and the goal of this narrative interview was "to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements" (Riessman, 2008, p. 23). The interviews were used to explore the participants' artistic practices, such as the ideas they engage with in their work, their inspirations and process, the medium they work in, and their personal aspirations for their art practices. I wanted the participants to talk about the history of their engagement in the arts, where they received their art training, what they have learned as standards of success across multiple social contexts they occupy, and how they define success for themselves. As well, the interview was used to investigate how the participants position themselves in terms of race, ethnicity and gender, their lived experiences of being a Chinese Canadian woman, what their transnational ties

are, and how they come to understand and navigate their hyphenated, dual, or hybrid Chinese Canadian identity. The dialogue was recorded and field notes were taken by the researcher about the participant's nonverbal communication such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions, all of which contribute to the delivery, understanding, and construction of meaning.

The interview also included a close examination of the participant's artistic processes using narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008). At the end of the interview, artists were asked to show the researcher an art piece they think is particularly demonstrative of their identity, or an aspect of it. The artists were asked to speak about the piece, describing its content, the artistic process, the intention for the work, whether they consider this piece as successful or not, and how it represents a part of their identity, as they would in a critique presentation during art school. The artists showed a variety of works, including past paintings from art school and a recently finished decorative painting for a living space, unfinished or in-progress pieces that no longer exist physically, and the contents of their portfolio that they show art dealers during studio visits. The show and tell of such artifacts was an important piece in constructing a description of the artists' practice that is as full as possible because it is not always evident simply by looking at the work what it means to the creator.

Arts-Based Focus Group: Collages

After the interviews were conducted to get an in-depth understanding of the artists, two arts-based focus groups were held to produce art and produce images for analysis (Sullivan, 2010, Leavy, 2009, Kuhn, 1995). In the first focus group, which lasted two hours, participants were asked to create collages about "being Chinese," "being Canadian," "being female," and their "holistic identity." The second focus group also lasted two hours and was divided into two

sections: narrating collages and photo elicitation. In the second focus group, participants were asked to bring in two images that represent what they think “being Chinese,” “being Canadian,” “being female,” and their “holistic identity” means. In the first half of the focus group, participants were asked to speak about their intentions for the collages they created in the first focus group in order to understand how they relate to the components of identity they have created collages for. They shared stories that inspired their images and stories about the process of crafting. The second half is the photo elicitation piece. Participants showed the images they brought to the group and took turns discussing how their images related to the prompts.

For the first focus group, collage was chosen as a visual arts-based research method because it is a metaphor for identity, constructed through fragments. Each piece is serendipitously encountered, subjectively experienced, purposefully chosen or rejected, and deliberately moulded by the artist to create meaning. Citing Vaughan (2004), Leavy (2009) describes it as a method of “gathering, selecting, analysis, synthesis, and presentation – a process that is strikingly similar to more traditional qualitative research” (p. 222). The process of creating collages involves the looking for connections and ruptures where [selected pieces] might collide to incite responses from... viewers – and [the] self... but [also being aware that]... viewers will find ruptures and connections that [the artist] does not anticipate or want” (Holbrook & Pouchier, 2014, p. 759). Although it can be seen as a loss of control or misunderstanding of the work, this is an inevitable risk for anyone who presents work to the public because meaning is defined by the creator’s intentions as much as the viewers’ interactions with it. Using this method, new possibilities and meanings are created through the ways in which everyday images and text from magazines, newspapers, and literature are juxtaposed as they are woven together by ink, reflecting how the creator considers, organizes,

assemblies, and views everyday encounters. Crafting visual art and narratives of experience are both valuable methods that provide opportunities to learn something new about the self. By “observing how participants craft self representations, [researchers may learn] how those self-representations express the complexities, ambivalences and surprises that accompany their production” (Brushwood Rose & Low, 2014, p. 34).

Many resources that are believed to be relevant due to prior knowledge of the participants were made available for creating collages, including Art Gallery of Ontario brochures (with images of contemporary art exhibitions), *Cineplex Magazine* (Canadian magazine with American Hollywood media and movie information), *Food & Drink Magazine* (Liquor Control Board of Ontario publication featuring recipes, food and drink recommendations), *Glow Magazine* (Canadian beauty and health publication), *Elle Magazine* (the world’s largest fashion magazine), *Ming Pao Newspaper Canada Saturday Magazine* (Toronto-based Chinese lifestyle and news publication printed in traditional Chinese script), *YorkU Magazine* (York University magazine), and *Professionally Speaking Magazine* (education publication from the Ontario College of Teachers). Construction paper and markers were also provided. Participants were encouraged to bring their own materials if they had specific ideas of what they would like to create. As collage is not a primary method they use in their artistic practice, participants initially expressed discomfort with the process. They were at first hesitant to commit to the images they encountered and use them to represent their identity. All three participants employed a variety of strategies to overcome this discomfort, including drawing and writing around and on top of cut out images, avoiding the magazines entirely and using mostly construction paper that lacked a predetermined context, and taking the collages home to attach materials from the participant’s private collections of resources.

The first arts-based focus group was held for two hours, which allotted thirty minutes for artists to work on their visual response for each prompt within the session. With the limited timeframe, artist-participants were discouraged to over-think their responses. Instead, they were challenged to execute ideas and to make aesthetic decisions quickly based on notions that have already formed about the topic but are perhaps not yet known to the creator until the moment of creation. The collage process can inspire new combinations of thoughts to be formed based on the materials that are reviewed and selected. Simultaneously, the participant is negotiating which parts to express and which parts to hold back. Participants were informed at the end that they could take the collages home to complete or make finishing touches if they are not finished by the end of the session.

The second focus group was image-based and was held for two hours. It allotted an hour for the participants to explain the collages and an hour for the photo elicitation piece. In the first hour, the participants discussed their artistic process and aesthetic choices, the intention for the work, and their connection to the prompts. This discussion is concerned with both process, which is the crafting of the collage, and product, which is the collage itself.

Image-Based Focus Group: Photo Elicitation

In the second hour of the second focus group, participants participated in photo elicitation, where they discussed how their photographs relate to the prompts and share stories about the pictures they brought in (Harper, 2002; Kuhn, 1995). Photo elicitation is the “insert[ion] of a photograph into a research interview... [where the researcher] evokes a different kind of information” (Harper, 2002, p. 13), where the viewer is invited into the life worlds reflected in the photographs. Photographs can “introduce content and topics that might otherwise be

overlooked or poorly understood from... [another's perspective] and can trigger new information, memories, and meanings for the interviewees" (Luttrell, 2010, p. 225). The purpose of the photo elicitation piece is to get a sense of how the themes and ideas that came out of the creative collage work are grounded in the lived or imagined realities reflected in the photographs. The photo elicitation augments my understandings of what the participants wanted to express with their collages in case their creative works are nonrepresentational, metaphorical, and abstract, and also gives access to the participants' environments and life worlds. They add validity and reliability to the interviews and collages. Images brought in by participants are used to stimulate and guide discussions. The second focus group created a communal dialogue amongst the women in the research study.

Prior to the second focus group, participants were asked to prepare two photos about each of the topics they created collages on, which are "being Chinese," "being Canadian," "being female," and their "holistic identity." These photos could be taken by themselves or found elsewhere. Participants could choose to show their chosen images digitally using an electronic device or bring them in as a physical artifact. All decided to display their images digitally as most of them did not exist in a physical format. The ephemerality of digital data underscores and reflects how memories, culture, and identity are no longer physical or location based in the 21st century, particularly for transnational individuals who stride boundaries that are constantly shifting depending on the context, social situations, and players involved. The participants brought in a range of photographs, including "visual inventories of objects, people, and artifacts... [and images from] the intimate dimensions of the social – family or other intimate social group, or one's own body" (Harper, 2002, p. 13). Two of the participants were concerned about the originality and ownership of the photographs and felt inclined to share their own visual

documents, while one participant was distressed because she could not find photos in her archives that fit some of the prompts and had to appropriate found images from the Internet. While this research study is aware of the issues around originality and ownership of images, it is the context that they are situated in and the narratives that participants tell with them that are the primary focus, as there is little meaning to knowledge without a knower to understand and make sense of these fragments (Hinchey, 2010).

To create a cross-section comparison between the stories told by participants and minimize fatigue from long periods of talk, the focus group discussion was structured by topic. Participants took turns speaking about their two images in relation to one prompt before moving on to the next. In the photo elicitation exercise, participants showed their two images, revealed why they had chosen the photos for the prompts, described the subject matter within the photograph, explained the circumstances of its construction, and expressed the feelings evoked or represented by the image (Harper, 2002; Kuhn, 1995). The photographs acted as triggers for retrieving, remembering, and summoning past events, the players involved, the emotions felt, and the significance of that moment in their lives. All of these factors influence the language and tone used by the narrator. The deep talk generated in photo elicitation showed how the participant saw, remembered, understood, and framed the moments captured in the photographs in relationship to the prompts about identity. The researcher acted as a facilitator who prompted speakers to elaborate on points of contention. After each speaker told a story, the other group members were encouraged to participate in discussion in order to explore which lived and storied experiences were shared amongst the group and which were solely positioned within the personal realm. The opportunity for stories to be shared is valuable because “we enact the selves

we want to become in relation to others – sometimes in concert with them, sometimes in opposition to them, but always in relation to them” (Hull & Katz, 2006, p. 47).

The group discussion allowed the researcher to get a sense of how one story related to another, and on the other hand, participants also gained insight on how others who share the same social markers perceive, interpret, and come to understand their experiences. In this activity, participants and researcher collaborate in the interpretation of the photograph’s meaning, and participants become “producers, interpreters, circulators, exhibitors, and social analysts of [their] own and other’s images” (Luttrell, 2010, p. 234). The objective is to “move beyond a purely personal response and towards a consideration of the photographs [and the stories’] cultural, [social] and historical embeddedness, its broader meanings, and... the responses it generates” (Kuhn, 1995, p. 7). While the three participants shared social markers of being Chinese, Canadian, and woman, they have very different views and attitudes about what it means to embody this identity.

Differences of opinion were anticipated based on the researcher’s prior knowledge of the participants’ values, experiences, and beliefs about various topics, gained from the one-on-one interviews and also from interactions as colleagues and friends. However, it was challenging for participants to overtly dispute points of contention because they did not know each other prior to the research study and doing so may have been perceived as risky. As a result, special attention was given to record participants’ paralinguistic patterns such as rhythm, intonation, pauses, silences, tempo, stress, pitch, respiratory responses, and volume, as they are important elements in revealing emotions and shaping meaning in communication.

Data Analysis Procedures

All interview transcripts, collages, photographs, narratives, and field notes gathered are used to explore how participants navigate their hybrid and transnational female Chinese Canadian identity, how they interpret and understand ideas of race, ethnicity, and gender from cross-cultural contexts, how their artistic practices reflect parts of their identity, and what pursuing art means for Chinese Canadian women.

For the visual imagery created and shared for this research, visual narrative inquiry is used to examine “the story of the production of an image, the image itself, and how [the artist assumes] it is read by different audiences” (Riessman, 2008, p. 144). As this approach suggests, it is almost impossible to separate data gathering from data analysis in this research study because analysis occurs throughout the data collection stage, the data review period, and the writing phase. Spoken and visual data gathered from one-on-one interviews, the arts-based focus group, and image-based focus group is studied through visual analysis (Barnet, 2008; Kuhn, 1995) and narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008). This section reviews the data analysis methods I used in the study. Visual analysis is used for the collages and photographs and narrative analysis is used for the interviews and image-based focus group. Case-based analysis is used guide the structure of the chapters and interpretation of data sets.

Visual Analysis of Collages and Photographs

The execution of any craft involves feelings and instincts, which are components of aesthetics that may not be easily put into words (Prior, 2013). Artists can make aesthetic choices but not know, at the time, why they have done so because it may have come in the spur of the moment as components that “would go well together,” or “just work in the composition.”

Creating collages is “a state of becoming” (Holbrook & Pourchier, 2014, p. 757). These affect-based, instinctive, and subjective artistic decisions should not be trivialized and disregarded as whims because they reflect ways of seeing and knowing the world, and meaning is constantly being generated in the unconscious realm of decision making (Prior, 2013). The conscious production of meaning and interpretation of artistic choices happens when the collages are complete. The artist rationalizes the function and purpose of each part in the work and how each aesthetic choice contributes to the meaning intended. Then, the participant conceptually situates these understandings, meanings, and rationales within cultural, social, and historical contexts. This whole process is analysis that the participants undergo during the research study. During the course of writing descriptions of the collages based on formal analysis (Barnet, 2008), these collages and understandings of them go through a second analysis by the researcher. In the second analysis of the collages and meanings created by participants, I closely examined the elements that made up the piece, such as line, shape, colour, texture, form, space, depth, mass, and composition, because these components shaped the artwork’s form, expression, content, and meaning.

Composition is the organization, formal structure, order, or arrangement of visual elements in a work of art. The placement of elements moves the viewer’s eye across the piece or deeper into the pictorial illusion. The way the elements are arranged can reflect different principles of art, such as variety, rhythm, emphasis, proportion, harmony, unity, balance, movement, and pattern, which all contribute to the meaning of the piece. Composition is a significant method for creating space in a two dimensional piece and is particularly important to study because how pieces are organized and arranged demonstrates how the artist thinks about the prompt and conceptualizes relationships between the objects on the page. An analysis on the use of space

through composition focuses on the relationship between the figure / subject and background, the clustering or fragmentation of elements, the overlapping, weaving, and grouping of pieces, the scale of different parts, and the ways in which pieces are positioned to create direction or movement in the collage. Meaning is generated from where pieces are located in a composition, from the size of these pieces, and from how they reference other systems of communication or connect to literary or personal texts in the world external to the work of art. Formal analysis is also used to analyze the images participants produced in the first arts-based focus group. To interpret the meaning of the images, the subject matter, the materials chosen, the relationship it makes with sociohistoric contexts, and the artist's intention are also examined (Barnet, 2008, p. 55).

When we look at images, “a visual story may be contained in the image, but the visual story is not self-evident – it requires interpretation – and thus making meaning from visual data is a negotiation that must be undertaken by the researcher” (Brushwood Rose & Low, 2014, p. 31-32) and other viewers. The self-evident content of the piece is the technical descriptions that are visible to the viewer and can be revealed through formal analysis. Aesthetic content is embedded within the composition and depend on the viewer's interpretation of the piece. Visual narrative analysis is the close examination of the story about the technical process of making, the aesthetic content within the picture, and how viewers respond to the piece (Riessman, 2008), particularly focusing on

how and when the image was made, social identities of image-maker and recipient, and other relevant aspects of the image-making process... the image, asking about the story it may suggest, what it includes, how component parts are arranged, and use of colour and technologies relevant to the genre...[and] the “audiencing” process—responses of the

initial viewers, subsequent responses, stories viewers may bring to an image, written text that guides viewing, where the spectator is positioned, and other issues related to reception” (p. 144).

While participants created collages during the arts-based focus group, the visual narrative analysis took place primarily in the image-based focus group when participants discussed their intentions for their collages, the techniques involved with how it was made, the story within the picture, how the components within the piece come together to convey or represent a message, a story, or an experience. Visual narrative analysis was also used for the photo elicitation component of the image-based focus group as participants discussed the context of the image, the story the participant wanted to tell with the photograph and its significance in relationship to the prompts about their social identities. After each participant shares their collage and photograph, the discussion opens up to include two other participants and myself, the researcher. At this time, I watched for comments, stories, emotional responses, and nonverbal communication that are generated from the group in order to understand how the feelings and experiences of particular participants are taken up and grounded within a group setting.

Narrative Analysis on Interviews and Image-Based Focus Group

Narrative analysis is the study of texts in storied form that is concerned about “how a speaker or writer assembles and sequences events and uses language and/or visual images to communicate meaning (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). This approach to analysis preserves extended accounts and investigates them within the context events and players are placed in, instead of breaking them up into edited and paraphrased fragments that overlook the sequence and structure of the story. Narrative analysis seeks to examine stories not only in terms of content, but

critically considers the significance of the storyteller's intention and purpose, the language chosen, the tone of voice, the order and linkages between episodes, the intended audience, the way the audience influences what is storied, the cultural references, the assumptions and omissions, and inconsistencies. This methodology draws from multiple sources of data, such as field notes, conversations during interviews and focus groups, artworks, and photographs, to construct narratives about participants and to illuminate how they make sense of events that happen in their lives. The one-on-one interviews and arts-based focus groups are narrative occasions where everyone presents "active[ly]... [and] jointly construct narrative and meaning" (Riessman, 2008, p. 23). The interview involves the researcher asking questions and the artist answering questions, but both play a part in shaping where the conversation and narration goes. The events narrated are special or significant to the narrator and often not mundane everyday encounters because they are noteworthy to be remembered and recounted. Verbal and nonverbal data from the interviews and focus groups are constantly being interpreted in the data review and writing period using narrative analysis.

With facilitation from the researcher, the second arts-based focus group in particular generated long turns at talk, which led to other stories being shared by other participants. In these instances where topics shift, it becomes evident that there are associations between the narratives told. The group setting allowed for knowledge to be circulated between participants, connections with the narratives to be made with their own lives, and responses to be shared. Shifts do not only occur with topic, but also with the ambiance of the room. There was a point in the focus group when one participant needed to leave early because of family commitments. After she exited, there was a shift in the remaining participants' body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, and paralinguistic patterns such as tempo, pitch, respiratory responses, and volume,

which all contributed to a shift in atmosphere of the discussion to becoming more lighthearted. Garnered from this shift is an insight that the two remaining participants may have felt uncomfortable in the presence of the one who exited the room. Although all of the participants embodied the identity of a Chinese Canadian woman artist, there are other important differences and subtle dynamics of power at play between them. The participant who left the room is a teacher and the manner in which she speaks is certain, concrete, and slightly serious. Her manner of talk contrasts with the other participants. One of them conducts themselves in a casual but vivacious way and the other in an ambiguous and cautious way.

Making meaning from field notes, transcripts, and audio recordings can be conceptualized as an act of weaving and collaging, where “both macro and micro issues as well as their interrelatedness” are explored and addressed (Leavy, 2009, p. 223). I read through the interview and focus group transcripts and combed through the participants’ narratives to pull together points of conflict and to find a common link between all of them. I looked for patterns with the goal of weaving together a kind of meta-narrative. By meta-narrative, I am referring to my interpretation and analysis of the data, as well as my organization and rearrangement of different units into extended interpretive biographies of the participants. This meta-narrative takes into account all the “tightly bounded stories told in answer to a single question... [as well as] long narratives that... traverse temporal and geographical space – biographical accounts that refer to entire lives or careers” (Riessman, 2008, p. 23) they have had so far. Restructured and constructed by the researcher, the meta-narrative draws excerpts primarily from the semi-structured one-on-one interview where the participants felt more comfortable disclosing personal struggles to someone they know in a closed intimate setting, rather than a group discussion, because many of these struggles are conceptualized as having associations with their identity as

Chinese Canadian women. These struggles and storied fragments are then situated in a larger cultural, social, and historical context.

As I am writing the meta-narrative of participants, I am stitching together relevant pieces of the participants' selves (Haraway, 1988/2013), which can be found in their storied memories of lived experiences and in the feelings evoked and shared. In the case studies, I piece together the connections participants make with the practices of groups in different (imagined) locations and the links they make with the recent and ancient past. When appropriate, I make note of the lack of such connections. The process of pulling together strands of storied memories of participants and remembering the course of the interviews and focus groups relate to memory work (Kuhn, 1995). Every time I access the images and texts, I reconsider the meaning, ideas and connections of the data. The "memory [of the research sessions] shape the stories we tell, in the present, about the past" (Kuhn, 1995, p. 3) because the present time, in which I am writing the story of how the research study is conducted and analyzed, frames how the past is reflected upon. My acts of remembering what happened in the interviews and focus groups, finding story strands, and weaving relevant information together all contribute to how the data is interpreted. These elements are then collaged in the format of a case-based narrative composition about the participants that incorporates both words and picture.

Case-Based Analysis

The need to use case-focused analysis (Weiss, 1994) became increasingly apparent as the research study progressed even though the initial research design adopted a thematic approach to analysis. The thematic approach involves issue-focused analysis (Weiss, 1994) that draws out issues from the participants' lives but would not be interested in them as individuals. While there

are advantages to using the issue-focused analysis method, it is imperative to recognize the artist-participants as individuals because the context of this study is on the situated experiences of Chinese Canadian women artists. Every one of them has a distinct style that is consistent throughout their four collages that can only be seen if the set of works are kept together.

The set of collages weave a visual narrative about several facets of the creator's identity, all of which are part of the artist even if their pieces visually contrast each other at times. For example, there were interesting comparisons and contrasts between the collage for being Chinese and the collage for "being Canadian." Gladys' image for being Chinese presents a naturalized tree, while the one for being Canadian presents a leaf as symbolic brand. Cardy's image for being Chinese is fragmented while the one for being Canadian is in one unbroken mass. Ness' image for being Chinese features a figure frozen in motion with her back towards the viewer, while the one for being Canadian features a figure sitting solidly and facing the viewer. Exploring each set of images through a case study approach allows for comparisons to be made between different aspects of their identity that cannot always be made known in discussions, due to the sensitive nature of the issues of identity (Brushwood Rose & Low, 2014). In my own collages, I was surprised to find similarities between how I feel about being Canadian and being Chinese through observing the images. Both are vertically oriented with upward directional movement in the composition, even though the motivations and stories behind them are not the same. My collages, presented in the next section, are used to elucidate how the mixed methods of visual narrative analysis, narrative analysis, and case-based analysis are used to unpack the meaning within images.

In constructing the case studies, all of the collages created and photographs brought in by each participant are explored together in one chapter. I have begun by thematically dividing each

chapter into sections that reflect the prompts the participants were given, to explore “being Chinese,” “being Canadian,” and “being female.” These divisions examine the individual through one lens at a time in order to capture how the individual conceives of these identity markers. Then, in the conclusion of each chapter, I aim to break down these divisions and see the individual as a whole, as the embodiment of a mixture of cultures, a complex and hybrid in every way. There is one exception to this structure. In Chapter 5 on emerging artist and illustrator Ness Lee, titled *Loss of Identity and the Construction of a Transnational Self*, the photograph shared for the prompt “holistic identity” is placed within the sections of “being Chinese” because it references the themes of “looking very Asian.” Through this placement, information can be gleaned from how closely her perception of her holistic identity matches the perceptions she has of her Chinese identity.

Also, I adopted a case-based analysis because it “make[s] the reader aware of the respondent’s experience within the context of their lives: this is what it is like to be in this person in this situation” (Weiss, 1994, p. 168). There is an immersive quality to how it takes readers into the lives of the artists in the study. Case studies are chosen to preserve of the words of the artists as much as possible because paraphrasing their narratives in an abstracted, condensed, summative format did not do the participants’ words justice. Paraphrasing buried the emotional content embedded in the participants’ word choices and did not seem true to how they wished to be represented. Working with a group of women whose narratives are about constantly being marginalized or misinterpreted, it is important that the study lets their voice come through in the report in a commitment to authorship (Leavy, 2009) even though I run the risk of including too much in the case studies. The case studies in this thesis have been pruned and restructured to “eliminate redundancies, straighten out the story line, and ensure that the case reads as well as it

can” (Weiss, 1994, p. 169) with acute awareness to strike a balance between what participants’ intended to convey and how their words are framed. Issue-based analysis may produce a report that seem to have more validity than one produced from a case-based analysis because the focus on themes rather than individuals in issue-based analysis can seem more objective, and therefore generalizable. In a positivist paradigm, distance is placed between the researcher and informant in an attempt to eliminate bias, but it is important to note that subjectivity is not erased simply because individuals are taken out of a research report. After all, knowledge does not exist in a vacuum and is always grounded in lived contexts that influence the way meaning is formed.

Example of Case-Based Visual Narrative Analysis

Interdisciplinary work that synthesizes social science and visual methodologies is not new, and many visual artists already create works that speak to transnational identity issues because of their own stake in the topic (Ball & Gilligan, 2010). Visual representations are especially rich because they allow participants to express what they find emotionally difficult. When participants negotiate what to share and what to hold back, the process of creation reveals what they know about themselves, but also what they did not yet know (Brushwood Rose & Low, 2014) as it reflects a process of constant becoming. Following are the collages I created about the prompts “being Chinese” and “being Canadian,” with the accompanying narratives.



Figure 1: Nicole Lee's collage on "being Chinese"



Figure 2: Nicole Lee's collage on "being Canadian"

For me, what it means to be Chinese is about hard work and persistence for the hope of upwards mobility. My collage (figure 1) depicts a colourfully abstract but steep mountain that a Chinese character is climbing up, hooking onto the slope with its "tail" and "arm" while carrying a bag twice the size of itself. The Earth's gravity and the extra weight make the climb difficult and it is not known what will be found at the "top" if the character ever gets there, but it is a necessary journey or else there will be a steep drop from the world the character is currently located, off the edge of the page towards oblivion. The Chinese character is my last name and the bag represents the burden of responsibility placed on me to succeed by my parents' sacrifice when they immigrated to Canada. Being Chinese is about carrying this weight and being resolute to keep going. The image serves as a metaphor for the need for labour to counter the pull

downwards or natural deterioration of one's state, which echoes a family mantra that one will be behind if one remains still. There is a need to ascend in social and economical class or face stark consequences, which involves not being able to stay in the relatively comfortable situation of the present.

The theme of the upwards direction is echoed in my collage on what it means to be Canadian (figure 2). The picture portrays a female character with a space rocket strapped on her back, blasting off towards the stars. There are clear labels for each starry goal, including equity, freedom, autonomy, individuality, and respect. The background is made up of pieces, suggesting the transition of contexts from a familiar Earth-like neighbourhood to the starry black of outer space. The bottom left character means "battle" in Chinese. Even though attaining these goals involves a battle, fight, or struggle, there is momentum in the way the rocket is shooting upwards from the fire, which represents motivation to me. Unintended at the time of creation but hidden in the black background area is an upside down set that looks like a theatre or a lecture hall, which may imply the performative or intellectual contexts in which the character believes is possible to attain these goals. Unlike the collage on "being Chinese," there is neither gravity nor a heavy pack to pull the character downwards. The collage on "being Canadian" can be interpreted as a continuation of the expedition being undertaken by the character in the collage on what it means to be Chinese, reflecting the chronological journey from homeland to Canada. It can also be interpreted as a depiction of the same struggle for upwards mobility in society through the lens of being Chinese and being Canadian.



Figure 3: Nicole Lee's collage on "being female"

My collage on being female (figure 3) is mostly empty except for a brown mushroom-like figure who crouches in a protective embrace at the bottom centre of the page. There is a heavy cap on this figure's head with the texture of hair. This collage about what it means to be female references a story about the standards of beauty. I used to have a straight mushroom haircut before immigrating to Canada, which was considered to be beautiful to my mother. After immigration, my hair began to curl and would not stay straight no matter how many times I combed, treated, or styled it.

The only remedy to this problem was heating it with a flat iron, but the process did not last long and would damage hair follicles so it was abandoned. These curls and kinks are considered by my mother to be unsightly and messy, and she often comments on how much more beautiful I was when I was younger, asking "what happened?" She claims that these curls and kinks are due to the hard Canadian water I began drinking once we immigrated, which contains minerals like calcium, magnesium, iron and other metals, despite the fact that the water in our house goes through a soft water filtration system. The only time I may drink hard water is from the tap at school. The mother-figure takes up a large role in defining what it means to be female for the child, including the standards of beauty. What this story suggests is that the mother is dissatisfied by the way the Canadian education system has influenced the child's perception of what it means

to be female. The set of standards brought from the place of origin, as a memory, is always a reference point for comparing the present. Indeed, my parents and I often disagree on gender norms, the need for sexual decency, and notions of gender equality. The background is left empty in the collage to address how femininity is about a set of projected values, beliefs, and behaviours from a viewer or an individual outside the self, which acts to subjugate the female character.

Overall, my holistic identity can be described as a set of performances on a stage (figure 4):



Figure 4: Nicole Lee's collage on "holistic identity"

The transnational self, being localized, globalized, hybridized all at once, is performative in nature. Identifications, loyalties, and the ways in which one situates the self are constantly shifting depending on the context and audience. This negotiation is full of paradoxes, inconsistencies, and ambiguity. Many social theorists use what Bhabha (1994) calls a "third space" to situate the transnational self and describe cross-cultural phenomena and mixtures,

particularly conspicuous is the practices of urban youth, who live in areas filled with diversity (Lam, 2004). The “third space” was originally a metaphor used to describe the in-between area for resistance and negotiation that complicates “the binary opposition of self and other, center and periphery, oppressor and oppressed” (Lam, 2004, p. 4) in colonial and postcolonial contexts. While it is a useful starting point to think about the location of culture, the third space, full of different types and spectrums of hybridity, the tracing of artifacts or other modes of representation to a location or culture suggests the conceptualization of culture as a fixed and knowable construct. As Ip (2008) writes, many transnational individuals “build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders, maintaining multiple involvements in both home and host societies where they are engaged in patterned, multifaceted, multilocal processes that include economic, sociocultural, and political practices and discourses [that] transcend the confines of the territorially bound jurisdiction of the nation state” (p. 33). There is a need to expand the concept to include individuals whose identities have been influenced by multiple movements or migrations because their identifications no longer oscillate only between “here” and “there.” Where they situate their sense of self cannot be easily traced to physical locations. Rather, their sense of belonging is imagined, performed, and negotiated based on everyday encounters with dominant discourses.

Data Representation: Poetic Representations

In the writing stage of the research project, I struggled further with interpreting the experience of my participants in a way that could be easily paraphrased and summarized. When I attempted to arrange the participants’ narratives into a clear beginning, middle, and end, it felt as if I was containing them in a summary. I felt uncomfortable creating descriptions of people, their

experiences, and their lives as if they are fully knowable, unchanging, and definite, instead of ambivalent, ambiguous, and complex. I wanted to acknowledge the interpretive process in which these descriptions are generated, and recognize participants as knowing subjects. Putting them into my own words felt as if I was commandeering participants' words and using their ideas for my purposes without giving them recognition as individuals. In the process of paraphrasing and summarizing, emotional content and nuanced elements of dialogue are lost. The repetitions, pauses, stutters, silences, and other patterns of language use are taken out, yet they can provide valuable information. They can suggest how the participant is feeling at the time. Depending on context, tone, and facial expression, pauses, stutters, silences can suggest discomfort, uncertainty, surprise, or thoughtfulness, or a combination of them. Repetition can suggest how important an idea is for the individual, how much they want to stress the point, or how it is repeated as a theme in their lives. I needed a method that could preserve the integrity of the participants' words, take into account the interpretive nature of the process, with opportunities to include emotional content and a range of different language patterns, and chose to use poetic representation.

Poetic representation is not a new qualitative research method even though it is a non-traditional approach to interpreting and analyzing data. In the last decade, many scholars have used this strategy in their research across the areas of visual culture, education, health sciences, psychology, and woman's studies (Holt, 2012; Sparkes & Douglas, 2007; Evelyn, 2004). The emergence of poetic representations as a social research method is grounded in

postmodern theory, postcolonial theory, feminist postmodernism, and feminist poststructuralism [which] have challenged traditional ways of knowing... [and] are concerned with producing situated and partial knowledge, accessing subjugated voices,

decentring authority, and paying attention to the discursive practices that shape experience and our articulation of human experience (Leavy, 2009, p. 65).

To create poetic representations, I extracted focused excerpts of narratives where the artists describe what their collages and photographs are about, where they reveal what the images mean to them personally, rationalize their aesthetic decisions or choices, tell stories that reference the social worlds that they inhabit, and express feelings associated with each visual piece. It involves a series of steps: “hearing, reading, selecting, editing, empathising, thinking, further paring, and shaping language in search of the kernels of meaning” (Evelyn, 2004, p. 108). As Leavy (2009) points out, this technique ultimately relies on extensive thematic coding, constituting a process of reduction where single words may come to represent segments of an interview transcript (p. 75). In the process of cutting down selected sections of the transcript, care is taken to preserve the sequence the words are spoken in, break them up according to the phrasing, pauses, and silences of speech or the grouping of themes, include meaningful repetitions, take out inconsequential sections, and add punctuation to reflect how the words sound like in the audio. These selected sections are arranged into poetic stanzas, which are “series of lines that have a parallel structure and sound as if they go together” (Riessman, 2008, p. 93). I have grouped segments together into stanzas according to themes and shifts in the speaker’s tone of voice or attitude towards the topic being discussed, which was observed from listening to the audio recordings and reviewing field notes closely. The poetic representations are titled according to the topic sentence that the participant began the narrative with. The poetic representations are then juxtaposed with the images they describe to create an interdependent relationship (see Holt, 2012) to reconstruct the environment of the second arts-based focus group where narratives are told in conjunction with the showing of images. This interdependent relationship is intended to capture both the product

of art making (the collage and photograph) as well as the rationalization of aesthetic decisions, which reflect the identity of the artists.

The poetic representation “enables a conciseness and concentration of language[,] which conveys meaning in a way not exactly replicated by direct quotes, case studies, or even other narrative forms” (Evelyn, 2004, p. 106). It allows the reader to get a feeling of the way participants speak without the audio recording as they read the text verbally or mentally, taking into account the nuanced meanings embedded in breaks and punctuations. In poetic representations, the speaker’s various narrative strategies, including pauses, repetitions, alliterations, narrative strategies, and rhythms, are honoured (Richardson, 1994). Poetic representations demand the reader to slow down, reread the words according to how the parts are organized, and interpret the words choices made by participants. While the researcher’s analysis is provided, these interpretations come after each set of image and poetic representation. As Sparkes & Douglas (2007) writes, “readers are invited to make their own conclusions and are not filtered toward a researcher-dominated interpretation” (p. 173) in the way that the pieces are organized, structured, and sequenced. When readers encounter and think about the text, they generate their own analysis and interpretation. As these interpretations from people with different perspectives and positions towards the text are developed, multiple understandings and meanings of the text are formed (Sparkes & Douglas, 2007; Evelyn, 2004), which serve to resist the positivist idea of the single story (Adichie, 2009).

Conclusion

A mix of traditional and non-traditional qualitative research methods are used in this research study. One-on-one semi-structure interviews are used to ground my understanding of

participants prior to the arts-based focus groups so that I will be more informed in asking questions that would open up more exchanges. Arts-based approaches of collage making, image-based narrative inquiry, and poetic representations are used to explore the subjective realities of participants.

The purpose of the research is to create in-depth case studies that examine the identities of Chinese Canadian female artists, who are all distinctly unique in character. It is the aim of the study to produce generalizable theoretical propositions and to contribute to the current body of knowledge by adding multiple voices to it. Although I was fumbling to find the right methodology to use in the beginning of the research study because there are no resources that map out every step of the method, I now understand why many of the texts and guides on arts-based research remain partially vague and open-ended. There are many methods grouped under the category of “arts-based research” and they are widely adaptable. Some are better suited for art therapy, some for art education, and others for artistic practice. There are countless possibilities depending on how the researcher adapts these approaches. While the particulars in arts-based research are not always replicable because there are many variables at play, the theoretical concepts that come out of the research can be built upon in future academic work that investigates similar identity issues. I tried to select participants who shared the same identity markers and started out thinking that they will share similar stories because they are in the same demographic categories in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and location. Over the course of the study, I eventually realized that all the participants have very disparate characters, identities, and experiences from each other despite being in the same demographic categories. The participants’ artistic practice, their level of artistic proficiency in their medium of choice, their identities, and how they express their identities through art are all distinct and unique. I have

learned that nothing can be assumed just because someone shares a social label with you and to always be skeptical when encountering statements or ideas that refer to a group of people.

Chapter 3: Conformity and Resistance in the Journey of Art Education

Gladys and I were classmates in a few visual art history and studio courses when we were both doing our undergraduate degrees at York University in 2007-2008, and we quickly connected because of our shared interest in art and shared heritage from Hong Kong. Her story is marked by the accommodation of others' expectations and needs, which are structures that give her art practice a practical context to flourish. Due to her art training and job as an art, science, and math teacher in a local Markham high school, she defines her art practice in terms of collecting techniques and skills in order to teach students and further her career. Gladys, 28-years-old at the time of the study, can be found zipping around town on a regular basis, always on the go to her next engagement, whether it is coaching the school volleyball team, or attending a family gathering, or meeting her friend to help with her graduate school thesis project. Despite how she is seemingly proficient in fluidly navigating norms, expectations, and needs from home, work, friends, society, and other social circles she occupies and satisfies the needs of everyone in her life, she struggles with running out of time to achieve all the responsibilities that require her attention. This desperation to strive, although framed in the positive rhetoric of learning most of the time in her discussion, seems to be rooted in her feeling of lack—of not being Chinese enough, of not being Canadian enough, and of not being female enough. In this chapter, I argue that her conformity to social norms from home, work, friends, society, and other social circles she occupies is simultaneously a kind of resistance against the inadequacy she feels about her identity.

Early Artistic Training

Born in Hong Kong, Gladys immigrated to Canada with her family when she was eight years old. Inspired by her father who practiced still life drawing, she picked up an interest in art when she was very young. Once in Canada, when she was confronted with the choice between taking music or art as an extracurricular activity in fifth grade, she chose art without hesitation. Gladys took private art classes on Saturdays at an Asian art studio from Grade five to eleven, where students are trained to master a wide array of techniques through reproducing pictures on magazine clippings with different mediums. When asked about the type of art instruction she received, she recalled:

My art teachers have always been very strict and like forcing us to create only out of certain ideas that he would give us. We weren't ever allowed to come up with our own ideas, and everything [is] very by the book, like very technique, technique, technique.

In Gladys' early training in art, emphasis was placed on executing and perfecting technique through rigorous rote learning strategies like repetitious copying. High quality work was defined by the degree to which the piece was an accurate and realistic rendering of the original. This type of training emphasizes realism, which has traditionally aimed to depict subjects "truthfully" without exaggeration, manipulation, or abstraction, suggesting it as a natural representation of the world. This approach suggests a unitary and scientific view of the world – that there is one definition of what is correct and it can be known by seeing. This emphasis on the one definition of success is echoed in the way the classes are structured, where the meaning and validation of success came solely from the teacher. As Gladys describes, "When I was younger, I didn't really think too too much outside the box. [...] Whatever my teacher says goes, and if he says, 'Great work,' then that's my success." These external standards of achievement are rationalized and

internalized as her own, when she adds how she “can feel it too when [she] see[s] improvement, [because] this is something [she] was never able to do before.”

Art teachers were not the only authority figures in Gladys’ life, as her parents also played key roles in mapping out notions of success by enforcing the importance of academic achievement while she was growing up, such as getting “good marks” in any subject. These notions of success outlined during her childhood and adolescent development were carried into adulthood and applied to her post-secondary education. When describing why she places emphasis on good marks, she makes connections between academic achievements with obtaining a career in her field of choice:

I guess my end goal, during my undergrad, was just making sure that I can get a job that was in the field I like? Which is like visual arts teaching, right? So for me, success in my visual arts career within university is getting good marks in those courses.

To provide context, students within the Concurrent Bachelor of Education Intermediate/Senior Program at York University have to maintain a minimum C+ overall average to stay in the program. The tangible financial incentive to pursue “good marks” might be to merit a Category A3 placement between Category A and A4 in the pay scale once she obtains a teaching position. The requirement of the Category A3 placement is a minimum B- average and the payout was around \$50,000 in the first year at the time of her 2010 graduation. However, Gladys clarifies that the definition of “good marks” is not only to reach these benchmarks, but to attain a minimum A grade without allowing the workload to completely consume her:

Gladys: And when I say good marks, I mean like, I’m not killing myself and I can get an A—I’m pretty happy with it. I don’t need to push for the A+ I feel. As long as, you know, I’m—I’M happy with the mark? You know a lot of the marking is very subjective to the

instructor as well, right? So as long as I'm satisfied with it, and the mark is at a decent acceptable level that I think would be attractive enough, then I'm happy with it.

Nicole: Okay, so the A is the decent attractive level? (She agrees) The B+ is not so good?

Gladys (makes an unpleasant expression): Not as good. I like my As. Yeah. I guess... growing up, my parents have always enforced, you know, getting As, in any subject.

She stresses several times that she is successful as long as she herself is satisfied with her work and her mark in this excerpt, but the grade level she aims for coincides with the standards laid out by her parents, so it is unclear whose standards they are. While her modesty may be at play when discussing grades, the A is only at an adequate or satisfactory level that is almost just good enough—but for whom is the mark acceptable and attractive for? This academic performance, in both sense of the word as accomplishment and as a show, seems to be put on for an audience like her parents or perhaps social circles outside of her immediate family. These standards of excellence from an external source are accepted and incorporated into her own value system.

Post-Secondary: Conformity and Resistance

I was very curious about why Gladys said the field she liked was teaching visual arts, her second teachable, and not science, her first teachable. In the interview, she describes teaching visual arts as one of her “top aspirations” and “dream jobs” ever since she was young because she enjoys helping and teaching people. From our schooling days together, I knew that she had actually majored in science instead of visual art, and that she had graduated with a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Education. Why did she not major in visual art if being an art teacher was her passion? Candidates in the Intermediate/Senior stream are required to prepare to teach two subjects, but the focus on each subject is not equal within the structure of the program. The

primary difference lies in the number of credits that are required to graduate. The candidate needs to complete 36 credits or six full university courses in the first teachable, the major subject, and 24 credits or four full university courses in the second area of focus. Not being a visual art major limits access to studios, time with art theorists, professors, critics, and historians, and networking opportunities with other students in visual arts, or in the broader Faculty of Fine Arts (now called School of the Arts, Media, Performance, and Design).

When asked why she did not major in visual arts, she explains that the choice to major in science was made as an alternative “Plan B” should a career in arts education failed. Gladys’ parents pushed her towards “the sciences and maths, and being a doctor,” because those routes are perceived to lead to job security, so she earned a science degree. When I asked her whether she had an interest in science, she was reluctant to offer me a direct and precise yes or no answer:

Out of all the sciences and maths, biology would be the one that I have more interest in, but it’s never reached the level that I’ve had for visual arts like in terms of my abilities. I always find biology interesting, but it’s not like... my interest in it is not nearly as much as visual arts. I wouldn’t like go out of my way to read biology journals, for example, but in visual arts, I would go out of my way to take courses, out of my own pocket so.

Science is a subject she seems to have taken out of necessity due to the pressures of securing employment at the end of post-secondary education and of parental and cultural expectations to become a respectable member of society. Her interest for biology and the initiative she has to update her knowledge in it is much less than what she felt she had for art. Yet, the wishes from authority figures in her life were adopted, again, as her own:

Nicole: *Would you say that you took science because of your parents?*

Gladys: I would say to satisfy my parents in one way, and also it does make sense. Like I mean I want to have—I always like having a plan B just in case something doesn't work out and at least I did okay in biology and I could still teach bio and I have used it for making money purposes, like teaching Saturday school or summer school.

The decision to take science is defended as a logical and sensible choice. She even endorses it by proving how she has used it for financial gain, which seems to be suggested as the fundamental goal of education. It is difficult to distinguish Gladys' own desire, or whether Gladys is expressing what she wants for herself or what her authority figures want for her.

Her experiences of schooling seem to reinforce dominant discourses and stereotypes surrounding individuals of Chinese heritage, as overachieving mark-driven students who are stellar at math and science and who obey the parameters set by authority figures. On the other hand, she finds clandestine means to resist and work with the expectations placed upon her. She consistently grabs hold of what others want for her and reconstructs them as her own expectations for herself. Her use of active voice and tendency to start her sentences with "I" suggest to me that she is choosing to empower herself by taking charge in an environment that seems to leave her with little control. She finds spaces to reclaim her sense of agency by pursuing her passion covertly as electives, while concurrently fulfilling requirements for her science and education programs. She manages to squeeze in what she wants to do while juggling demands from her family and teachers. Gladys recognizes that "reputation is pretty huge in Chinese culture, in [her] understanding of it, of how [she] was brought up." As a result, there are certain advantages to being seen as operating in the science stream within social situations she may encounter. Equipped with a science degree, her relevant coursework readily enables her to take up a medical career. More importantly, it fends off apprehension, disappointment, and

perceived failure from concerned parties. Despite toiling away to satisfy her parents, she never once criticized them in our conversations for subjugating her, but instead describes them as

very reasonable people. We have good conversations all the time, especially me and my dad actually. We talk openly. I always go to them for advice for anything, and they're like my rock. I'm a very lucky child.

She understands their expectations as manifestations of guidance, which comes from love. She describes their advice as serving to ground her instead of drag her down. While it may be easy to jump to the conclusion that she is a victim of cultural traditions that place an exceptional focus on achievement and performance, her understanding of these experiences, narratives of resistance, and strategies of coping are just as important in defining her character.

As we made our way to the second focus group on a cold February afternoon, we chatted briefly and she disclosed that she had originally wanted to be a fashion designer. I was intrigued by this story as it was never mentioned in the seven years I have known her, and especially because it was a breach of the seamless narrative she told me about her path towards art education: how she had always wanted to be an art teacher and how she attained that dream job through hard work. She was eventually dissuaded from her plan to become a fashion designer by her parents, for which she said she is now thankful because she believes taking on that career would have lead her to an unstable and challenging future, which she finds unfavourable. Being an art teacher was actually somewhat of a compromise that allowed her to continue her art practice and make a living.

I was uncertain about whether this was another instance of conformity to cultural pressures, until she revealed that teaching visual arts is a way to prove to herself that a career in the arts is indeed viable. Becoming a teacher means that she assumes the role of an authority

figure who can be in a position to make rules, define standards, and hold power. This revelation makes it clear that we must be very careful in making judgements about individuals being “oppressed” without recognizing how they come to understand the situation, how they define themselves, and how they navigate through differing voices. This is not to suggest that her situation is ideal and that she is unaffected by the dominant discourses that surround her identity, but that we must also recognize her efforts to gain control of her life.

Art Practice, Teaching Practice

Despite confronted with many challenges in her decision to become an artist, Gladys chose this path because she thought art was her calling and that she had talent. She felt she had “always been pretty good at it... [and she] never [had] to put crazy effort into getting the highest mark in class for art and [she has] always gotten the award for it.” Art is considered to be a mastery of skill, as “you have to be very good at your technique in terms of looking at darks and lights and values, elements and principles [of design]... how to blend, how to do pointillism [and] various techniques.” She primarily identifies as a painter who specializes in acrylics. While there are not specific artists or sources she gets inspiration from, she finds the internet to be a great starting point, particularly art posts that are shared on Facebook and Pinterest because they collect ideas from many different artists and crafters. Online spaces have democratized art to make it available and accessible for everyone. Everyone can be an artist and an inspiration to others without having to navigate the exclusivity of art spaces.

Gladys’ art practice involves functionality as she describes herself as a “super practical person,” since the pieces she makes usually satisfy a purpose, like completing assignments for courses or decorating a living room:

For example I know I want to paint a 30x40' piece... because I'm going to use that in my living room. So I would think like, "Oh what colours do I need?" or like, "Oh what kind of things will go with the composition of the house?"

Creation is framed by a concrete objective. The requirements that naturally arise from the contexts that compel her to make art serve as a structure to guide the making process. Her approach to producing art echoes her perception that fixed conditions put in place by authority figures guide her life. Creativity is only allowed to happen within an environment of control, whether control is superimposed by the self, others, or the situation. For instance, the process of creating the work is described as being nested within the structure of a timeframe:

I usually take a step back... and just kind of see like the overall picture: where do I still need to improve on. Generally speaking, I think most of my pieces are done within, if it's a larger painting, maybe 30 hours is good... But it also depends on my topic I guess... I would tell myself a deadline as well. You pretty much tell yourself, "Ok, you stop within the end of the week, and... you put more hours in if you feel like you don't have enough."

While many artists "take a step back" in order to consider the picture as a whole and determine what the next steps for the work will be, her assessment extends beyond the frame of the piece in front of her. Her work involves figuring out how the artwork will fit within its intended environment. This theme of trying to integrate into environments is repeated throughout her experiences of being a female Chinese Canadian artist.

Gladys' art practice is conceptualized and described as interconnected with her teaching practice. She believes that becoming a better artist is linked to becoming a better teacher because continuing to make work, explore possibilities and refine techniques will enhance her skill set, which she can then share with her students. The aim of transferring techniques to her students is

to give them options within the structure of the course or assignments. She opens up choices and possibilities but it is up to the students as to whether or not they want to try and incorporate them into their projects. Her work as an artist focuses on the collection of a variety of skills and techniques through coursework, which is very different than traditional and contemporary notions of what an artist does— dedicating their life to master their craft and putting their “creative genius” on display. She admits that she “[does] not really have much time to create art out of nowhere, as a hobby [because] there are just so many other things going on in life.” Instead, she takes classes in something new every year, such as Chinese brush painting, digital photography, or animation, in order to enhance her practice and expand her teaching toolbox. The courses she completes count as professional development, and advance her teaching career. Having taken multiple courses in digital photography, she was asked by her department to teach the digital photography course as she grew more comfortable with the medium. Completing assignments and meeting course objectives give her the confidence to “step up to the game” and take new leadership positions should the opportunity arise. Her expanded knowledge pool also allows her to better address student questions.

It is not surprising that educators like to learn new skills and foster lifelong learning in themselves. “Lifelong learning” is a phrase that gets tossed around in teacher education programs and school boards because it is widely believed that the self-inspired pursuit of knowledge is valuable in the way that it encourages personal and professional development. Educators try to cultivate lifelong learning in students so that they will be driven by themselves to wonder, explore, and learn when they are no longer in the classroom with supervision and guidance from an authority. However, Gladys explains her learning in a peculiar manner:

I personally really... love learning. So every year in the summer, I force myself to learn something new in art. For example, last year, I have no clue... how to use various lenses. I would buy the lens, I would take courses, and I would learn how to use it. I would lock myself in a place... in a town somewhere and I would full out learn how to use these things... So hopefully I'll get to make my skill sets bigger.

In the excerpt above, she describes how she loves learning and how she commits much of her time and energy to the activity. Her pursuit of knowledge seems to be self-inspired and never-ending, but it does not seem to be voluntary if she “forces” herself to do so, if she makes the financial commitment to buy the equipment before knowing how to use them as if to “lock” herself into the activity, and if she confines herself in a space in order to master a skill. These verbs seem to paint a different picture of the lifelong learning than the idyllic one outlined in teachers college. Here, the incessant pursuit of knowledge is not just done to advance one’s self. Rather, it seems to be about staying ahead in the rat race, implying that you are falling behind every day if you do not keep up and improve yourself. While she conforms with the expectations of her job to be a lifelong learner to the extent where she continuously forces herself to take lessons, she simultaneously resists the feeling of inadequacy or of not being enough, which seems to be rooted from how she feels about her Chinese Canadian identity.

If Gladys had the time, without any pressure from her family or demands from her career, she says:

I would love to get into doing more of my own visual arts and maybe, maybe even selling some of my art, maybe applying some of my artistic skills... in cooking [and] cake decorating... I also like doing pottery.

She envisions being able to do this without the need to juggle responsibilities in the future when she retires. In Ontario, teachers are eligible to retire with a full pension at age 65 or when their years of work plus their age equals 85. Gladys is currently 28 and has worked for around 5 years as a teacher. Her retirement will be in approximately 40 years. She mentions that she would love to do “more of her own art” after retirement and I wonder if she considers what she is doing now “her own” art? Or is it art made according to others’ definitions of art? By extension, is the narrative she is telling me “her own” story? Or is it a story that is borrowed or influenced by others’ definitions of what should be told?

Navigating Chinese Canadian Female Identity

Gladys’ persistent advancement of self comes out of the gap between how she conceptualizes Chinese Canadian female identity and who she is as an individual. She actively pushes to meet the standards laid out by the various social contexts she interacts in because she believes that she embodies or need to embody a particular way of being Chinese Canadian. She succeeds in fitting into the social circles she wants to join through compromise, and in doing so, she ardently resists feelings of insufficiency.

From the conversations I had with Gladys, her race and ethnicity seem to be understood in relationship to physical location and how members of her various social circles construct race and culture, which may include friends, family, and colleagues; nationality seems to be understood in relationship to how she, as a racialized body, situates herself within the dominant national discourses at work; gender seems to be understood in relationship to norms, traditions, and expectations. Race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender are all important to her construction of

identity. These elements flow into shaping each other, without precise boundaries of where one begins and where one ends.

While race, ethnicity, nationality and gender seem to often be discussed as separate entities in identity formation, it is important to note that they are inextricably linked to one another and cannot be discussed without drawing connections to one another. While I grouped discussions about race and ethnicity, nationality, and gender separately below, I make links between race, ethnicity nationality and gender. I separated these into sections because I wish to interrogate how participants conceptualizes aspects of their identity and how they attribute and categorize these aspects as characteristics of being Chinese, being Canadian, and being female, in order to understand what these labels mean to them. In these discussions, Connections are drawn between race, ethnicity nationality and gender because participants understand their race and ethnicity of being Chinese in relationship to their Canadian nationality, and vice versa. As well, they perceive their gender in relationship to Chinese and Canadian standards of femininity. By understanding these intricacies of how participants think about these labels, insights can be garnered about their loyalties, whether they see themselves as “more Chinese” or “more Canadian” or an even mixture of both.

Being Chinese

Gladys has been to Nanjing, China for a three-month internship and many other provinces for travel purposes, but surprisingly has been to Hong Kong, her place of origin, only once to visit her grandmother and another time for a brief “stop over.” In both Hong Kong and China, Gladys described how she was treated with a distinct type of respect that transcended social conventions of the region, one that held power over locals. She looks racially Chinese, and

so passes off as a local Hong Kongese or mainland Chinese at first glance. Gradually, locals often consider her as “slow” or awkward when they interact with her, due to her lack of fluency in colloquial Cantonese or regional ways of speaking in Mandarin. They also express disapproval of her and think that she is behaving inappropriately because she does not act like how they expect locals to behave. In the locals’ eyes, she is not Chinese enough. This disapproval or rejection changes as soon as she employs the English language to navigate the struggle for superiority. Upon learning that Gladys is not one of them, locals evaluate her using a different set of expectations. The set of criteria that she did not meet before to her use of English suddenly cease to matter. Instead, locals would appreciate her efforts to try to understand them and communicate with them, admire her fluency in English, give her more time to process dialogues, and overlook her violation of social norms because they do not apply to a foreigner. It is through her use of English that she gains a sense of control over the situation.

In the example of her internship in China, she remembers waiting for an elevator with a fellow Chinese-Canadian female intern. Unbeknownst to them, the CEO was also waiting for the elevator with them. When the elevator arrived, all the locals let the head of the company go first as a sign of respect. The girls did not know his identity and walked in without following this cultural custom, since they had waited in line first. The two women were ostracized by upset stares until they “opened [their] mouths to speak in English fluently,” which signalled a group understanding that the women were “foreigners” and thus cannot be held accountable to community expectations. In that moment, although they looked Chinese, they were seen as not fully Chinese. In Hong Kong, people could tell she was not from Hong Kong “once [she] opened [her] mouth” to speak in Cantonese because her style of speaking is too proper, as if it is in written form instead of vernacular form. Despite being seen as an outsider, she gained celebrity

status due to her fluent command of English. When Gladys' Hong Kongese friend took her out to meet some local friends, all of these friends gathered around her to speak to her and find out more about her because she was the Canadian foreigner in the social setting. She was made into a spectacle as someone who looks as if she can pass off as one of them, but is actually different.

Power struggles play out in both her stories of China and Hong Kong. The locals held power over Gladys due to their knowledge of customs and ways of being in their native social setting. She changes others' negative perception of her into a positive one with her fluency in English as a strategy to regain control and dominance over the social dynamics and environments she was situated in. She successfully avoids being ostracized because of her perceived weakness of not being able to speak colloquial Cantonese and exoticizes her "foreignness" or "Canadianness" to her advantage. Gladys considers Hong Kong colloquialism to be too casual and vernacular, and believes that her way of speaking Cantonese is more proper because she speaks as if she is writing, which relates to the theme of cultural attrition in her collage on "Being Chinese" (figure 5). Immigrating to and growing up in Canada from the age of 8, Gladys experiences a loss of culture and language through attrition. What she remembers from her past in Hong Kong has already gradually changed without her. While she was probably taught the proper way of speaking when she was a child, she returns to Hong Kong as an adult who is expected to have a proficient command of language and be able to shift between proper and vernacular ways of speaking depending on the circumstance.

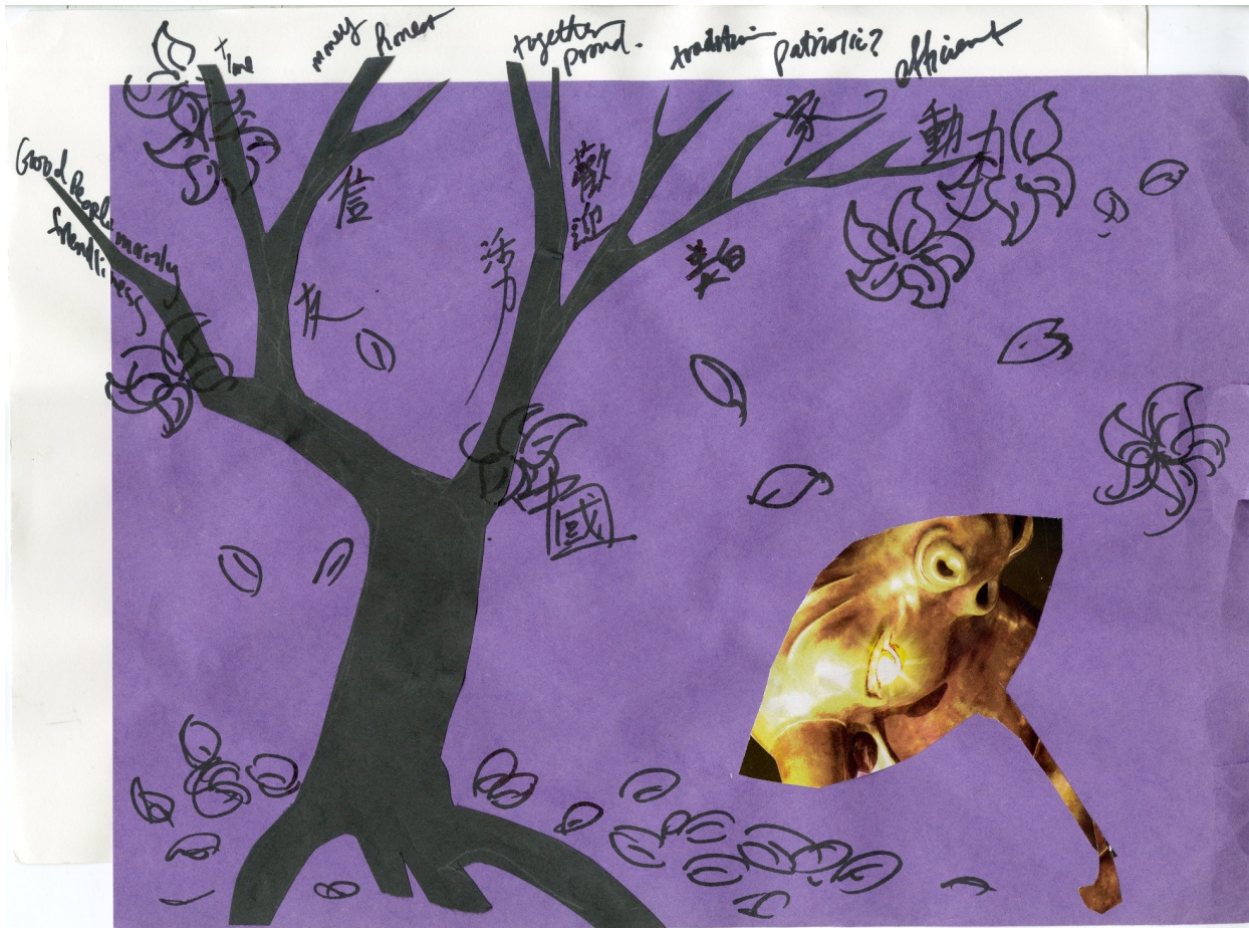


Figure 5: Gladys Lui's collage on "being Chinese"

Loss of Culture

I was born in Hong Kong so
The umbrella is very iconic right now
Even though I don't know enough about it

Chinese words that I can recognize, though limited,
that are deeply rooted in Chinese culture:
Trust, being welcoming, family, energetic, friendships

Some words I couldn't write in Chinese
I'll write in English
hence the whiter part of the piece
Friendliness, honesty, proud, togetherness, tradition, efficiency

A tree, flowers and petals falling down
Things are being lost in Chinese culture
The better things, with time
We are losing that

As her collage suggests, the tree that represents her Chinese cultural roots is losing its leaves, where the qualities of “being Chinese” for Gladys are written. The Chinese characters from left to right translates as friendship, trust, energy, being welcoming, beautify by whitening skin, family, and vitality. She admits during the sharing of collages that she could not write some of the words she wanted to express in Chinese and used English as a substitute, which include good people mainly, friendliness, money, efficient use of time, togetherness, pride, tradition, and patriotism. While Gladys knows about the umbrella movement, a pro-democracy political movement that is momentarily shaping the socio-political and economic dynamics of Hong Kong and affecting the relationship between China and Hong Kong since 2014, she says she does not know enough about it.

Following the theme of attrition and cultural loss, Gladys admits that she had to search for images about “being Chinese” on Google for the image-based focus group where participants shared images about the prompts “being Chinese,” “being Canadian,” “being female,” and their “holistic identity.” I speculate she used stock images from the Internet because the Chinese culture that she is familiar with is characterized by values, which may not translate well visually, but also because she does not know enough about contemporary Chinese culture to describe what it means to her personally and how it is relevant to her in a modern context. Two images (figures 6 and 7) and statements are shared for the “being Chinese” prompt.



Figure 6: Gladys Lui's photograph on "being Chinese" of a traditional dancer

Gracefulness

Being Chinese is very graceful
at least traditional Chinese
Tradition is not necessarily good or bad
but it's positive that people think
Chinese people are graceful
There's culture and tradition involved
Specific types of dance,
performances, various theatres
which I don't know much about



Figure 7: Gladys Lui's photograph on "being Chinese" of a Chinese soldier

Conformity

A picture of a soldier in the Chinese army
He's conforming to his role as a soldier
Tears in his eyes, forced to do something
He didn't want to.
Sent off to a military camp where
He knows there's a slim chance of living
In mainland China,
there's a lot of conformity
Obeying those who are higher up

The image of a Chinese dancer (figure 6) is used to illustrate one traditional aspect of Chinese identity, particularly for women, as being graceful. As this image shows, the Chinese culture that Gladys is familiar with seems to be firmly rooted in the ancient past, ahistorical nostalgia, and dominant discourses of Chinese identity. The picture of graceful Chinese dancers represents tradition. Gladys appreciates it but is regrettably unfamiliar with the traditional significance or cultural meanings of the art form. The image also suggests traditional ideals of femininity where one has to glide through life beautifully with an ostensible lack of effort. The image of a soldier (figure 7) is used to describe the compliance, conventionality, and obedience in her experiences of Chinese culture. Throughout her experiences in China and in her family, conformity to expectations from an authority figure is a common theme. However, Gladys describes the soldier as being forced to conform, which may suggest that her compliance to meet the expectations of

authority figures is not as happy and willing as it seems. It is evident that she is aware that there is individuality within a collective.

Gladys' identification as a Chinese comes from her race—her physical appearances as “Asian-looking” and how others perceive her. She struggles with her Chinese-Canadian identity:

Well, physically obviously I'm Chinese, right? I mean, I am Asian-looking and everything. And... mentally-wise, I would say I'm 50% traditional, like pretty traditional Chinese. That's how I was brought up, because I came here when I was 8 from Hong Kong— so Hong Kongese Chinese, whatever you want to call it. The other half of me... I would say I'm pretty assimilated into the Western culture.

Her Hong Kongese identity is based on her place of origin, but it seems to be brushed off as an insignificant detail when she grew frustrated with the technicality of identity markers and quickly wraps it up with “whatever you want to call it.” She sees her “Chineseness” through the lens of how others define her. Her identity seems like a performance, catered and delivered to a specific audience in front of her. She initially describes herself as 50% traditional Chinese and 50% “Western” because she has “assimilated into the Western culture.” Then, she shifts to explain that she is 40% Chinese and 60% “Westernized” because she has spent more time in Canada and feels more comfortable speaking and expressing herself in English, despite being able to speak fluently in Cantonese. In terms of values, she considers herself to be 60% Chinese and 40% Western because she is “living at home and [has] to do a lot of things to respect [her] parents, [because it is] their house, [so it is] their rules.” This portion of the interview lead Gladys to exhale deeply, as if she was overwhelmed by the question, and she concluded that she “just say[s] Chinese Canadian because that's how [she] feel[s] like others would identify [her].” The Chinese identity and culture Gladys is familiar with is one characterized by conformity to

the rules of a power game. She follows dominant discourses and ways of being when they serve to cast her in a positive light, give her an advantage, or grant her superior social status. On the contrary, she easily flips the rules and expectations of behaviour around in resistance when they do not serve her and classify her as “not Chinese enough” due to cultural attrition, as illustrated in her use of English in her stories of Hong Kong and China.

Being Canadian

Gladys did not mention being Canadian until she spoke about how she is Westernized. Her assimilation into Western culture, she says, comes from “blend[ing] in very well with her environment,” such as the workplace. At the school where she works, she knows what her colleagues, who are all non-Asian, are talking about and can continue the conversation because “it’s not like [she is] straight off the boat and [would] be like, ‘what are you talking about, what is hockey or I didn’t watch the Raptors game.’” The Canadian environment Gladys refers to seems to be defined by simplified, iconic, and dominant national discourses like sports. Her strategy to navigate this situation is by speaking their language of common interests. Gladys also identifies as Canadian before Chinese because she holds a Canadian passport and has been living in Canada since the age of eight. Being Canadian is, therefore, defined as a physical location, since “everyone who... comes to Canada is Canadian” as if we are all “joining a club.” However, it is a place where racialized bodies have to constantly prove themselves through behaving like Canadians to be included.

Following the theme of assimilation, Gladys’s process of constructing her collage on “Being Canadian” involves finding words that “fit nicely into the Canadian flag.” She has literally selected parts to include and exclude in order to fit an image, much like a metaphor for

how she shows and hides certain parts of herself in order to match dominant discourses of what it means to be Canadian. Below are the collage Gladys created and the accompanying statement for the prompt “being Canadian”:



Figure 8: Gladys Lui's collage on “being Canadian”

Canadian Club

A bunch of words that fits
nicely into the Canadian flag
When I was like looking for Canadian things
We're all from different
cultures and backgrounds
We're all joining this club
of being Canadian

Compared to where I grew up

in Hong Kong
It's free being in Canada
You're asked to exercise your imagination
But people are easily distracted
Escapes, YOLO, very positive
Allowed to let go more
When in this Westernized society.

And obviously there's maple syrup
somewhere.

When speaking about her collage, she uses positive words to describe Canada: it is a free and imaginative escape with people who take risks and let go because “YOLO” (acronym for You Only Live Once). The words included in the collage are mostly characteristics, features, or values of Canadian life that can be found in the government distributed promotional material, which includes freedom, politics, free speech, individualism, education, health care, retirement,

travel, snow and landscape. There are more personal words like family, love, community, life, and attitude, but all of these are notably generic. Gladys does not include her individual perspectives and experiences perhaps because she wants the words to be generic enough to reflect the experiences of the diverse Canadian population, or perhaps because she does not think her stories reflect a Canadian identity. Even though Canadians have different cultures and backgrounds, her collage does not reflect the diversity articulated in her statement. Her creative process suggests that being Canadian is more about fitting into a pre-existing mould of the flag than expressing one's individuality. To summarize her statement, she falls back on the dominant discourses of maple syrup to describe her Canadian identity.

While everything sounds ideal on the surface, Gladys struggles with an exclusive society that is not culturally relevant to her. Many of the art movements she is required to teach in the curriculum are Western, such as impressionism and surrealism. She attributes the lack of representation from different cultures to her department head "not being of Asian-descent" and to Canada operating predominantly in a Western paradigm. Although she is Canadian and wants to be part of the multicultural and diverse landscape of the country, her workplace and the curriculum she has to teach demand her to conform to Western standards. As individuals encounter, experience, and infer meaning from how the education and societal systems function, the hidden curricula (McCutcheon, 1997) teaches us that the lived experiences of racialized bodies are less important than the lived experiences of White bodies. The theme of racial marginalization is echoed in the photograph of Gladys shares of a crowd waving Canadian flags (figure 9). However, she is committed to making alternative voices heard by bringing cultural techniques like Chinese brush painting to her students in resistance in order to promote cultural diversity in schools.

Here are two photographs (figures 9 and 10) Gladys brought to share on the topic of “Being Canadian”:



Figure 9: Gladys Lui’s photograph on “being Canadian” of crowd with flags

The Canadian Crowd

A lot of people holding Canadian flags
But not really any Asian people
Even Brown Asian people

Outside Markham, Richmond Hill,
Downtown Toronto,
a lot of suburban areas of Canada
are very White still

Even if you go up Northern York region
There’s racism going on there too
Even though we all act like
we’re all Canadian and all-encompassing

It’s sad.
But they’re all happy people here



Figure 10: Gladys Lui’s photograph on “being Canadian” of Canadian symbols

Represent

Various images of what
Canadian things we have

Beer, hockey
Tim Hortons
Totem poles
Canadian money

Represent.

Igloo
Beaver
Maple syrup

For the win.

These images were pulled off from the Google images search engine, because Gladys felt she does not have anything “Canadian-like” that she took herself. This shows that she does not feel very Canadian because any photo she took would be fitting for the prompt of “being Canadian.” This is no surprise if her sense of “Being Canadian” means a homogenous Caucasian society, celebrating their national identity all together in the same way (by waving flags), and represented

by icons that reflect little of the diversity in the country. Evident in the photograph of Canadian popular symbols and iconographies (figure 10), what Gladys sees as characteristics of “Being Canadian” are part of a generic and stereotypical national discourse that does not reflect or represent her lived experiences as a Chinese Canadian woman, except for Tim Hortons where she frequents for coffee to start her day.

Inclusivity is perceived to be an act and Gladys is saddened by the exclusion of Asian peoples in the group of people holding Canadian flags. She is dejected as she describes the covert racism that continues to happen in her experiences of Canada. The phrase “it’s sad,” which refers to racism, is a stark contrast to the homogenous flag-waving Caucasians in the photograph, who are “all happy people,” seemingly oblivious to her pain as they continue to be the dominantly powerful group. Gladys is not afraid to recognize that racism exists in Canada. She believes it mainly happens in the suburban areas rather than areas like Markham, Richmond Hill, and downtown Toronto. She does not feel immediately marginalized because she lives in Markham, an ethnoburb (Li, 2009) where many Asian communities reside, so she feels less like a minority. Her friends are mostly Asians, who she feels comfortable speaking with as there is a mutual understanding of cultural expectations between them.

Gladys’ stories about being Canadian can be seen as being about conformity to the social norms and dominant national discourses of Canadian identity. However, they can also be read as resistance against her racialization. She tries to assimilate and participate in White Canadian traditions, like speaking to her White colleagues about hockey or a Toronto Raptors basketball game in the staff room to prove that she is Canadian.

Femininity and Womanhood

The concept of familial togetherness is very strong in the Chinese culture that Gladys was brought up in, which serves to influence her ideas of femininity. Part of her identification with being traditional Chinese comes from her efforts to “go back to [her] roots, as a Chinese girl... especially since not married, we call it girl” even though she is in her late twenties. The rite of passage of becoming a fully grown woman seems to be dependent upon marriage, signifying that male ownership or a transfer from the father’s household to the husband’s, like property, is what makes a female whole (Valenti, 2009). She says that she has always lived at home and intends to live at home until she gets married, which is part of the Chinese tradition that her parents encourage and one that she fully respects and understands. Once again, she has chosen to internalize these expectations and make them her own, to the extent that she will pass them on in her own parenting. While we were the only ones in the house during the interview, her voice dropped to a hush when the topic of sexuality came up:

Gladys: I think I secretly like that. Because... your parents are looking out for you in a sense?... I guess your namesake as a girl, in Chinese culture, right? Being a girl and you know, you’re—you’re pure or whatever, right? That type of stuff is like you want to be still living at home before you get married I guess, in that sense. I don’t know if that kind of... you understand what I’m trying to say. (She is uncomfortable)

Nicole: Yeah, all right, so you mean your reputation?

Gladys: Exactly, the reputation as a girl who isn’t sleeping around or whatever, that kind of stuff. So I like that, and to be honest when I have my own kids, I’m going to try to enforce that on my own kids too. Obviously try to make them understand that... I’m just

trying to protect you here, your reputation, and ... later on when you want to find a good man, you want to make sure they'll like you and that they'll respect you in that sense too.

From her sudden drop in tone, it seems the topic of sexuality is a taboo subject that needs to be discussed in private quarters, reflecting how it needs to be hidden until it is legitimized by an official union. She tells me these expectations were made explicit and have been ingrained into her little by little. The necessity to live at home is related to the protection of a female's sexual reputation because the child is believed to be safest in the home, isolated from the temptations of the world. Her chastity is seen to be crucial to gaining respect from a future partner—a good man. While there are cultural expectations to abstain until marriage, her family's religious beliefs as Catholics also reinforce this traditional practice. While everyone can have their own practices and ideas of their own sexuality, this practice reflects a patriarchal control of a woman's body and reinforces the purity myth where a woman is considered to be worth more if they are virgin brides (Valenti, 2009).

Gladys tries to “spend a lot of time with [her family] and help out ... as much as she can, whether financially or physically” because family always comes first. This is her collage on “being female” accompanied by her words in poetic form:

Expectations of Being Female

Being female

First and foremost— being a caretaker
I'm surrounded by females who are
the caretaker in the family



Figure 11: Gladys Lui's collage on “being female”

We're expected to conform to
 expectations of being sexy or beautiful
 We're always trying to push our boundaries
 Pushing out of a bubble

We're always being watched:
 eyes of parents, those around you,
 your peers, other females.
 There're a lot of expectations.

These numbers on a clock
 We're always running out of time
 to do certain things,
 to achieve certain goals in life

Even though the pair of eyes belongs to a man, Gladys does not say she is affected specifically by a male. She describes “being female” as being a caretaker who is under the gaze and scrutiny of different people like her parents, peers, and other women. These individuals in her life, both female and male, seem to see through a male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) and expect her to be beautiful and sexy. As well, it may suggest that they are operating under patriarchal lenses to have females assume the caretaker role. Gladys uses “always” multiple times in her rhetoric to express her state of being female, demonstrating how it requires attention every moment of the day to deal with imposed expectations— of what it means to be beautiful, of how others define femininity, of how she needs to resist societal limitations, and of how successful she should be at particular ages. The women in her image, even the one pushing out of the bubble and resisting containment, are not Chinese. The standards of beauty are not only impossible to attain because her body shape is different than the ones portrayed, but also because she belongs to the wrong race. The images she selected to represent notions of beauty reflect postcolonial values that are part of a Eurocentric view of the world. Below are two images of her role models that she shared for the topic “being female”:

My mom

Huge role model in my life
Obviously there are parts of her
I'm not as fond of or
I don't completely agree with
But there are characteristics of her that
I hope to also have in my life
such as being very hard working

She's always giving me and my family
The best. My younger brother and I—
Always the best.
She always puts us before anything else
She's a friendly person
She doesn't try to do anything bad
to anybody, rather just take it sometimes
She has a lot of patience
I wish I can have more sometimes

She's a caregiver in all aspects
Before, she was a teacher
Then a nurse at a nursing home
She takes care of everything in the house
Making sure everything goes as planned,
And takes care of my dad, and—it's good!

Amal Clooney

George's new wife
Not only is she a pretty face,
what she does for a living and
the achievements that she has
I thought was pretty cool
She's involved with humanitarian purposes
She is a lawyer, a very successful one at that
Very educated, very graceful
From things I've read about her
Those aspects of her life
Something to look up to
A celebrity and not just a pretty face



Figure 12: Gladys Lui's photograph on "being female" of her mother



Figure 13: Gladys Lui's photograph on "being female" of Amal Clooney

The two role models outlined above appear to be very different. Amal Clooney is a celebrity who is understood through her public persona of "having it all" as she seems to be beautiful,

intelligent, kind hearted, and career-oriented. The mother figure is an individual who is known through personal connection, defined by her sacrifice and role as a kind hearted and patient caretaker. However, they are both sides of the same coin. The common theme is that women face heavy pressure to be perfect, to have one's life, feelings, affairs, and energies, all satisfactorily arranged in proper order. The mother's tendency to "rather just take it" even when something is wrong is celebrated. Perfection may include attaining vocational success or finding happiness. There seems to be a belief of meritocracy at play, that if an individual labours and strives for perfection, it can be reached through hard work. Another common thread is that both exemplify heteronormativity and are defined by their male counterparts. Amal Clooney's media attention results primarily from her marriage to "Hollywood's most enduring eligible bachelor" George Clooney instead of her accomplishments as a lawyer, writer, or activist, and a mother's recognition comes from her domestic function in giving and taking care of her husband and the family. It is unknown to me whether these individuals happily identify with the labels placed upon them but there is a need to celebrate women holistically as individuals who do not live glamorous lives, who are struggling through challenges and who are imperfect beneath the image they are pressured to create.

Conclusion

The artistic practices of Chinese-Canadian female reflect the issues that they grapple with. The pressure Gladys faces from all three social labels as being Chinese, Canadian, and female are evident in the way she changes herself and her strategies to adapt to different social dynamics. Always equipped with a positive attitude, she appears to be content with her daily life

and the expectations placed upon her. She acknowledges and takes responsibility of expectations placed upon her, while resisting furtively within the limitations.

Gladys' resistance is apparent in the ways in which she tries to prove herself to others while playing to the rules of social norms. She attempts to prove that she is "Chinese enough" by asserting that her Cantonese is more proper than locals, and even changes the rules of judgment in her experiences in China and Hong Kong to defend herself against the criticism of "not being Chinese enough." She also attempts to prove that she is "Canadian enough" by taking part in White Canadian traditions despite implying that she does not feel Canadian when she claims that she could not find any pictures about "being Canadian" in her photograph inventory. As an art teacher working in the Canadian education system, she advocates for cultural diversity by bringing in different cultural techniques into the classroom. As a woman who encounters sexist remarks at work like "let the guys handle it," or "make me a sandwich," she "deal[s] with them [by] coming up with a smarter comeback... [to] shut them up, and let them know that [she is] not one to be messed around with." Her resistance in all of the stories she shares has to do with shifting power dynamics between the people within a social situation to avoid subjugation from others.

One might assume by her optimistic demeanor that everything is fine, but her resignation to her state of always running out of time and money seem to crack her impeccable account of her life and art practice. Here is her collage on her "identity holistically" (figure 14) that discusses her juggling of responsibilities and expectations, where she takes on the role of Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins, a symbol of hope, sacrifice, and rebellion in a dystopic world of autocratic oppression:



Figure 14: Gladys Lui's collage on "holistic identity"

Fragments of Me

I was trying to find somebody or something
in the magazine that I relate to
I found Katniss Everdeen—I like her
She's unlike other people
you find in magazines
Her character is a brave girl,
who is very responsible

She stands for what's right
She looks after who she cares about
Not necessarily the most beautiful person
but she's attractive in her own ways

I'm a huge fan of food and coffee
Something I'm very proud of

The asparagus is my weapon

I feel like I'm always running out of time
Money is always running out of my pockets.
There's just a lot of things going on that
I feel like I'm always in a race
always so tired, so stressed.
Like with the tortoise and the hare
I'm the dead hare

Time is always running away.
I feel like I'm shooting myself in the head
'cause I'm always out of breath
I love my rest, creativity
All part of my life.

From her explanation, I get this image of her world being constantly on the edge of crumbling, threatening to overwhelm her unless she actively fights and races to be on top making everything in the order that fulfills both herself and expectations imposed. From the phrase “all part of my life,” it seems that Gladys feels ambivalent about all these pressures coming at her from the social spheres that she interacts with. The intense pressure compels her to “feel like [she’s] shooting [her]self in the head” but she continues to run the modern rat race in pursuit of success that is defined on other people’s terms. The work life imbalance seems evident in how she subjects herself to overwork to reach for the next level. Though she takes on the role of Katniss because it seems that she wishes to resist social norms, she cannot abandon her current path due to the fear of financial scarcity, since “money is always running out.” In the collage, Katniss is a metaphor for Gladys, and she looks both confused and ambivalent about what she wants most amongst all the elements around her as they seem equally important being in the same scale.

Instead of giving up, Gladys pushes to meet all demands from her family, career, and friends. She believes that to successfully manage all of her responsibilities means that she will find equilibrium and stability, which leads to a higher level of happiness. To cope with the stress, she goes on vacations, to be away from everything she knows. Small pieces of happiness are found and collected by living in the present, the everyday moments like taking a selfie with a llama in Peru, which is the picture she shared for the prompt “holistic identity”:



Figure 15: Gladys Lui's photograph on "holistic identity" of herself and a llama

Fleeting Temporality of Happiness

I took this with a—a llama
 Thought it was really cute.
 And for me, this is a really funny picture
 of being goofy with the llama
 I like to capture those moments
 Though we're different species of animals
 We're both happy at that time.
 It seems like he was happily eating his grass.
 I was like, "Hey let's take a picture."
 Selfie! With the llama.
 I just thought of me, being a happy person and
 trying to stay happy doing things I like
 and fulfilling my responsibilities
 of my role in the family.
 There needs to be a lot of balance in life
 in many aspects. Certain times
 you're happier than others.
 Travelling makes me super happy.
 In general, you have to be at an equilibrium
 in many aspects of life
 in order to reach a higher level of happiness.
 'Cause you—you want stability in life,
 in many sense, in many ways, I think.

Chapter 4: The Struggle for Control over Process, Product, and Identity

Jia Chen Cardy Lai and I were classmates in high school visual art and enriched art classes and kept in touch ever since. Her story is characterized by the struggle for control over her process of making, how her pieces are viewed, and consequently how her identity is on display and how others come to know her. In the stories Cardy shares, repeated is the explicit rejection of others' definition of who she is and external standards of being Chinese, Canadian, and female because she is constantly seen as not fitting into these social labels. Her art practice challenges dominant discourses like patriarchy and Eurocentricism, due to her experiences of racial marginalization during her post-secondary school art training and the feminist political theory she was educated under in the same school. Cardy, a 26-year-old female emerging fibre and ceramic artist, takes on critical awareness, activism, and social engagement to contest preconceived notions about social systems. In her textile and sculptural pieces, she juxtaposes what she defines as contradictory ideas to illustrate tensions between them and open conversations around them, but not to provide answers. The focus of her practice is on concepts rather than the creation of art objects. The elusiveness and impermanence of ideas retain the possibility to change, which reflects the inconclusiveness and ambivalence in her negotiations of social tensions as well as her identity.

Art Education

Ever since Cardy was young, her mother enrolled her in extracurricular activities that were deemed healthy to the development of a child. She was enrolled in swimming classes, because being able to swim can save her life someday. She was enrolled in piano lessons, because mastery over musical notes and rhythms would make her smart. She was enrolled in

ballet programs with her younger sister, because her mother wanted them to be ballerinas. This suggests that instilling a sense of graceful control over female bodies is valued. While the pair was in ballet, the boisterous activities of the karate class next door would pass through the thin walls, and the sisters begged to learn karate instead. Their mother was very hesitant but accepted after some thought, because throwing punches and kicks would keep them from being fat. Being fat seems like a condition that is feared, something to actively prevent due to the social standards of being female back home and here in Canada. And so she was allowed to do karate.

Yet as far back as Cardy can remember, it was art that she had a natural inclination towards as a way to differentiate herself from others. In school group projects, it was illustrating diagrams that she enjoyed the most. When she went to high school, she took as many art courses as she could fit in her Ontario Secondary School Diploma requirements, and eventually specialized in studio art in Concordia University, where she strived to develop her technical and creative potential within the ceramic and textile arts by constantly building, making, or drawing. After discovering her passion in art, dedicating most of her high school education and undergraduate degree in the field, she is not entirely sure she wants to be an artist. After all, her parents, relatives, and extended family do not consider a profession in art a serious one that generates enough financial compensation to live. There is a lack of concrete structure in the art world, and guarantee of income. The struggling artist understands their concerns, since she, too, does not yet know how to make her art practice sustainable.

When asked about what her goals are, she says she does “not have a power position that [she] would like to aim for or something concrete because [she does] not know” what the future holds. Ideally, she would like to be funded by a Toronto Art Council visual arts program grant, which is “intended to cover direct costs of creation/production, subsistence and materials”

(“Visual Artists Program – Toronto Arts Council”), so that she can figure out where her art practice goes from there. Making art without the burden of financial insecurity would allow space and time for exploration, which is a luxury that a racialized Chinese Canadian operating in the exclusive art world with pressures from home and marginalization from society cannot necessarily afford without funding.

Art Practice

Broadly speaking, Cardy’s conception of art practice involves social engagement. The role of the artist encompasses the responsibility and commitment to artistic integrity for her. Having artistic integrity is qualified as producing work in order to address social issues or provoke the (re)examination of public matters in order to make the world a better place. The sense of artistic integrity is what differentiates art from non-art. She believes that “often things can look like art and they use a lot of technique that is very current but... it [needs to] aim to expand our ways as a human being, whether intellectually or emotionally.” Works do not have to be “grand opuses... [but can be] a personal and poetic gesture” that evokes emotions or thoughts in the viewer. She describes how a durational art piece she saw at school demonstrates artistic integrity. It showed the artist peeling a tangerine and eating it slowly repeatedly in a meditative manner with a poem accompanying the footage. While she “really hated it” and criticized it at first for being “too indulgent in nostalgia and self reflection,” the piece was appreciated and considered successful when she found meaning in it that can be applied to her own life. Chaotic or unknown sequences of life that are incoherent and irrelevant seem to be deemed as unacceptable until they become knowable and relatable.

She describes her work as involving the examination of subjects through “an artistic scope,” which is loosely spoken about as a process of learning and expressing ideas aesthetically in order to make them engaging and accessible for the public. Professionally, she aspires to participate in residencies and show work in different artistic communities, but she asserts that advocacy is part of the work ahead because she believes that “it is also [her] responsibility to carve out spaces for art making and dialogue, responding to changes in society, and to just ultimately show that art is an important part of society.” For the artist, the intention to have an impact and responsibility for social engagement are what drive the work, but they are also what limit free exploration. While she is “very dexterous and responsive to the making process... [she is] very aware that [she] can get carried away with it... [because] after making you do need to read and write and think... critically of what you just did.” Much thought and effort is put into ensuring a balance of research and artistic intuition in order to situate the self and the work within a larger discourse, historical framework, or context, having theory justify or play with practice and vice versa. Cardy expressed a desire of wanting to “make work that has integrity in... whatever the work chooses to examine.” Her concern of “being carried away” by the making process parallels the notion put forward from “whatever the work chooses to examine,” where the creation of artwork and the medium being worked with seem to take over the artist and have a life of its own in an uncontrolled and unpredictable fashion. The work is described as an active agent that needs to be tamed and the loss of control is to be feared. Following this theme, the loss of control over her own identity is a conflict that plagues her stories of being Chinese, Canadian, and female.

Her art practice operates through a process that “jump[s] all over the place.” For example, she describes how she would begin with a “nuanced... idea of skin, what it does...

[which] relates to biology and then it can be seen as maybe metaphors for identity in a poetic way, like shedding skin.” Her practice seems to involve a serendipitous divergent thinking or free-association process that is “responsive to what [she] encounter[s] in [her] personal life and what matters to [her] at the moment.” At the same time, she cautiously suggests that this process does not mean she is uncommitted or whimsical. It starts with “small quiet inclinations towards certain forms, shapes, or themes,” and it progresses by “making and responding to what happens.” Cardy’s work emphasizes process over product. Her artistic process is fragmented, intuitive, and spontaneous. It entails the oscillation of creating in the studio and separating from the work in order to spend time gathering related information, reading articles, and researching ideas. A piece is created through multiple sessions. The assessment of its progression and next steps are done through distance, which is believed to be necessary to gain a better perspective. The work is never finished, but “often a feeling of done for now.” Cardy’s pieces are always in progress, changing and evolving. Particularly with her sculptural pieces, she has often altered the arrangement, which she conceptualizes as an integral part of the work, to address the space it is located in. Showcasing her sculptures and textile work in different spaces gives her “an opportunity to see what the stronger aspects of certain installations [are].” Her art practice, as a representation for selfhood and metaphor for her Chinese Canadian female identity, is a continual process of refinement, redefinition, and reinvention depending on the multiple social spaces she occupies.

Being Chinese

With extended family in Guangzhou city of the Guangdong province in China, Cardy has been back to the city she was from multiple times for prolonged periods to see family, such as

entire childhood summers, short two-week stays, and month-long visits. Her identity formation through occupying multiple spaces is what Ip (2008) refers to as transnationalism, as someone who “build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders, maintaining multiple involvements in both home and host societies where they are engaged in patterned, multifaceted, multilocal processes that include economic, sociocultural, and political practices and discourses” (p. 33). There are a lot of anxieties involved in assembling and reassembling identities depending on the environment that one is in because identity comes from how individuals regard themselves and how others see them (Ip, 2008).

Cardy recalls from her experiences in Guangzhou that the streets in China were overwhelmingly crowded, which involves a different set of skills to navigate public spaces. In reference to the emphasis of social engagement in her artistic practice, she appreciates the democratic marketplace in China and how the lack of bureaucratic processes promotes sustainability and a sense of community, because “in some ways you can just do things like... wheel out a cart and make street food for people.” The lack of bureaucratic paperwork and permits for the use of public space makes civic engagement much more democratic, versatile, and accessible, so that “trolleys of vendors [can] just assemble in a parking lot of... a banquet hall that would close.” These public spaces seem truly public as they address the needs of the citizens who live there. While there are positive impressions, the Chinese-Canadian artist traverses many challenges and struggles to navigate through them when she visits China. Despite having been born in Guangdong and having visited multiple times, there appears to be a sense of culture clash at play when Cardy describes how there are “people [who] do not seem to care about each other in ways that [she] was used to seeing” and who have distinct mannerisms. She describes how individuals have to be more assertive and decisive to defend against forceful

suggestions from others, otherwise “it is room for people to change your mind.” When prompted for an example, she describes an incident at the market:

I just don't know if I want a bag, and the vendor was like “you want it, you want it, you want it.” And we're like, “um...” Like I didn't—when I don't know how much things actually should cost. You know? I don't know, I'd end up paying more.

The dynamics in the mainland Chinese market are not the same as the ones operating in Canadian grocery shops. Salespeople in Canada tend not to be as involved in buyers' products choices because prices are non-negotiable, cultural norms dictate that they show consideration for buyers' preferences, and the workers gets paid an hourly rate whether or not the items sell or not. However, vendors in China are persistent in making the sale because they are often the owners of the stall or associates who are invested in the business. They have more power in deciding the prices of the goods and expect bartering to happen, so they actively engage the buyer in trade negotiations. The marketplace is a space not only for buying and selling products but also for the negotiation of cultural knowledge. Evident from Cardy's narrative, simple cues like not knowing how much items are worth, how to negotiate prices, or how to speak Cantonese fluently in the way locals do put her at a disadvantage. Even though she can pass off as one of the locals by her appearance, she is treated as someone foreign as soon as she demonstrates a lack of cultural knowledge, so she ends up paying more. She talks about the need to have “street cred,” which is shorthand for street credibility, a slang term that means “commanding a level of respect in an urban environment due to experience in or knowledge of issues affecting those environments” (“Street Cred – Urban Dictionary,” 2006), or to basically show that you live there in order to be accepted into the community as one of their own.

The extended family environment seems to further alienate her despite the good will of the group. Cardy perceives tensions between how she herself wants to experience the city and how her relatives want her to spend her time. As hosts, her relatives would “rush to get everyone in the car to go to destination spots” in order to “show [her] a good time.” This special treatment brands her as a tourist and a foreigner to her place of origin. Instead, she prefers to “go out alone and see... insert [her]self into the scenery, on [her] own terms.” Correspondingly, the photo (figure 16) and statement she shares for the prompt “being Chinese” show how she values the importance of learning about places through spending time engaging with communities and gaining local perspectives instead of rushing through sights and sceneries that have commercial value:



Figure 16: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being Chinese" of Eddie Huang

A Great Young Voice: Eddie Huang

He's from Taiwan
 He speaks about being Chinese
 in New York, in America
 He travels to different countries and
 He's a host of a travel food documentary
 It's not just Rachael Ray's 40 dollar a day,
 where you don't really learn
 about the place and the people where you're at
 He does try to engage with communities
 and get the perspective of people
 who live in the places he visits
 He's a great young voice
 for Chinese people

who've grown up in North America.
 He's not Canadian

Eddie Huang's travel food documentary *Huang's World* features the culture and diversity of the urban landscape and showcases well-loved neighbourhood food joints that only people who have “street cred” would know about and go to. Eddie Huang's television personality seems to care about bringing awareness of small businesses to benefit local owners more than Rachael Ray's

television personality, whose mission seems self-serving and exploitative. While Cardy might strive to be more like Eddie Huang, who seems to be an authentic personality in touch with different ethnic and immigrant neighbourhoods, there are certain risks involved when interacting with local communities without being acquainted with the cultural norms of the area.

When in China, Cardy enjoys having her female cousin, who is a year older, act as her guide because it is “more soothing and relatable.” This is perhaps because her cousin has “street cred” and can explain local customs to her. Other than this relative, she seems to be disengaged from most extended family members because she does not know them well. She divulges, “I was just visiting people... [and] I don’t really know who they are, but apparently they’ve known me since I was five... and I’m just really bored” while the chatter happens. Being from Canada, Cardy is a novelty and a status symbol for her grandmother in China, who used to “parade that around happily whenever [they] went to a banquet hall... for dim sum... [saying] ‘that’s my grandchild from Canada.’” In Cardy’s narrative, which is told through her lens, her grandmother does not address her as “she,” but “that” as if she is an object. While it cannot be known that her grandmother perceived detachment in actuality, the description suggests emotional distance perceived by the speaker. There is a loss of connection through a generational gap as well as cultural divergence, even though her grandmother was the one who took care of her until she was five when her parents went to Japan to make money and help an aunt with her meat shop business.

Cardy’s extended family and her parents are reference points for her understanding of what being Chinese means. This immediate social circle believes in the importance of being family-oriented, as “it is assumed that happiness is [achieved by] having a family, having a baby, and getting a job that sustains all that... in the quickest and the most logical way possible.”

Stability is seen as a marker of success, alongside doing well academically and following rules. Her decision to pursue art and her inclination to question systems through her art practice can be seen as a rebellious act, one that does not follow a predetermined set of guidelines nor follow traditional notions of success. While she cares about her family, she rejects the expectation to constantly keep up with the lives of others and have to be reliant on them because, as she states, “I need that space to be myself.” The space where the self thrives seems to differ from the space the family occupies. She does not fit the model of being Chinese that her extended family and parents have outlined for her because of her lived experiences in Canada, which creates tensions and conflicts within the domestic sphere. The nature of the domestic sphere became one of independence and isolation where individuals ask for help and help one another only when necessary. She creates the below collage (figure 17) and statement for the prompt “being Chinese”:



Figure 17: Cardy Lai's collage on "being Chinese"

Meaning of Being Chinese

Full images I've

cut up
into fragments and snippets because my
connection with being Chinese and Chinese culture is
disjointed
it feels disjointed
and incomplete

A lot of definitions of being Chinese or
ideas of being Chinese I feel is
given to me by other people
Chinese and non-Chinese

The disjointedness comes from
not having a very real and personal agency
with choosing or using—
to be self-directed in Chinese culture.
It's a lot of push and pull

There is some angst sometimes
with grappling with the idea:
like an image of someone really pretty
in a Chinese cosmetic ad

I just cut that up
and a picture from a wedding banquet

And I cut that up
from what I've known,
it's an expectation to be married

An uncompromisable factor to happiness
from a lot of older Chinese people I've noticed

And I don't know if I agree or disagree

care that they were dirty. It seemed like such a limited [and] specific thing to focus an entire identity to.

When I asked her whether all dirty objects would be thrown out, she said, “No, it’s her frustration of like how... I’m not Chinese the way she’s used to knowing Chinese people.” Cardy’s values seem to differ from those of her mother’s. Dirty running shoes signaled that Cardy was not a neat person and did not take care of maintaining her appearance to look presentable, which was an important part of being Chinese in her mother’s perspective. Davidson (2008) writes that “‘Chineseness’ becomes an identity through its inerrability, through the reproducibility of ‘cultural actions’ in new contexts; in other words, remembering” (p. 19). While her mother can clearly remember the cultural actions from Guangdong and can reproduce them in the new context of Canada, Cardy had only five years of her childhood and sporadic visits as reference points to draw from for remembering, which makes it challenging to reproduce appropriate and satisfactory cultural actions. From the repetition of “just the fact that” in her narrative, the standards of behaviour and her resistance from them seem to be considered as factual and static—that the rules of being Chinese are never going to change and that she will always fall short.

The fragmentation of the pieces shows the disjointedness that Cardy feels about her Chinese identity. The learning of what Chinese culture entails occurs, for the most part, through alienation of not fitting in to the group dynamics. This alienation contributes to her rejection of group norms at home and in China. The broken pictures also seem to reference the separation of her parents during her elementary school years. She remembers it being “not so hard” at the time, but that she “disliked [her] mom because she was a very anxious person... [which she] interpreted [as] yelling or lack of affection,” so she was happy with the arrangement of living

with her father and her sister staying with her mother. The shattered pictures also reference the multiple and at times conflicting voices in her immediate and extended family, of what being Chinese and a woman means. Cardy went back to live with her mother when her father remarried during her middle school years. She remembers that her mother “was very convincing in her argument, [saying] ‘you are growing up to be a girl [so] you should be with your mom...’” Little conversation took place between Cardy and her father, but she now realizes that it “is very one-sided, just to assume that a man cannot raise a preteen girl, [because] it is not always true.” Embedded within this thought is the idea that children need same-sex role models in their lives to act as a guide because they share a better connection and understanding of their bodies and roles in society. There is also emphasis on kinship and blood relations, which is demonstrated when her extended family told her to bear in mind that her stepmother is not her real mother. From these lessons, she “just thought [she] was supposed to hate her (stepmother), but [she] didn’t actually.”

Cardy resists the various imposed expectations due to her lived experiences, and as a result actively avoids fulfilling preconceived notions of behaviour. In the focus group, when the stereotype of Asians taking pictures of their food was brought up as a point of discussion, she uncomfortably says she “tries not to” participate in this trend because it disrupts the flow of restaurant service in public and contributes to information overload on social media, but that she would only do so in private for personal viewing and memory. Since she photographs food privately, it seems that she does not find the act itself objectionable, but that she finds conforming to the dominant discourse and being classified by others objectionable. She struggles to control how she wants to be defined and actively resists how others define her. Ironically, she cannot escape the influence of dominant discourses. Cardy, as a racialized body, is affected by

them because these stereotypes and standards of being still shape her behaviour in her active resistance. When asked how she navigates her hyphenated Chinese-Canadian identity, she says with exasperation, “you’re always navigating it, and there’s no conclusive answer, and I guess the big thing is that I have to pay attention to it all the time... It’s not like I’m always addressing it but it’s always there.” The definitions or ideas of being Chinese are given to her not only by Chinese people but non-Chinese people as well. Her frustration with others’ inability to see past her racialized body is, interestingly, expressed through sharing the story of the American architect Maya Lin:

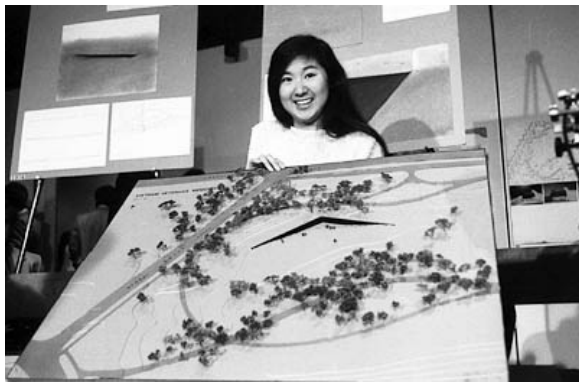


Figure 18: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being Chinese" of Maya Lin

More Chinese than American: Maya Lin

She's an architect
It's an old photo of her
when she was still at Yale
She designed the Vietnamese War Memorial
in Washington DC

When she did it— when she was selected
they didn't know who she was
Each candidate was assigned a number
And they picked her design
not knowing
that she was still a student

and everything.

Once it was put out there that
she was the designer
people just— there were a lot of politics
that grew out of it.

People didn't feel right
that she was Asian
and she was designing
this American war memorial.

She tried to be very apolitical
about her design, and of course
she found out she couldn't—
Everything's political

They would always associate
her identity with what she tried to do:
A heartfelt but politically neutral gesture

At the end it was war,
and a lot of people died.
There was baggage behind
making that memorial

I've never encountered
anything on this level.
It seems really stressful for her,
It goes to show a lot of things
and it's just more subtle in my life.

They can't disassociate your being Chinese
with—in—in ways that are
proper and human,

They thought she shouldn't do
the memorial. Because it was biased.
But it wasn't...

They should judge the design of the work
I think it's beautiful and sensitive
and hits the nail on its head.
She tried to present a scar
The aftermath of war
A big scar
A lot of people got hurt

All their names are there.
There's nothing glorious.
She didn't make
a heroic memorial of heroes.
It's just sad.

A lot of people
superimposed biases on it
Like, "this is a zen design"
She even asked like veterans.
About half of them couldn't justify it
but said there was discomfort

It was—it's so crazy to read that.
I spent a lot of time with that text

This story shows how race plays into the understanding of one's identity and work. Cardy "spent a lot of time with that text" because she was confronted with an undeniable case of racial prejudice. Maya Lin's submission for the Vietnamese War Memorial was chosen through a blind review process, but Americans felt uncomfortable with the designer's Chinese identity marker because it was intended to be an American war memorial. There is an assumption that Maya Lin is not American enough to qualify because of her hyphenated identity. Inherent in this discomfort is the assumption that White is neutral, while coloured is biased, even though the perspectives of all peoples are equally as subjective. The danger of considering fair-skinned people, their ideas, and their beliefs the norm is that this gives them the privilege of being the standard and ideal for everyone else to follow and strive to become, while finding parts of themselves that are fundamentally different and unchangeable inferior. It is perhaps "crazy" to consider that racism still exists in a place where there are many policies promoting equality and social justice, however it is still very much part of the social reality we are living in. The larger climate filled with racial prejudice manifests in subtle ways in Cardy's life in Canada, specifically Toronto, Ontario and Montreal, Quebec.

Being Canadian

There is a national rhetoric of Canada priding itself of preserving and enhancing multiculturalism. In 1988, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed. In the policy document, cultural and racial diversity is stated as “a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada’s future” (“Canadian Multiculturalism Act,” 1988). Being different is considered positive since it means bringing new resources to the society. Everyone can contribute in that way. The rhetoric of equal opportunities is evoked throughout the document to suggest that the society is inclusive and that “full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society” is promoted (“Canadian Multiculturalism Act,” 1988). While there is comfort in having inclusivity within a policy document, many racialized bodies struggle with a sense of belonging and being included in Canadian society.

Cardy finds Toronto, Ontario to be home. She identifies as Chinese-Canadian with no particular preference to which comes first, but humorously suggested that the two identity markers would cross-dissolve into each other in an ideal situation. This may come from a desire to fully belong to both worlds all at once all the time, without her social circles valuing one over the other. Many of her experiences of speak to the marginalization of racialized bodies in Canada, and particularly Montreal, Quebec where she attended post-secondary school and where she has lived for six years. Below is her collage (figure 19) and statement for the prompt “being Canadian”:



Figure 19: Cardy Lai's collage on "being Canadian"

Home

The map near the shores of Ontario
from excursions to cottages
and Ontario countryside
I find this strange sort of peace there
and identify Toronto, Ontario to be home

But there've been just, as a consistent—
It's consistent throughout my life—

I superimposed onto this map of Ontario
the Charlie's Angels gang.
Just from looking at the ads,
Cameron Diaz is always in the middle
(I know aesthetically she's the tallest one)
and Lucy Lui is on the side.

I always somewhat feel like that
when I'm in a group,
however subtle or obvious, it's there

Living in Montreal for university
I got a lot of that
Other people always remind me
I'm this way or that way
It's attention that's always present.
But at the same time,
I do feel like it's home.

I have a pot of honey here because
I always have to coat things in honey
to have a peaceful dialogue
I don't necessarily wish
to speak that sweetly
There're tensions at institutions

I get asked very often,
where you're from and
not everyone get asked that
the same amount
But it's still home so I don't know

In this statement, racial marginalization is told through the positioning of Charlie's Angel instead of direct recognition and acknowledgment. From the way Cardy cuts off when she tries to bring up the topic of marginalization as a consistent experience, it seems difficult and unbearable to call to mind. Cameron Diaz's central position as a blonde White female demands visual and social attention, while Lucy Lui's peripheral position symbolically represents her lesser status, despite how the inclusion of a Chinese actress in a mainstream Hollywood film is a step forward from not being included at all. In the photograph, Lucy Lui has coloured her hair blonde to resemble a Westerner. This example is used to communicate how she feels when she is in a group, as being always less important than her peers due to her Chineseness or her "cross-dissolved" hybrid identity between Chinese and Canadian.

Cardy's subtle but ongoing rejection from group settings in Canada that are mainly dominated by mainstream ideas is further highlighted by how others ask her "where are you from," as if she is a foreigner whose home is in another country and whose place in Canada is only transitory. Her foreignness draws constant attention and she is often reminded that she is different, like in this story she shared:

In my first year at university, one of my textile arts professors read my full name on the attendance list. Then I told her [and] introduced myself to everyone as Cardy. She said, "No. Jia's your real name. We're going to call you Jia." The entire year she called me Jia... I was just very nervous and eager to do well. It didn't occur to me that that was not cool. I feel that it's not cool now, because I get to decide what my name is, right?

In this incident, the student is exoticized based on her name. The pronouncement of Jia as her real name is based on a narrow assumption that Chinese people must have foreign-sounding names. Perhaps the instructor wished for Cardy to embrace her ethnic name and not be ashamed

of it. However, the instructor nonetheless imposed her desire to define who Cardy was based on her difference, disrespecting Cardy's wishes of what she wanted to be called. Her experiences of exclusion from her Canadian identity took years for her to make sense of because they occurred over a period of time and were less explicit than her experiences of exclusion from her Chinese identity. While she felt angry about these encounters much later on, she continues to feel pressured to have "a peaceful dialogue" about it, represented by the honey pot in the collage, rather than releasing the full force of her frustrations, in order to maintain status quo and to conform to the artificial politeness of Canadian society. Though there are tensions with her experiences in Canada, the collage makes up a singular unit in the centre of the page. With the strands at the bottom, the pictorial mass looks like it is growing cohesively.

A large majority of her peers and classmates at Concordia University were White, and she describes them as "people who knew what was next in art or [what] the relevant issues [are] now." For example, while she did not understand the significance of net art and was repelled by it for the longest time, her peers were keen on embracing internet as the new art space, using basic and outdated html imagery in a celebrated fashion as a commentary on digital consumerism. Cardy explored some possibilities of why she did not catch on to net art as quickly as her colleagues did, suggesting that she "may have slower on the uptake" or that it "is just not [her] territory." She expresses frustration at being pressured to "showcase how much information you know" within the art world, including vernissages (private view of an art exhibition prior to the opening) and the postsecondary institution setting, because she sees herself as someone who takes time to process, understand, and love new ideas and experiences. She contrasts this with the individuals around her, who "have a lot of opinions very quickly [and] talk for the sake of showcasing intelligence." This set of experiences relate to Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital,

which is defined “as a form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 7). The colleagues who constantly demonstrate what they know, what they have read, whose work they have seen, how they feel about it, seem to possess a significant amount of cultural capital and are able to mobilize this particular form of knowledge to gain social capital, therefore becoming the people “in the know” or the “cool kids.”

Though it can seem like these individuals are faster, smarter, and more immediate than Cardy, who thinks she is “slower,” there are dynamics of power around race and social class at play hidden underneath the surface. Through a long process of “acquisition or inculcation[,] which includes the pedagogical action of the family or group members (family education), educated members of the social formation (diffused education) and social institutions (institutionalized education)” (Bourdieu, 1993, p.7), her peers had already started off the conversation being privileged by knowing more—or knowing more of the subjects that can be mobilized to gain social capital within a mainstream group. Unfortunately, this leaves Cardy thinking that there is “there’s no space for slower thinking,” or no space for someone like her in the conversation because everyone will have already moved on from the topic she is still mulling over. She shares the below photograph (figure 20) and statement for the prompt “being Canadian” of her in an art gallery, which may be what it looks like when she is attending a vernissage with her peers:



Figure 20: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being Canadian" of a vernissage

Me in an Art Gallery

Me in an Art Gallery
with people from my school
It's just kind of what it looks like
all the time. Like we weren't...

I went to OCAD recently to just visit
It seemed to be culturally more mixed
But this was Montreal
and everyone was from all over Canada,
but predominantly White.

I had a hard time
connecting to their nostalgia
They would always make references
to the past or have
a certain way of talking that
I didn't really catch up with.

Candid photos are always that way.
I just noticed something
And I made a face
May caught it.
It's on the gallery's website.
Just documentation of their—
an event that happened in the space.
It's online

Similar to the Charlie's Angels picture that is part of her collage, she is off to the side and marginalized even in this very intimate space. She is the only racialized body in the photo and she does not seem to fit in from the way she is isolated from the other bodies in the room, who look like they are engaging in deep conversation without her. Indeed, she finds it challenging to connect to her peers' nostalgia or understand their references to a common past and culture.

Cardy is caught making a face in this candid photograph because of a sudden awareness of how a sign was made with plasticine. And her image is made available online, a space she has described her discomfort with because of her grimace, for others' purpose of documenting the event.

Contrasting the photograph of Cardy in a room full of people (figure 20), the open landscape of Ontario cottage country is where she feels peaceful. Below are the two other photographs (figures 21 and 22) she shared for the prompt “Being Canadian”:



Figure 21: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being Canadian" of cottage country



Figure 22: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being Canadian" of flowers in road

Cottages

Ontario cottage country
this ritual of going
Not everyone has cottages
but even just going out there
feels very Canadian
I don't know why.

Without much tension
Very peaceful and feels like home.
It's always hard to sum up
you just want to do what you...
put one foot forward at time
without thinking about too much.

Going out to Ontario cottage country is described as a ritual for many Canadians. As Harrison (2013) writes, “the cottage is where treasured memories are carefully stored; where homogeneity across culture, class, and race, national identity, and tradition are presumed; where joy is found in much that is modern because it is integrally entwined with ‘timeless nature’.” Through participating in the practice of going to cottages, one can feel connected with their Canadian national identity and feel like being a part of a club of culturally, socially, racially, and nationally similar people. The image on the left shows the artist, alone and facing the viewer, with her shoes off, against an idyllic background of the beach. It is comfortable being there, like a home, where she can have control over how she is defined, presented in relative isolation from others. It is a space she can explore, play, and interact with the landscape. In the picture on the right, she

superimposes flowers onto the landscape by holding it in front of her, as if symbolically exerting control over her surroundings. There is also a path, suggesting how she gets to choose which direction to go, while still being a part of what it means to be Canadian in mainstream discourse.

Being Female

This desire for self determination is also evident in Cardy's navigation of "being female." As of now, Cardy's body of work engages in female bodily aesthetics. She draws primary inspiration from Eva Hesse, a German-American sculptor active in New York in 1950-70, who "addressed bodily aesthetics while simultaneously modernist," which garnered the respect of her male minimalist and modernist counterparts who created reductive formal work. Her pieces referenced the warmth of the body but were abstract at the same time. The female artist was able to gain recognition and fit in within a circle of male contemporaries in a patriarchal art world. Hesse used latex, fibreglass, plastic, urethane, and natural materials to make sinuous, geometric, organic forms that referenced the texture of skin and the fibre within bodies, which would look so delicate that it seemed like they would crumble. She admires how Hesse's body of work straddle boundaries in how it is "both strong and vulnerable, tentative and expansive" (Lippard, 1992, p.6).

This description also aptly fits how Cardy interacts with me during the interview, asserting herself but pulling back from identification at the same time. For instance, she expresses how she has worked ceramics and textile processes such as porcelain making, hand stitching, fabric dyeing, and printmaking and has also experimented with digital tools. However, she is "very hesitant to specifically identify with one medium because... there is potential in

every medium.” She expresses how women can be a lot of different things by sharing the following two photographs (figures 23 and 24) and statements for the prompt “being female”:

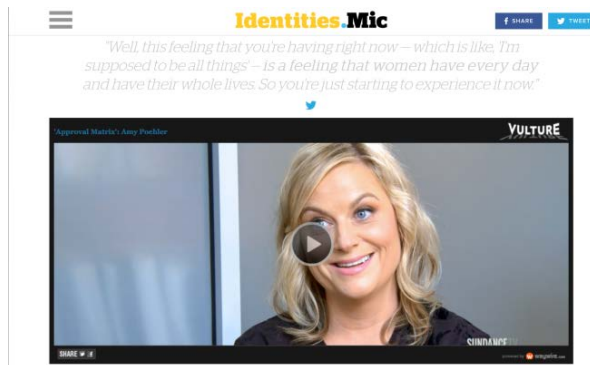


Figure 23: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being female" of Amy Poehler

You can be a lot of different things

In an interview Amy Poehler was asked by this guy— “So what do girls really like? Do they like nerds or do they just like people who look like nerds?”

Amy Poehler thought
it was a ridiculous question
and underhandedly makes fun of him,
“This feeling that you’re having right now,
I’m supposed to be all these things:
cool and a nerd, is a feeling women have
every day and whole lives,
so you’re just starting to experience it now.”

I can relate to it
I definitely have felt like that growing up
I was supposed to be smart, but also pretty
and wear all these things exclusive
You can be a lot of different things.
Maybe not all at once all the time,
but you can be.



Figure 24: Cardy Lai's photograph on "being female" of Prada vs. Miu Miu article

Making room for different things

They asked her: What’s the difference
between her brands Prada and Miu Miu?
Miu Miu is her nickname.
Her name is Miuccia Prada.

She said, Prada, every element
is well thought out and justified in design
Whereas Miu Miu is a different process
more immediate and playful
It’s not necessarily younger
It’s just more immediate

She addresses different ways
of wanting to create, that seemingly
oppose each other.
She makes room for both
The important lesson here is
to make room for...
these different things
that you need—want.

There are many possibilities of what femininity and womanhood can mean to individuals across different periods of time and across a variety of social circles. In contrast to how she feels about being Chinese as mostly an unvarying construct, femininity is seen as a label that can mean “a lot of different things,” even though these traits can seem contradictory at times. Even though there are many sources, like the media, school rules, or ideas from home, that dictate what female bodies are supposed to look and behave like, these two statements show how there is a turn towards embracing paradoxical and shifting selves that change according to the environment and who one wants to be in the moment.

Following Hesse, Cardy produces “objects with textures or colours that reference the body... [to address] established expectations of women and their bodies” rather than creating figurative art. Her independent study project during her last year in the ceramics department that culminated in a joint art exhibition titled *These Bones Thrown* resists against dominant discourses of femininity and womanhood, particularly about “[the] set of rules of how women’s bodies should be, whether compact or athletic, or voluptuous and curvaceous.” She expresses frustration in how the female body “is just always just being told what to do.” Countering others’ set of guidelines for women and their bodies, her work “shows textures of what bodies usually do... letting it all hang out.” For example, she describes one of her pieces that involves dipping paper rope in tea:

It was just at the same time very beautiful and very gross and it was disintegrating before our eyes... beauty is just momentary. [At first] it was wet and glistening, and on the boundary between gross and beautiful. As it dried up, it became grotesque.

The work shows the ephemerality and temporality of beauty and of existence. The ropes “reference intestines and how [body parts] change and harden, [which] shows a passage of time.”

Femininity is perceived to be directly related to beauty and bodies are expected to conform to certain standards to be appreciated, but Cardy debunks the sanctity of the ideal by stripping the body down to its basic organic form in an almost reductive way. She explains that femininity is messy business in her collage (figure 25) and statement:



Figure 25: Cardy Lai's collage on "being female"

Messy Business

It's kind of messy
Everyone's female in different ways
There are rituals that we—people do
or choose to do
It becomes messy

We should just be aware of that
Celebrate that, with confetti
Coming out of a malfunctioning
shaving cream can

Western ideal of beauty
and two contemporary comedians
who speak about what it's like,
to be women, intelligently:
Amy Poehler and Tina Fey

Being female is messy business
We should all be aware that
People don't look the way they look
in magazines. That's just theatre
And it's not real.

The collage features the large cut out of Michelangelo's drawing titled *Cleopatra* (1532-33) on the left side, who stare at relatively small images of Amy Poehler and Tina Fey. The

contemporary comedians look away from the classic standard of beauty. On the right side, a woman sprays shaving cream on herself and all of other figures, uniting them and celebrating their embodiment of different models of womanhood. The text included explains how women in magazines look gorgeous because of a team of support staff and how they do not exemplify realistic standards of beauty. It advocates readers to be true to themselves about who they are and be fearless in showing both their happy and sad selves when interacting with others. While this text is empowering readers to be free in expressing themselves, the two contemporary comedians in slim bodies, stunning clothes, and perfect hair ironically flash their “megawatt smiles” at the viewer and continue perpetuating contemporary standards of female beauty. However, Cardy’s work suggests that this is acceptable as long as women are the ones who are in control of their self image.

Conclusion

Cardy’s identity as a transnational individual is full of paradoxes that she feels a need to resolve. It is conceptualized as container that holds a collection of many binary and oppositional elements, such as the wish for security and exploration, the desire to belong in Canadian and Chinese communities, the want to embody traditional and contemporary notions of femininity, and the fascination of examining the grotesque and beautiful within the same object.

In the photographs (figures 26 and 27) and statement she shared for the prompt “holistic identity,” the artist shows how she is drawn to both the safety of familiar surroundings and the adventure of exploring new places, but finds that they are often in conflict with each other:



Figure 26: Cardy Lai's photograph on "holistic identity" of pod suit in bush



Figure 27: Cardy Lai's photograph on "holistic identity" of pod suit in snow bank

Security and Doing New Things

An art piece that I did: A suit for myself
very pod-like, circular, with spongy surfaces

I wanted it to be absorbent, tactile
and interact with surfaces
(some of it is memory foam)
But to protect me while I put myself
in situations I'm not quite comfortable with
(like leaning into a brambly bush)
Just going out into the world and
encountering things

This one I found pretty funny
I'm just trying to blend in with my suit
with the snow banks, trying to get by
with dictating the amount of attention I want

It's at once an armour and shelter
but the purpose for it was to enable me
to feel safe while I'm in new terrain.

Security and doing new things is
a lot of push and pull

Being a racialized individual, it is especially challenging to control the amount and the kind of attention one holds from others, as race is always at the forefront of what others notice, because that identification is visual in nature. While Canada prides itself as a multicultural society that appreciates people of all cultures equally and is therefore considered not racist, it only takes a glimpse for someone to "know" another by making assumptions about where they belong in various categorizations of being and the implications of that labelling. The brambled bush in the picture on the left suggests that there is a risk every time there is an encounter. Cardy's textile suit demonstrates a yearning to reclaim her sense of agency and control over how she is known and defined, but also expresses a need for this process to not be as comfortable as possible

through being in an insulated space that still allows for mobility and access to different environments. There is an explicit engagement with the idea of “fitting in” as Cardy inserts herself into the environment with her textile suit.

While it is unclear how the participant conceptualizes this insulated space, the collage representing her holistic identity (figure 28) may suggest that it means shift in perspective to accept the contradictions of being and the hardships associated with them. The plate of food rises over the city with fireworks on the sides expresses a desire for exploration and being comfortable or safe at the same time, but it is seen as something to be celebrated:



Figure 28: Cardy Lai's collage on "holistic identity"

Comfort and Exploration

A plate of food in a sun formation
rising over a cityscape
Food is very comforting—
a place of security

Big cities and going from place to place
Stretching yourself
Not always being safe and taking chances
Doing things you're uncomfortable with.

A desire to want both
at the same time, all the time

The fireworks, a celebratory visual
I need to accept that's where I am,
where I need to be, take it lightly,
and see that it's a good thing, maybe

Echoing this idea of embodying multiple ways of being that are perceived as contradictory and paradoxical is a narrative about an unfinished project, addressing the loss of control and the hope of taking it back through artistic interventions:

I love fashion, but I can't afford all of it, the haute couture, and I don't work in spaces that allow for me to wear it. So I wanted to make these rip off Alexander McQueen shoes and just make this absurd video pieces where I'd go all about in my everyday life, working at a café, working in ceramics, wearing these shoes... And I imagine it'd be so weird just attracting all this attention with these shoes that maybe I didn't really want or didn't really own... People who admire these shoes for artistic purposes would be in art school but why can't I wear it in art school? It's just all these tensions... about neither this nor that and just tensions of wanting different things or being different things.

Through this narrative, Cardy suggests another possibility of what the insulated space of experience can mean: her identity as an artist. Her artistic practice is a space where she can recover her voice to define how her identity and her works are displayed to the public through premeditated and intentional compositional arrangements of works or art rather than her racialized body. It can be used to challenge and destabilize normalized ways of being and perceiving, posing as a counter-narrative to dominant discourses of who she is as a Chinese Canadian woman.

Chapter 5: Loss of Identity and the Construction of a Transnational Self

Ness Lee and I were classmates in a painting class at York University in 2007-2008, the only year she was there studying visual arts before switching to the Ontario College of Art and Design (now OCAD University) to pursue a degree in design, specializing in illustration. As a transnational woman with a family history of intergenerational migration, her story is about the loss of identity from the challenge she faces to locate a physical place of origin and a set of cultural histories, practices, traditions, and language to be connected to. Being of Hakka Chinese heritage, an ethnic minority group in China, Ness experiences a cultural attrition and alienation because she does not fit into Cantonese or Mandarin Chinese diaspora communities that are more dominant in Canada. Instead, she learns what being Chinese means from dominant discourses and racial stereotypes in mainstream society, from Chinese or Asian friends, and from her family. To address this loss, Ness's art practice involves constructing a Chinese Canadian female identity from a mixture of cultural fragments from a variety of sources, including dominant discourses, different places, cultures, and histories. She creates biographical illustrations about this imagined identity, which she sells and markets during art and craft fairs. The 26-year-old emerging artist illustrator can be spotted at any time during the week preparing for the next show she is participating in, selling work in art and craft shows, hosting studio visits, and attending art talks and workshops across downtown Toronto. To sustain her practice, she works as a part-time waitress at a hotel and as a seasonal pottery teacher at a local community centre. This case-study investigates questions of identity through examining a range of her art pieces, which speak to the meeting point of the cultural fragments that she embodies and is a part of.

Art Education

Ness' passion towards art can be traced back to her older female cousin, who went to Sheridan College for animation and eventually became an animator for DreamWorks Studios. When she was young, she would watch her cousin, who is 10 years older than her, draw cartoon characters. Watching a family member rise to success in the art world made it possible for Ness and her parents to believe that art is a viable career. She matches the stereotype of an Asian child who took a lot of extracurricular classes, but remembers never being forced into it, which is different from the popular narrative of Chinese children being subjugated by hyper-disciplinary parents. Instead, it was Ness who asked to learn piano and viola, sing in choirs, try taekwondo, do gym activities, and take art classes. Despite the lack of a strong and vibrant art community in her area, it was art that “stuck” with her. She took every chance she could to do it, from public school art courses to private drop-in sessions for still life drawings. During high school, she was engaged with the student council and the yearbook club doing graphic design as well.

After completing her post-secondary education at OCAD University in illustration, she is struggling to carve a path for her art practice and trying to find ways to make it sustainable. While her original goal was to be an illustrator, she feels “torn” between illustration and fine art because they are two different camps for her and she is not sure which one can be viable in the long term. Ness imparts that she still does not understand the process of “getting represented as an artist, selling [her] artwork [because she] hasn't ventured into that yet.” Currently, she is working to define her artistic practice through a process of elimination:

I am still kind of young as an artist or illustrator, so I haven't solidified a process. Right now I'm exploring everything and anything. So I've been doing ceramics, painting... For

illustration I've been trying more digital stuff and I don't know. I've been into textiles like making plush toys and [silk] screening... Trying everything, figuring out what I hate.

Through experimentation, she has found that she dislikes sewing and prefers traditional painting over digital techniques because she finds tactile work fulfilling. On top of creating art, which are visual diaries that reflect who she is and how she experiences the world, she is intensely involved with selling her work. For craft fairs like the annual One of a Kind show or her online Etsy shop, she produces and sells goods like pins, ceramic plates, tattoos, nail art stickers, zines, plushies, and printed tote bags. For art exhibitions like the annual Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition, she is able to sell more original paintings. Merchandising her creations started out as an effort to promote her work and get her name “out there,” but it grew to become a business when she found public interest in her goods. She describes her practice as “pretty much selling yourself.” Her identity as an Asian person is transformed into a brand that is marketed and sold.

Art Practice: Illustration and Art

The anxiety about the perceived divide between illustration and art might have partly come from the institutional partition that exists at OCAD University between the Faculty of Design and Faculty of Art, where her illustration and ceramic practices fall under design while her drawing, painting, printmaking, and sculptural activities fall under art. However, Ness makes the distinction herself: illustration is a freelance business, while art is personal expression. To elaborate, she says that illustration is contract or project-based work that involves a client, who provides artistic direction and messages to be represented in pictorial form. She explains that it follows a predictable structure that comprises of churning out work to meet a rough draft deadline and various revisions deadlines, digitizing or painting the work to meet the final proof

deadline, and sending the piece to the client, and receiving payment. The submitted work goes to print on paper or digitally and the job is done. There is a clear progression of beginning and end. On the other hand, Ness describes art as “what you want” and can be approached from many different avenues. She claims that she prefers illustrations because “it’s simpler and straight to the point...[since] you do this work and it’s great, and you move on... but with art... it’s more complicated and... tedious.” In social situations within illustration, interactions are mostly about networking and the business of getting contracts, where viewers “just go look at it and go ‘that’s amazing’, [or] ‘that’s a great piece,’ and they won’t ask you for the meaning, because often times it is from this article” it is accompanying. As a fine artist, she exclaims that viewers and buyers often “want to know what your intentions were, the meanings, how you come to make this piece, and it is a lot of talking about yourself, which I hate.”

Ness may not enjoy talking about herself, but her art practice is all about her identity. It is channeled into her art because “it is the only way [she] can communicate [her] opinions without being interrupted.” When there are conflicting views, she sees her art as a “one-way street” to convey messages that can reach the viewer before a response can be formulated and/or vocalized. She clarifies that in the art world, or perhaps even in other social spheres, “it is all about immediate digestion and immediate dispersal of your opinion,” which is temporal and fleeting. This seems to imply that she finds her work valuable because of its permanence in representing her thoughts. Ness struggles with being heard in a world where she has “accepted that [she is] a dime in a dozen... and whether or not [she] says her opinion... would not matter because the world would go on.” It is then perhaps not surprising that she prefers the client-driven illustration process rather than the self-directed fine art process. Illustration begins with a prompt that acts as a structure to both guide and limit the making process. It involves satisfying

what others want and serves as a distraction to matters related to her sense of self, which Ness seems to find many tensions in. However, it is in these tensions that she seems to find inspiration for her work.

With her ceramics, drawings, and paintings, Ness describes her process as intuitive and instinctual. She had been trained to methodically follow formal rules in design composition, to employ many reference images as resources, and to draw with correct proportions. There is a right and wrong in art school and students would be critiqued for breaking certain rules. While Ness supports these rules as generally good practice, she finds their rigidity problematic. Rather than spending a lot of time preplanning, gathering reference images and having the whole idea down pat, she prefers executing the piece with a “this there, that there” approach. They are immediate responses to her everyday experiences, feelings, or thoughts that “just show up in [her] brain.” Since she has been out of school, Ness has come to believe that if an artist has “something great going on, [they should] just go with it instead of worrying about everything, like technical stuff, or reference images.” From the immediacy of her art process, her art practice seems to reflect more of who she is as a person than her illustrations. Although Ness outlines key differences between the illustration and art, there are moments when she slips and refers to her paintings as illustrations during our conversations. Her practice straddles both spheres and she struggles to identify with one more than the other. For Ness, the distinctions are perhaps not as clear cut as I have summarized here.

Weeaboo: Fascination with Asian cultures

Whether consciously or unconsciously embraced, Ness’ paintings remind viewers of *ukiyo-e*, a genre of Japanese prints and paintings that depicted the hedonistic lifestyles of the

rising merchant class in the Edo period (1603-1837), and more specifically *shunga*, Japanese erotic art. In both *shunga* and Ness' work, many of the figures are nude with their bodies on display in a contorted manner. When there are multiple figures in one work, the emphasis seems to be on bodily interaction. While *shunga* focuses on showing sexual intercourse with an exaggeration of the figures' genitalia, the figures in Ness' work are fleshy, plump, and androgynous masses. She discloses that her primary inspiration is actually sumo wrestlers from Japan. She was keen on attesting her interest by mentioning that she visited Japan twice, and even "went to see a sumo match, so it confirms that [she is] in love with sumo wrestlers." In the photograph (figure 29) and statement she shared for the prompt "holistic identity," she speaks about embodying the life of a sumo wrestler:



Figure 29: Ness Lee's photograph on "holistic identity" of a sumo wrestling match

Life of a Sumo Wrestler

Just being part of the match,
seeing the way the fight's over
in a few minutes:
How it initiates, the uproar of it,
the tensions.
A lot of it is very thrilling
It's how I would like my life to be

Like some kind of sports match,
Where it's thriving, up and down,
adventurous

Being there: I learned more about sumo life
It's a culture in itself—a religion itself,
and you immerse yourselves in this sport.
They live, eat, and breathe sumo wrestling
Something I aspire to be obsessed with
Whatever I do, doing what I do as an artist
I just want to be obsessed
And wholeheartedly thrown into it
Eat, sleep, and breathe it
That sums me up
A dedicated individual

The life of a sumo is very me
(but not so intense)
Theirs is very rigorous, pretty rock-star
I like that. I want to be a rock star.
Not in that way though.

At first glance, the collection of Ness' work that are sold at craft fairs, which includes wearable art objects like sushi, onigiri (rice ball), soy sauce, sumo wrestler, and dumpling pins, borders on the fetishization of different Asian cultures, which involves the racial stereotyping of bodies and cultural practices. It seems to capitalize on essentialist discourse that surrounds Asians in general as a homogenous, fixed and knowable category of people. From the understanding Ness has gained from interacting with Japanese friends and from her two trips to Japan, for one month and two and a half weeks respectively, she has grown to appreciate "the aesthetics of everything [because] everything is just beautifully made, designed, and cute, and sumo wrestler of course." She believes that "their culture, everything, their way of living, is just really great," but clarifies that she is not talking about "the ugly stuff" like stereotypical notions of them being "conservative, restricting in life" and having strict morals. One of her pieces, titled *Lucky Cats*, addresses this fascination. Ness describes it this way:

It's kind of weeb culture... like, a weeb or a weeaboo? It's like when a White person's infatuated with Chinese culture or Japanese culture... This piece is about that, but... a different way. I feel like a weeb. I don't understand my culture but I'm fascinated by it, but I shouldn't be, because I'm Chinese or whatever... [it is] ironic.

From a brief search on Google, weeaboo (or Wapanese, as in Wannabe Japanese) is an English slang or meme that is used to describe individuals "who is obsessed with Japan / Japanese Culture... and attempts to act as if they were Japanese, even though they are far from it" ("Weeaboo – Urban Dictionary," 2006). I became confused because weeb is a term used exclusively for the fascination with Japanese culture, not Chinese culture. Interestingly, Ness has adopted it to describe her attraction to both Chinese and Japanese culture, interweaving the two together.

Throughout the interview and focus groups, Ness often refers to herself romantically as Asian first and foremost, and then clarifies in a softer, more difficult tone as Chinese. She made this collage (figure 30) on the topic “Being Chinese”:



Figure 30: Ness Lee's collage on "being Chinese"

Noodle Forest Trap

This is me being Asian—Being Chinese.
Running through a noodle garden,
a noodle forest.
That's me running. It traps me.

I am Chinese, but I'm not
immersed in the culture
It was very conflicting
growing up

I want to run away
just because I don't know much about it
and it's something that doesn't really...
I don't know
It's like a push and pull

In the image, the nude magenta figure runs through and becomes tangled in wavy yellow strips that Ness explains as noodles. The figure faces away from the viewer as if she does not want to confront anyone or have to explain her circumstances. When describing her collage, Ness vehemently exclaimed that she hates pink and how she used it because it is an alarming highlighter colour. This piece seems to show how her racialized body as a Chinese often draws viewers' attention despite efforts to evade the topic. She is caught in the web of noodles, an item that reminds her of being Chinese. In particular, the noodles remind her of her identity as a Hakka person, a Chinese ethnic group with a distinct Hakka language who has historically migrated frequently around China, because her cultural roots are most significantly passed on

through daily rituals of food practices. She is eager to recommend me her favourite Hakka dish, *fung mi mien*, which is stir fried noodle with molasses soy sauce.

Talking about food gets Ness excited. It is the only cultural practice that she acknowledges that she has inherited from her Hakka ethnic heritage throughout our conversations. Eating is a cultural, shared, and embodied practice that everyone can participate in regardless of their affinities. When asked about what some of her family values or cultural practices might involve, she remembers that her parents really wanted her to learn the Hakka language, but eventually gave up. Due to pressures to sustain the family, Ness' parents worked blue collared jobs to put food on the table and had little time left to instill a strong sense of values and cultural connection in their children. Ness laments, "They're too busy to focus and instill language... and values [because] they just come home all tired... so it never seemed or they never made it as important as... normal families do." The Hakka language is passed down to the next generation through oral means. There is no written form of the dialect and they have borrowed the use of traditional Chinese text. In extracurricular Chinese lessons available in community heritage language schools, the language of instruction is usually Mandarin or Cantonese, and rarely Hakka or other minority ethnic dialects. Ness wants to run away not because she does not want to know about her culture, but because she has few ways of learning about it. This collage seems to suggest that her Chinese and Hakka identities (noodles) trap her and keep her from being free, yet I was not sure why until researching on the history of Hakka people and thought more about her experiences in the Chinese diaspora in Toronto.

Being Hakka-Chinese

Hakka, literally translated as “guest families,” is a Chinese ethnic group whose origins are widely debated (Marks, 2012) but speculated to have roots in north central China (Constable, 1996). According to Marks (2012) Hakka people historically migrated south in waves during the Han (206 BC – 220 AD), Song (960–1279), and Qing dynasties (1644-1911). They now live primarily in Southeast China, Taiwan, and regions of Southeast Asia (Constable, 1996). Their migrations were not random, but rather due to the economic benefit of finding better markets for their agricultural products (Marks, 2012). They also moved for political reasons because they were often considered minorities, latecomers, and therefore intruders to an area that is already populated and were forced to settle remote mountainous regions (Djao, 2003). Sometimes they even faced banishment from local communities. In more recent history, Ness recalls how her grandmother, who is now 101 years old, told her “it’s true, we had to leave the country” due to her skin colour. Her grandmother was exiled from China during one of the World Wars, although it is unclear whether it was the First or Second World War as her grandmother, who was born in 1914, has lived through both. Ness explains that during the wars, “the darker the skin, the more poor they envision you as; Hakka people are generally darker-skinned, so I think they were just kicked out based on skin colour, and... I think their social status.”

Ness’ grandmother migrated to India, met her grandfather, who was also Chinese, and raised a family in Calcutta, India. Their children grew up learning Hakka and Hindi. Her parents met in India and eventually came to Canada with her grandmother around 30 years ago, where Ness and her elder brother were born. The rest of the family dispersed to Sweden and Australia. Her parents have a working knowledge of Hakka because they speak it in their intergenerational home. They have lost their proficiency in Hindi since they do not speak it regularly anymore, but

have retained a basic understanding of it. They learned English and speak mainly Hakka and English now, and have also picked up Cantonese and Mandarin “just to get by in life.” Hakka people who have migrated to different continents often adopt the culture and language of their new home and lead very different lives. The ambiguity of Hakka culture and place of origin make it challenging to understand:

I think like Hakka— it’s because they moved around so much they don’t really have something set in stone, like a culture set in stone, because they just had to adapt to where they moved to and lived... Yeah I think you’ll just have to blend in, I guess I don’t know.

Ness used to speak Hakka when she was younger but she and her brother lost it due to language attrition. They did not have sufficient practice because no one was Hakka around except her family. She gets intensely frustrated when others expect her to be able to speak Cantonese or Mandarin in Markham, the city she grew up in with many Chinese and Indian families, and in the hotel she works in. Her exasperation comes partly from having to constantly tell others, “I don’t speak anything... I’m not anything, leave me alone,” but also partly from others’ expectation and projection of what it means to be Chinese. She does not fit the model of what dominant discourses define as being Chinese.

Underlying power dynamics and dominant discourses are not always apparent until someone is unable to fit a mould. It is only then that the politics of identity are revealed. According to the Markham Ward 7 2011 Demographics quick fact sheet, 91% of the population identify as visible minority with South Asian (53%) and Chinese (20%) as the top two reported visible minority groups in the area. A quick scan of the language section tells us that the most frequently spoken mother tongue language is English (34%) in the area, but the most dominant Chinese mother tongue languages are Cantonese (9%), Chinese—not otherwise specified (6%),

and Mandarin (2%). Being Hakka, Ness would probably fall under the miscellaneous Chinese “not otherwise specified” category. The languages that these individuals speak are not named, recognized, or given status like Mandarin or Cantonese partially because of how languages are grouped together and categorized, but also partially because individuals who speak the recognized languages hold significantly more economic power than the individuals who do not. This lack of acknowledgement marginalizes non-Mandarin or Cantonese speakers on a systemic level. However, the effects of this categorization manifest themselves on a social level. A model of what it means to be Chinese is superimposed upon all Chinese bodies, moderated by Chinese and non-Chinese alike. Ness does not fit the model because she is Hakka, and these oppressive expectations alienate her from her Chinese heritage. To get away, she moved from the Markham ethnoburb, where one’s place of origin was very important when socializing, to downtown Toronto, where “it doesn’t really matter, because everyone’s different.”

The abstraction of her people’s history, culture, and identity perplexed her so deeply that she focused her Bachelor of Design degree thesis on “being Hakka and growing up as a Chinese person not speaking Chinese... [with] literally the title ‘I Don’t Speak Chinese.’” In a painting titled *Lei Ho Ma*, which is Cantonese for “how are you,” she illustrates a family of four having a meal together. A train track travels through one figure’s head and mouth to the next, but crashes when the train gets to one of the women at the table. She describes it as a dinner table scene where everyone speaks a language and the conversation or momentum of it abruptly stops because of her lack of knowledge in the communal language. Ness does not see her work as having Hakka influence, despite seeming to draw inspiration from her family. This scene in *Lei Ho Ma*, seems to have all the players in her immediate family, with a mother, a father, a brother, and herself, but she says, “It’s not exactly my brother or my parents... I just painted a picture of

a family, it's not really me, but it was like... an example, I suppose." In her Etsy shop and in craft fairs, she sells shrinky dink wearable art pins with the image of a plump woman who has circular glasses and red lips. This figure also appears in the curriculum vitae in her portfolio. I asked her about the figure:

Nicole: I have a question with the little figure on your CV here. Is that you?

Ness: No it's not. It's just a character I made. Yeah, Auntie Mapo.

Nicole: So it's an auntie? Like a Hakka auntie? Or...

Ness: No no, I created these characters: Uncle Stan and Auntie Mapo. They're a couple.

Nicole: And are they Chinese? Or are they...?

Ness: Oh... I guess they're Japanese, because Uncle Stan has this rockabilly hair. Have you ever seen like those Japanese rockers?... I started off doing that, so I guess he's Japanese now. And then I made his wife.

Nicole: So this is a Japanese... old lady?

Ness: Yeah I guess so. She does look like my mom though. My mom is like, "You drew me. Why you drew me?"

Nicole: So she has an element of Hakka in her... kind of?

Ness: No... I don't think Hakka has a visual element to it. She's just... this lady's just Asian? And old. She looks like my mom, but my mom doesn't have circular glasses.

Whether intentionally or not, Ness seems to have appropriated the facial features of her Hakka mother for Auntie Mapo's design. Even after multiple prompts, she resolutely denies having Hakka influences in her work since she believes Hakka culture does not have a visual element to it. This lack of Hakka visual culture and visibility in general can be attributed to the minority status that the group traditionally occupied as migrants within China and in other countries they

have eventually settled in, where their stories are not often the ones being heard. In Western societies like Canada, they are marginalized because of their race and because they are not the “typical” Chinese that can be easily categorized. Ness’ comment also points to a lack of a visible Hakka community around her. Even though Hakka people identify as Chinese, look Chinese, and have their roots in China, their perspectives, histories, memories, and cultural practices are distinct from Mandarin and Cantonese communities, the majority Chinese groups in metropolises of Canada like Toronto. When Ness says she is “Asian” instead of “Chinese,” she seems to be making a distinction between herself and the majority Chinese groups around her. Her alienation is so great that she would identify Auntie Mapo, a figure with Hakka features, as Japanese rather than Chinese.

From the success of animation series like *Dragon Ball Z*, *Pokemon*, *Fullmetal Alchemist*, *Naruto*, *Death Note*, and more on Cartoon Network, Japanese popular culture is increasingly essentialized, exoticized, and sensationalized in North America. Japanese culture, available to be consumed in the forms of animated series on television, Japanese pop (or Jpop) tracks on YouTube, sushi dishes at all you can eat restaurants, and cartoon merchandise at anime conventions, is a highly visible Asian culture that both old and young generations have immediate access to. These popular icons and practices give consumers the illusion of Japanese culture being a stable and static construct that can be collected and owned. While there are advantages to the popularization of Japanese popular culture, such as fostering interest in the mass public to learn about the culture and care about the people there, it inevitably creates an oversimplified version filled with stereotypes. When asked about what she thought about Japanese culture, Ness mentioned that everyone is polite, very considerate, simple, quiet, and to themselves but are too conservative and restricted in life. These limited structures of

understanding act to define what it means to be Japanese and, in turn, marginalize those who do not fit the model.

Ness is thoughtful about her “obsession” with Japanese culture. She muses that at first “it was just a stupid obsession, but... realize[d] that it’s kind of... being born again and choosing your own path in culture.” She clarifies repeatedly that her choice does not mean she wants to be Japanese, but is instead about “having the choice to learn the language, learn the culture, and care for something naturally” on her own. She finds it problematic that individuals are expected to embrace the traditions, norms, rules, and religion associated with the ethnicity or race they were born into. Her adoption of and interest in another culture is conceptualized as an active choice, in line with the rhetoric of choice, freedom, and fluidity in Canadian multiculturalism and liberalism. Yet, this choice is one that seems to have been necessitated by Ness’ alienation and lack of personal connection with her own cultural heritage through different kinds of marginalization. The visibility of Japanese culture cast a stark contrast to the invisibility of Hakka culture. She discloses, “I don’t really have that relatable in mind... [for] Hakka values, Hakka’s not really... anything to me because it’s like practically non-existent.” Adopting a highly visible Asian culture as her own is a way to be included in the discourse of being Asian, when she feels she is “not that Asian,” and when her social circles are telling her she does not fit. Ness’ practice indulges in stereotypes, but uses them as resistance against who she is expected to be. She shares this image (figure 31) and statement for the prompt “Being Chinese”:



Figure 31: Ness Lee's photograph on "being Chinese" of a black burger

Photographs of Food

Asians take photos of food.
It's a stereotype, but it is true
often people poke fun of it
but I find it really fun.

I'm very impartial to the opinion
of photo food taking
but it's a very Asian thing
In that moment when I took this photo
I did feel very Asian.

Food taking is a rebellion
'cause this is so Asian,
but I'm not that Asian.

Ness speaks about feeling like an Asian in a romantic tone as if it is an ideal, but makes a joke at the end to point out both the irony and purpose of her resistance. An onlooker might see her, an Asian body, taking a photo of food and think she is reinforcing status quo. However, Ness describes herself as rebelling against the status quo in her own way. The state of being Chinese seems performative for both an audience and the self. To embody a culture, one needs to act and dress in certain ways to look and feel like a part of it. In this selfie she shared for the prompt "holistic identity" (figure 32), Ness expressed romantically that she thought she "looked very Asian."



Figure 32: Ness Lee's photograph on "holistic identity" of a self portrait

I looked very Asian

This is me. I took a selfie.
I drew on this fan with my illustrations,
and I thought I looked very Asian.
I had dyed hair, well I still do.
but this is gray hair.
I thought that was me holistically,
trying to be different,
but still trying to learn about my culture,
or at least have it a part of me.
And also voice out my individuality through it
It's a picture of me trying to do me

Through props, costumes, and popular iconographies, she is learning about her own culture. The phrase “trying to do me” implies that identity involves actively taking on roles. Despite learning from dominant discourses, her adaptation and expression of the culture shows how it is a constantly shifting construct. Being Chinese is about finding a comfortable space to express one’s own version of the culture in this photograph and statement:



Figure 33: Ness Lee's photograph on "being Chinese" of a campsite

This little space you have in this world

I was at the Scarborough Bluffs
I go there often to clear my head
All of a sudden in the corner— I find this.
No one’s there, empty and deserted,
But it’s so beautifully made.
It’s very strange, I loved it
I want to lie in it

That was being Asian—Chinese for me,
It’s setting up camp somewhere,
Random places, and just doing you.
Being comfortable and trying to
aesthetically have your own individuality,
In this little space you have in this world.
It’s how I feel being Chinese
I’m not really that Chinese,
but in my own way I’m making myself
fit into this culture

There is profound ambiguity in Ness’ understanding of her own identity. She says, “I like being kind of different, or [how] I have these multifaceted things to relate to, but at the same time... I don’t know what I am.” It is challenging and complicated to locate and define the self, particularly for someone who caught between being Chinese and Canadian, and between being Chinese in some contexts and not in others. Identity is a versatile construct that changes depending on immediate social environment and shifting socio-political allegiances over a period of time. To parallel this thought, she discloses how her art practice is about “how to best display or show it [at] venues and events, [but she does] not know what is great yet.” Her art practice

acts as a metaphor for her identity and her struggle to best show the different sides of herself in different situations. She thinks she is more influenced by Western values and culture because she grew up in a multicultural society, but does not know fully what her own definitions are to be Canadian or Hakka. Both cultures “just kind of blend in... especially being Chinese not knowing Chinese and practically living... as a Westerner just speaking English.” When asked how she identifies herself, she says “there’s no particular label, because I haven’t found a label for myself I guess,” and in another instance, “I don’t really label myself as anything because it’s just so irritating to explain, but I just generally tell people I’m Hakka... I don’t elaborate on it, I just say ‘I’m Hakka’” or “I kind of say all those keywords: Hakka, Chinese, Canadian.”

Being Canadian

Ness does not speak extensively about being Canadian and only briefly mentions that it is “pretty great, friendly, [and] sweet.” She is proud to be Canadian because of the diversity that exists in Toronto and how everyone is accommodating of difference. Her collage (figure 34) and statement for the prompt “being Canadian” shows how she feels comfortable living in downtown being part of a community of peoples who identify with different combinations of social markers, regardless of the culture clashes and differences of opinions that come up:



Figure 34: Ness Lee's collage on "being Canadian"

Sweet and unnerving

Being Canadian
 Canadian colours: Red and white.
 This figure holds houses
 made in chocolate

I find Canada to be home,
 and it's pretty sweet.
 I am proud to be Canadian
 When travelling,
 it's nice to say I'm Canadian
 The idea of us like one big melting pot

is comforting
 At the same time quite unnerving
 The snakes are there.
 Culture clashes, differences of opinions
 but at the same time, comfortable

I'm unsure about the aspect of home,
 and being comfortable about certain things,
 but being Canadian is like home,
 an aspect of home

Contrasting the figure in the collage made for the prompt “being Chinese,” the red figure here sits with stability. As a Canadian body, she embraces her sense of home and belonging to protect them from the snakes of the cultural conflicts that alienate her.

It is interesting how Canada is described as a melting pot instead of a cultural mosaic. This implies that Canada's multiculturalism experienced as a process of assimilation rather than preservation and coexistence of different ethnic groups, languages, and cultures. Peach (2005) suggests the preservation of minority identity lead by policies of cultural pluralism depends on the residential concentration of the minority peoples, who will have more interactions and marriages with members of the group, and pass on their values, language, and culture within a community of similar peoples. Even though Ness grew up with a Chinese community, her experiences do not match the multicultural model because the community she was in was not of her ethnicity. Instead, her experiences match more of the assimilation model where the mixing and integration of different peoples occur. She distances herself from Markham physically and criticizes her peers in the ethnoburb for being closed in and having narrow minds because “their notion of a good job is [based on] salary... getting something solid, permanent, and consistent.” Her art practice is the opposite of these values and she feels her work is not taken seriously as a

result. There cannot be an assumption that all people of the same minority category, however defined, share similar allegiances, histories, languages, and values.

Ness also shared the following photographs and remarks about “being Canadian”:



Figure 35: Ness Lee's photograph on "being Canadian" of a social gathering

Place with \$7.99 Beer

Me and my friends in Chinatown
There's this place
where you could get \$7 pitchers.
It's this really shitty beer
Everyone goes there. It's really fun—
I found it really Canadian, it's so makeshift

It's Asian, but conforming to comforts of
customers, whether Asian or not
She just lets you do what you want.
There's a TV and a keyboard
at the front, anyone goes up
and goes on Youtube,
plays music. Often bizarre music
It's interactive and obnoxious in that way

It's an Asian environment,
but I was with people who aren't very Asian
They're like me
Not really immersed into our cultures,
None of them are specifically Asian
Embracing Asianness, the way of living
in my own way with my friends



Figure 36: Ness Lee's photograph on "being Canadian" of her painted illustration

Have fun with it

A painting I did— A portion of it
It's not even like that anymore.
There are people on it now.
The portion I took a picture of
It's a bed, it's about comforts
and using these comforts
to make it a home
When you're a kid, you have that wire
you put that ball through the wire—
That game, often in doctor's offices
A slide, playful atmosphere

Being Canadian
It's up to you to have fun with it

The image on the left (figure 35) suggests that Canadianness means having the opportunity and space to shape one's own culture, with likeminded people, by figuring out what is most comfortable. It is a place where many different people who are not rooted in their home culture

mingles and creates an entirely new identity for themselves, which involves a process of creating and exploring new experiences, then finding what practices to retain and expel from one's life. This practice is similar to how Ness tries to determine what medium she enjoys working with the most through trial and error. Interestingly, the photograph on the right (figure 36) begins with a playful tone but is contrasted by the ominous reference to the doctor's office where this space to play is remembered to be located. This allowance to play seems to serve as a distraction from the larger context of affliction, the reason why one might visit the doctor in the first place. While the bed symbolizes the comfort of making a home and setting up camp wherever the artist chooses, it seems to also be a necessity for Canadians because the alternative is suffering a sense of loss and displacement.

Femininity and Womanhood

The elements of play, exploration, defining identity on one's own terms, finding a place that is comfortable, emphasizing individuality, and being true to one's self from Ness' explanations of "being Chinese" and "being Canadian" are echoed in her description of femininity and womanhood. Primarily, the artist's concept of gender is constructed through family values of her racial and ethnic background. Having had grown up in India, her parents retained many values and beliefs from India, including how a lady should behave. Ness' father "would always tell [her] to do chores, and do the dishes because [she is] a woman." Despite her frustration with these expectations, she would do them to help ease her mother's workload. Even though there are expectations being placed upon her, she denies that she had a strict upbringing. Instead, her time at home was described as "a nagging upbringing" filled with directives regarding social behaviours and subjects she should learn that conform to the norms of being

Chinese, being Hakka, and being female. Ness sees herself as “more like the strong type” of woman who takes on “stronger family roles like organizing things [and] doing paper work” which she defines as unfeminine. At the hotel where Ness works, there is a similar gender divide as the ones at home but manifests differently. Male coworkers tend to help female coworkers because males are perceived as physically stronger. However, they do not help Ness because they know she can do it. This notion of a woman working with men as equals brings to mind how Hakka women were economically active in dynastic China, working both in and out of the house to assist with making a living (Djao, 2003). When foot-binding began in the Song dynasty (960–1279) and gained popularity in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) as a standard of beauty, Hakka women “prided themselves on the fact that they worked alongside their men and never bound their daughters’ feet” (Djao, 2003, p. 181). This history of valuing function over ideals of beauty and womanhood matches how Ness conducts her life today as a Hakka-Chinese-Canadian woman, even though she does not feel connected to her cultural heritage.

She talks about femininity and the standards of beauty with disdain when describing her collage (figure 37) and photographs (figures 38 and 39):



Figure 37: Ness Lee's collage on "being female"

Femi-ni-ni-ni-mity

Can never really say that word.
 Flowers on the eyes
 It's a subjective view, all personal
 Based on your own opinion of beauty.

There're things I find beautiful
 that people think are ugly
 Very subjective

Beauty or being female
 comes with a lot of opinions.
 with feminism and
 other people's views on things
 all these people
 crawling on the back of this figure,
 and some hanging out.

Femininity is like that
 There're just too many opinions

Here, Ness describes femininity as essentially linked to beauty. The collage touches on the notion of beauty as a subjective and personal evaluation. In describing the collage, Ness uttered the word femininity in a mock baby voice like a babble of repeated sounds, suggesting its incoherence to the speaker. The figures on the woman's back seem to reference and play on the idiom "get off my back," acting as a metaphor for a wish for people to stop the harassment about standards of womanhood and beauty. The woman's eyes are covered by flowers and her head is in the clouds, hinting that many are in their own fantasies, blinded by the pursuit of such standards and without the ability to see a person (or their own self) for who they really are beneath their external appearance. The clouds also show how many standards are ideals that are unattainable for women in the real world. Ness shares a photo about the subjectivity of beauty and value:



Figure 38: Ness Lee's photograph on "being female" of student pottery project

Aya

This art student I had
An adorable little 3-year old girl
She made this face.
(I teach pottery; we have a face project)
I thought it was very beautiful

She was like, "Ah! It's my face,
so I think it's amazing!"
It's about the eye of the beholder.
Someone looking at it—
Might not be pretty.
But to me, it's beautiful
'cause I watched her make it.

I watched her decide
to make this eye this way, and
having daddy's hair

Aya's pottery face sculpture (figure 38) illustrates how beauty is "in the eye of the beholder" and that there is no one model to follow. The assessment of value, for her, comes from a process of creation, choice, understanding, and the appreciation of the three components.

Ness identifies as female, but when I asked her for confirmation, she interpreted the question as one about her artistic practice and fervently denied,

No! It doesn't pop up as something as important I guess... I don't think there is a sex to my work, like a gender to my work, nor do I keep that mind when I make stuff... I don't think my things are pretty, I think they're cute... if you're thinking flowers and bunnies and pink stuff and fluffy unicorns, nothing like that. I think it's just pretty androgynous.

Her fierce and deliberate detachment from the feminine label seems to come from how she defines femininity, as a limiting gender stereotype that can be found being rampantly distributed in gender-specific publications (like *The Big Book of Girl Stuff*), toys (like Barbie), and foods (like the pink Kinder Surprise). She believes that she is "not really that feminine nor [does she] feel like [she has] to dress up like a woman," asserting that she is not a traditional

pretty lady who would paint her nails. While her full name is Vanessa Lee, she chose to shorten it to Ness Lee for it to sound more androgynous, rationalizing it with the purpose of making it simpler to remember. The strength of Ness' response to my question, her interpretation of it, and her decision to change her name suggest her awareness that there are disadvantages to being known as female in the art world and being seen as making "feminine art." Citing a Guerilla Girls 2011 survey, Bader (2012) writes:

...just 4% of the artists in the Metropolitan Museum's contemporary section were female. MOMA and the Guggenheim fared somewhat better, with 26% and 23% respectively... Women of color produced 2% of MOMA's art and 5% of the Guggenheim's... the National Museum of Women in the Arts estimates that 5% of art currently on display in US museums was made by women.

Female artists have historically been left out of the canon, museums, and art history texts. The percentage of racialized women's work being included in art institutions is even smaller. While efforts have been made to point out the gaps for public awareness and action in recent years, Ness' self-extrication from the female label is a response to the reality that sexism still permeates the art world today, where the work of female artists is not taken as seriously as their male counterparts.

The final photograph (figure 39) and statement shared about "femininity" shows how being a woman, like being Chinese and Canadian, is about defining what it means on a personal level without fearing the judgement of others or having to commit to superimposed standards by "running for the hills" one's own values and beliefs. "Being female" is a matter of being confident about individual vibrancy and expression of character. It means not being afraid to create, carve out, adopt, modify, and (re)define a state of being that works for the individual,

which can mix seemingly contradictory elements like tradition and modernity, orthodox practices and rebellion, the bizarre and the beautiful. To Ness, each individual is a mixture of contradictions and being a woman means being in tune with one's identity, staying true to that vision no matter what others' standards may be, and expressing this vision to the world:



Figure 39: Ness Lee's photograph on "being female" of a Japanese restaurant

You do you

This restaurant:

The character, so vibrant

Mascot in front of it, bizarre inside

These funky tables

Mannequins joining you

They're creepy, but fun

Along all the walls:

Pornographic images, traditionally done

In those prayer wooden boxes in temples

It was really fun

Like femininity:

"You do you," kind of thing

Just run for the hills with it

It's brave. Being comfortable
not afraid of being who you are
and telling the world, flat out:

What you are,

how beauty is to you,

and being female,

and shit like that.

So... femi-ni-ni-ni-mity.

Holistic Identity and Final Thoughts

As reflected in her representation of her holistic identity and her narrative accompanying this collage, Ness conceives herself as a transnational individual (Vertovec, 2009) who occupies many different cultural spaces all at once and as a result feels alienated by her in-betweenness because she can never be located within one cultural sphere. Her identity does not only reflect

cultural hybridity but transcends the idea of the third space (Bhabha, 1994) as it is fluidly sliding and slipping. The transnational identity that transcends location and perceived cultural boundaries avoid fixed definitions of being, and as a result is distressing and challenging to describe, which may perhaps be why the artist has chosen to include the fire imagery. It also reflects the danger of being in this position, of being unknown or misknown. Due to her family's multiple migratory history, it is one that is not based on location, but rather one that is based on imagining what it means as being part of an "Asian" ethnic group and stories that are told within the family—memories of the past in different parts of the world.



Figure 40: Ness Lee's collage on "holistic identity"

Layers

When people talk about
who they are and their identity
It's super complex
There's so many layers to a person
Often people forget
when they interact with one another

That intertwines with my identity
being Hakka and Chinese and Canadian
Not really one or the other,
but kind of between all of them
the layers of everything.

The fire... the conflicting ideals I had
with ALL these cultures
it is a double edged sword.

Different colours, the different sides
of cultures or my culture I guess
There's so many Hakkas everywhere
like they're everywhere.
They're everywhere.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Through working with Chinese Canadian artists in the context of this thesis project, which involves a series of one-on-one semi-structured interviews, an arts-based focus group, and an image-based focus group, it seems that the ways in which female Chinese Canadian artists conceptualize their plural identities are deeply rooted within both personal and social realms. The ideas about who they are as Chinese and as Canadian are always largely defined by others in their immediate environment. As the social worlds they inhabit shift, so do their perceptions and locations of self. Their identity is defined and governed by both local and international perceptions of who they are expected to be, which may or may not correspond to how they see themselves or who they want to be. The conflict of being unknown or misknown is evident in the narratives they tell about wanting to assert their identity, as a self-defined construct, in resistance to who they are perceived to be and how they are expected to behave by social norms established within circles of friends, family traditions and practices, and educational institutions. These assertions of self take different forms and are reflected in the art they produce.

Art Practice as a Reflection of Identity

One of my research questions asks how the artistic practices and representation(s) of the Chinese Canadian women artists' self identity emerge from the diverse transnational and multicultural contexts they occupy. Going into the one-on-one interview conversations, I wanted to find out how the participants conceptualize their artist practice and how is it a unique expression of who they are, whether it is reflected stylistically or through choices of medium. From insights gleaned from the one-on-one interview conversations however, it is evident that the reflection of the self in art does not only involve choices in style and medium. The artists in

this study have diverse interpretations and definitions of what an artistic practice means, what its purpose is, and what it involves. These interpretations and definitions reflect their sense of self because they link closely with how they navigate the world as a Chinese Canadian woman artist. They are reflections of a collection of experiences, life histories, value systems, educational ideologies, cultural practices, and family history and traditions.

The first chapter examines how Gladys' art practice reflects her sentiments about the accommodation of others' expectations and needs. The works she produces are practical in nature. Her art practice flourishes within contexts of need, such as fulfilling course requirements, teachers' success criteria, or a blank wall in the house that calls for enrichment. These structures give her art function and purpose. Consequently, she adopts these contexts of need as her own set of expectations for herself, which makes it challenging to differentiate her individual voice from the voice of the collectives she is a part of. As an in-service art teacher in a local high school, she defines her art practice in terms of collecting techniques and skills through professional development as a means of inspiring students, expanding the curriculum, and advancing her career. Otherwise, there is little time to indulge in artistic practices that do not serve a dual purpose of satisfying what she wants to do and the expectations of others, which serve and can be perceived simultaneously as conformity and resistance. As a result of the constant pressure to accommodate the value system of the family and demands from work, she often struggles with running out of time to accomplish all the tasks that demand her attention. Her accommodating approach to navigating different parts of her identity and contexts of need that arise out of her membership in social communities can be seen as conformity, which has negative associations when read through a Western lens of analysis that focuses on individuality and independence. In this lens, the accommodative approach can be seen as a lack of critical reflection about how one

is engaged in everyday activities. The individual can be read as a victim of societal pressures that come from home, work, friends, society, and other social circles she is situated in. Alternatively, conformity to group values is not necessarily purely negative. Gladys chooses this approach to attain greater happiness that comes from keeping the peace and harmony of a collective. Her participation in group practices instills in her a sense of belonging and community. There is value in fostering cohesion within family and social circles. As reflected in her artistic practice, the focus of this approach is on inserting the self into an existing environment or structure. Value is placed on harmony, cohesion, unity, and solidarity within a group rather than individual activism or rebellion.

The second chapter presents a completely different model of what art practice means. Rather than accommodating and conforming to norms, Cardy's art practice reflects her awareness, activism, and social engagement, about ideas that are taken for granted as Truth. Motivated by the social justice agenda of the educational institution she studied in and her experiences of racial marginalization in Quebec, her art practice takes on a critical and social justice approach to investigating, exposing, questioning, challenging ideas that are Eurocentric and patriarchal. Her art practice focuses on the resistance of popular and dominant discourses about femininity and womanhood by pairing the beautiful and the grotesque together in sculptures that deteriorate with the passing of time. Importance is placed upon the artistic integrity of the work, which generally means making art for the self without the influence of others, of sponsorship, and of economic gain. However, the artist defines artistic integrity on her own terms as addressing social issues to bring awareness to the public for the betterment of society. The artist faces tensions such as wanting the development of an individual self without external influence and wanting the art to be grounded within a historical, social, and cultural

context in order to make a difference. Her art practice reflects her constant negotiations between what she defines as opposing elements, such as taking risks to explore but also being in the safety of familiar territory, and her Chinese and Canadian identities. Descriptions of these negotiations are left ambiguous and open-ended due to her ambivalence about taking on multiple identities and occupying multiple roles at once. Her art practice reflects the inconclusiveness of her negotiations by opening topics up to viewers to decide what to make of them. The focus is on the concept or idea, rather than the realization of an art object itself.

The third chapter outlines how Ness defines her art practice in terms of a brand to be sold and marketed. She creates illustrations that are biographical in nature as well as pieces that are defined by clients' needs. Her biographical illustrations do not simply reflect her Chinese Canadian identity but involve the construction of an imagined Chinese Canadian identity. Her Chinese Canadian identity is perceived by mainstream society as exotic, which is effectively used to market her products and goods. Being a transnational woman whose family migrated from China to India and to Canada, it is challenging for Ness to locate a physical place of origin with a clear set of cultural histories, practices, traditions, and language to be connected and grounded to. It is not easy for the artist to simply pick one location from her family's migratory history and build an allegiance to it. Her identity is therefore made up of that a mixture of cultural fragments that can be traced from many different locations. The artist draws influence from multiple places, cultures, and histories because of her transnational identity. As a result, she refers to herself broadly as "Asian" and "Canadian" because she is born, raised, and living in Toronto. Due to her heritage as Hakka Chinese, one of the ethnic minority groups in China who have historically had migratory tendencies and who have integrated themselves within host societies through acculturation, the artist struggles to learn the cultural history of her people. She

expresses frustration about the invisibility of her people, even though “they are everywhere.” To construct her sense of self as a Chinese or broadly as an Asian person, she learns from dominant discourses and racial stereotypes in mainstream society, from Chinese or Asian friends (like Japanese, Indian, etc.), and from her family. Informed by these resources, her art practice involves creating whimsical visual diary illustrations that adopt Japanese popular cultural icons like sumo wrestlers, rockabilly hair, and sushi because that is what the resources available have informed her about what it means to be Asian. Although she identifies as female, she rejects any associations between her art practice and notions of femininity or womanhood, which is seen to be linked to matters of inconsequentiality and keeping up with appearances. Instead, she identifies her art as gender neutral and the figures in her illustrations are often androgynous. The focus of her art practice is on visually illustrating the meeting point of the different cultures that she embodies and is a part of.

Navigating the Hyphenated Space

Part of my investigation is on how female Chinese Canadian artists come to understand and navigate their dual and/or hybrid identities, and navigate the hyphenated space between being Chinese and being Canadian that is “a zone of contact and change, a collision of cultures” (Gagnon, 2000, p. 128). The participants’ answers to this question are as distinct from each other as their approaches to their artistic practices, but the common theme is that they do not feel like they are fully Chinese or fully Canadian. Their notions of womanhood and femininity are linked closely to with the frameworks of race and nationality.

Gladys’ Chinese identity comes from her appearance and how others perceive her as a racialized person. Her heritage also plays a significant role, even though she says she does not

know much about Hong Kong. Rather, it is her knowledge of Cantonese and Mandarin, the geography of China, mainland Chinese people and their customs, her family values, and Chinese traditional arts that grounds her identification. Relationships and allegiances to certain identity labels are acquired or built through learning and understanding. Her identification with being Canadian comes from living in Toronto and owning a Canadian passport. Other than that, she seems to be alienated from her Canadian identity because of the Eurocentricity of its definition in mainstream society. As evident in the arts-based components of the research study, her notions of beauty and femininity seem to be centered around Caucasian females, even though the figures in the collage are intended to represent moving forward and pushing out of the bubble of how others define them. This is perhaps due to the adoption of colonial notions from pre-1997 Hong Kong or the acculturation into Canadian Eurocentric cultural values.

Contrary to the first case study on Gladys, whose identification with social groups is rooted in participation and involvement, Cardy's relationships and allegiances to identity labels are constructed through rejection, discrimination, marginalization, and alienation. Cardy's construction of what it means to be Chinese comes from her immediate and extended family's rejection of her Westernized values and practices, which are deemed by them to not be Chinese enough, or not Chinese like they are used to. This is shown through her story about the dirty sneakers and her family's disappointment with her decision to pursue art, which is believed to be a path that does not produce job stability, particularly for a racialized individual who is anticipated to be discriminated against in mainstream society. Nevertheless, her frequent trips to her place of origin and interactions with extended family members still ground her identification as Chinese. While she is not Chinese enough for her family, she is not Canadian enough for her teachers and peers in Quebec as she is constantly racialized and expected to act a certain way

that is believed to be Chinese, which demoralizes, marginalizes, and trivializes her as a person. Agency is taken away from her when her teacher insisted that her “real name” is Jia, even though she prefers to be called Cardy. Her ideas of what it means to be a woman can be traced to the feminist education she received, which spurs her into social resistance of all external definitions of self, in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender. Inspired by this social cause, she is particularly engaged with the resistance of gender roles and body image standards from home and Canadian society at large.

Ness’ identity, relationships, and allegiances to social groups are formed differently from both Gladys and Cardy. She identifies as Chinese, specifically Hakka Chinese, but prefers to refer to herself broadly as Asian. Her identity formation is informed by a complex set of social dynamics within her life. Her Chinese identity is rooted in the loss of cultural heritage and connection, which comes from multiple migrations in her family’s history, from China to India in her grandparents’ generation, then from India to Canada in her parents’ generation. This loss compels her to search for traces of culture and construct her own version of a Chinese identity. This is done through learning from dominant discourses of what it means to be Chinese. Being Asian, instead of Hakka Chinese, allows her to draw from a larger pool of cultural resources in the process of selecting and identifying which parts to accept and which parts to reject when constructing her sense of self. She chimes into dominant discourses not because she wants to reinforce stereotypes, but because she wants to be a part of a culture that she does not ultimately feel a part of. Ness is not confident in her membership as a Chinese because she lost the ability to speak the Hakka language from intergenerational language attrition, because she is not part of a visible Hakka community outside the context of home, and because her Hakka ethnic identity is not represented in Canadian or diasporic Chinese communities. With Chinese communities, she

feels a need to differentiate herself from groups of mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese, who are perceived as homogenous groups. She feels more comfortable owning her Canadian identity because of the idea of multiculturalism. Everyone is different so it is acceptable to be different. Her identity formation is not just about the dualistic hybridity of being Chinese and/or Canadian. It is not only about what customs, values, and beliefs she has taken up from these locations. Rather, it is a process of gathering and fusing together elements that she finds comfortable to integrate into herself. She sees being in Canada as having the opportunity to be reborn through choosing which cultural fragments are right for the self. However optimistic this may be, the strategy is taken up due to a necessity for a sense of belonging.

It is challenging for participants to describe specifically how they navigate their dual, hybrid, or hyphenated identity. They have told me stories how Chinese people see and treat them during their trips to China, as well as how Canadians at home see and treat them in different social spaces, but the following excerpt was one of the few instances where their engagement and/or resistance against dominant narratives played out right in front of me. After gaining an initial understanding of the artists' art practice, family background, education, and social worlds in the one-on-one semi-structured interview, the following conversation was prompted when the participants met for the image-based focus group to discuss the photographs they brought in. They were spurred to discuss the act of taking photographs of food because Ness' picture of a black burger (figure 31) shows on her laptop for a brief moment while she is preparing her presentation. Their conversation sums up the participants' unique engagement with stereotypes well:

Ness: This is the being Asian one, I took it obviously because Asians take photos of food.

Gladys: Yesss!

Ness: It's a stereotype, but it is true, and it's like—

Cardy: It's pretty consistent.

Ness: Often people poke fun of it, but I find it really fun. I'm very impartial to the opinion of photo food taking but I feel it's a very Asian thing? I think that's why I chose it, and... in that moment when I took this photo I did <romantically> feel very Asian. [...]

Nicole: Do you guys take pictures of your food?

Cardy: Um... I try not to.

Gladys: I do.

Nicole: <to Cardy> Okay, why not?

Cardy: Uh— well, just at restaurants I think... I get—I don't know. I just don't think it's necessary and it slows down service. Lots of people take photos and show it and how much more information needs to be out there, is my way of thinking about it. But if I feel really accomplished that I made this gigantic cake for a friend I love, I'll take a picture <G: Yeah.> for my own personal viewing purposes but I just feel like so much is shared and there's so much on your newsfeed on Facebook. It's just not necessary so that's all.

Nicole: <to Gladys> Okay, and why do you take pictures of your food?

Gladys: Well I love cooking <laughs> and I like to take pictures of food that I'm pretty proud of making? [...] When I go outside for food, if there is something spectacular that I want to try to make myself, I'll take a picture of the food and try to recreate it at home.

This moment echoes the themes explored throughout this study: it describes the complexity for participants of situating the self while negotiating how dominant discourses define them, how they want to act, and how they want to portray themselves in front of the audience in the room, all of which might compel them to act in different ways.

Taking photographs of food is an Asian stereotype that is part of the popular dominant discourses about what it means to be Chinese. Ness eagerly participates in the practice because it reinforces her membership in the Chinese or Asian culture, something that she has been looking for throughout her life and art practice. The romantic tone of her voice when she describes feeling “very Asian” shows how it is an ideal for her to attain. The activity becomes a ritual she performs to take up a role, as if it is a performance for others who occupy the same social space at the time. Cardy resists the external definition of self due to her experiences of marginalization and need for resistance. She participates in the activity of taking photographs of food, but only privately in the context of personal pride. Her decision to not take up the practice is rationalized within a framework of information overload that is accepted by the group. Gladys is excited to show support in the practice at first when it is first brought up, but after hearing Cardy’s concerns, she shifts to an accommodative echo that balances both Ness and Cardy’s approaches to engaging this stereotype. She expresses enthusiasm in her participation like Ness, but situates it within a context of personal pride of cooking, which Cardy finds acceptable. She also connects her participation with the purpose of creation, a practice that artists find positive associations with.

The dual, hybrid, and hyphenated identity is complex and always shifting depending on the environment where the individual is situated in and who is readily in the room. It is about finding a space where the self as well as the people around the individual are comfortable. In all the stories told and the events that played out in the research study, being Chinese and Canadian is about situating the self, or the struggle to do so, in discourses that are acceptable for all parties present. Frustration, isolation, and marginalization are the result when the racialized and

gendered individual cannot satisfy the Eurocentric and patriarchal criteria of inclusion within a social context.

Having an Art Career as a Chinese Canadian Woman

The final research question is one I have not specifically addressed: What does pursuing a career in the arts mean for Chinese Canadian women? Embedded in the narratives that the participants shared is a set of reasons contributing to why they have chosen to pursue a career in the arts despite the social and economical hardships associated with the choice. Sustained throughout the narratives of all three participants is an early exposure to art and the development of interest in it. This interest, often described as something that developed intrinsically or naturally, can be traced from the artistic abilities of role models, encouragement from teachers, financial support from family to enrol in classes, and an enjoyment in the process of creation, exploration, and play. All of them started identifying as a mini-artist from a young age. All three artists had family members who did not want them to pursue an art career because of the financial instability and hardships associated with the path. Some of them faced direct discouragement from family members while others did not, but the concerns from parents remained consistent, that their children will not be able to sustain themselves with an art career. Regardless of the anticipated financial strain and parental disapproval of art careers, they still pursued it in post-secondary school and subsequently for their profession. Each artist has their own unique set of reasoning and motivations behind their decision, but they are all centered on resistance.

By pursuing art, Gladys wanted to prove herself to parents and established authorities that it is possible to make the craft she is passionate about into a sustainable living. Valuing the social

cohesion of the family, she does not overtly resist their expectations of financial stability and success and a positive reputation. Instead, the resistance is covertly accomplished through conforming and meeting their expectations, but finding ways to do what she wants in the process at the same time. In becoming an art teacher, her parents' concerns about financial stability and success are addressed. She has a stable income and can take care of herself. The teaching profession is seen as a respectable one to take on, which serves to satisfy the criteria for a positive reputation. On top, her role as a teacher involves taking care of youth, which satisfies the expectations about the role of a woman as a caretaker. A career as an education professional gives her authority, power, and status in the family because she now guides children as her parents have done for her. The parents are no longer the only ones who can claim to know best how children should be raised. She can also make this claim and take control of her own life. Her strategy involves much juggling of what others want her to do and what she wants for herself for the goal of finding a middle ground that balances the needs of both. It serves to accommodate the expectations of those in power and assert herself at the same time. Her case shows that resistance is much more than outright rejection, but a delicate balancing act.

In her choice to become an artist, Cardy wanted to drive social change and assert herself according to self-defined parameters rather than letting others define her. In the process of crafting, creating, and making, she is forming projects that are based on her own artistic impulses and instincts and her own choice of issues that affect her everyday life. Her sculptural and installation works allow viewers to enter her world and engage with her ideas in a way that is framed and structured by her design. The immersive sculptural or ceramic works allow others to enter and experience her reality in the arrangement she wants it to be presented. She uses her art to resist the loss of control over her identity and to take back the sense of agency in how she is

defined. Her clay and paper pieces on body parts juxtapose the beautiful and grotesque in order to resist the expectations imposed upon women's bodies. Despite her active resistance against patriarchy in her art, at times the body of work contribute to dominant discourses about race and ethnicity, favouring beige, off-white, and pink for skin tones because they are considered "inoffensive," neutral, and warm to the artist. Her engagement with the concept of race and ethnicity are rooted in more personal pieces about the family and the self. This case shows that even in the resistance of certain dominant discourses, others continue to be embraced. There is a need to be aware of how the elements being rejected and accepted in art play into multiple systems of power, a variety of dominant discourses, and different sets of stereotypes.

Ness has similar motivations as Cardy in her art practice. Art is valuable and important to her because she can represent her voice, expressions, opinions, and self identity through her illustrations and ceramic pieces. Through her art, she wants other people to listen to her and get to know her. She believes that it is the only way she can communicate without being interrupted in a world that moves too quickly in forming judgements. Art is for her is a one-way communication process that requires the viewer to slow down, experience the piece, appreciate the meaning of what they seeing, and gain an understanding of the artist and her messages, before they are able to come up with a response to the piece, whether it is formed internally or vocalized to the artist. Her visual diary illustrations allow her to make a lasting impression in the minds of people who see and/or purchase her work, more so than a fleeting conversation would allow. While it may not be her intention because of her hesitance to claiming a full membership as Chinese, Ness' work serves as a resistance to the lack of cultural representation of Hakka people in Canadian and diasporic Chinese communities. Even though her work appropriates cultural icons from other ethnicities that are not her own, her affinity towards trade, her

resourcefulness of selling her own identity, her integration into multicultural Canada to survive, and her construction of a hybrid transnational identity reflects Hakka traditions of migration in order to situate the self where prosperity and success can be fostered and where strategies of adopting local practices are used in a new place of residence.

Ness and Cardy's unique methods of resistance through their engagement with art are rooted in the rejection of normative notions of happiness (Ahmed, 2010). As Cardy explains, all parents must have a certain degree of anxiety when their children decide to pursue an art career, but as Ness explains, it is more so with Chinese immigrant parents because of their high expectations for their children to succeed academically and financially in order to improve the family's reputation, climb up in social status, and build a better life in a new place of residence. In Chinese families, this normative notion of happiness for Chinese Canadian women involves finding a stable job, getting married, having children, and taking care of the family. The idea of success is primarily structured around the heteronormative model of a nuclear family, in which the woman plays a supporting role of nurture. A career in the arts deviates from this model of stability. It is a life filled with mostly unpaid (and fortunate if paid) internships, contract work, part-time work, seasonal work, that are for the most part without the benefits of insurance or paid vacation leave. It involves working multiple side jobs to fund participation in gallery exhibitions or craft fairs that Ness describes as risks, where success means breaking even and gaining the appreciation of clients and art dealers. It is an incredible gamble to live this life, but a necessary one for the two latter artists in this study because it is a mode of resistance. Part of their identity as a practicing artist, instead of an art educator who has financial security, involves going through and embracing this struggle of instability. It involves being the willing victim of Canadian systemic barriers in order to highlight and bring awareness to their existence. Their

unhappiness is a refusal to accept the social expectations imposed on them, whether in terms of race, ethnicity, or gender.

Implications of the Research and Next Steps

The most important lesson learned in this research study is that care needs to be taken in making generic statements about groups of people. When a category of people are grouped together and discussed, there must be an awareness and acknowledgement that the people described within these groups have diverse varieties of experiences, personal histories, social allegiances, and political views. Everyone is made up of a unique blend of elements and is driven and informed by different factors. When describing the research to colleagues, friends, and family, the immediate response is often, “that is a very specific group of people you are studying.” While the demographics of the research can seem specific, I believe that it is important to see people holistically with all the social identities that make up who they are. For Chinese Canadians, the experiences of being Chinese cannot be separated from the experiences of being Canadian. Likewise, the experiences of womanhood and femininity are closely linked to notions of race and ethnicity.

As a subcategory of this lesson on taking caution while making generic statements about groups of people, judgements cannot be made easily about people who make the same decision or perform the same act. Even in the participation of same action, like taking photographs of food for example, there is a complex assortment of motivations and considerations undertaken by the individuals who perform the act. Before individuals can be critiqued for reinforcing stereotypes or praised for avoiding them, the context for their actions must be understood. While some individuals do indeed chime into dominant discourses, not all of them do, even if the same

act is being performed. Intentions are important as actions and decisions do not exist in a vacuum, so they cannot be examined and analyzed outside of their contexts. In particular, the political implications from my research pertain to not make generalizations about Chinese Canadian women. They are often homogenized in discussions based on their race, ethnicity, and gender, but they are individuals with unique lived experiences that have shaped their identities, ideologies, and loyalties. If it is necessary to create generalizations, one needs to be sensitive and take differences among individuals within the group into consideration.

Qualitative research methods like interviews are useful in capturing the grey areas of experiences and issues as well as the drives and motivations behind individual decisions. Arts-based strategies combined with narrative inquiry methods are valuable in capturing the process and product of the participants' artistic practices. Creating a visual image requires making premeditated choices and decisions, which reveals key themes about the topic of inquiry within a composition. The way the composition is put together captures a large amount of information about the individuals' state of mind when they consider the topic of inquiry, particularly if there is a time limit on the activity and participants are required to make connections quickly. Specifically, my research study shows that there is a lot of value and potential in the arts for both artists and non-artists in exploring experiences of identity, social difference, and marginalization. The participants' creative choices, which are recorded through the process of mark-making in the form of drawing, writing, and collaging, reflect the creator's identity and unique thinking process. No two art pieces are alike when compared, which shows the social differences between creators and the vibrant individuality within each person. When arts-based research is coupled with visual narrative inquiry, stories of marginalization and power struggles can be uncovered by asking participants what they wished to express with the elements in their artwork.

While anonymity is assumed to be a crucial part in ethical research in order to protect participants' privacy, arts-based research projects like this one involves a distinct set of considerations. With the consent of participants involved, this research study publishes artists' names because this project involves publishing images of their artistic works, ideas, and process, all of which are intellectual properties that cannot be left without credits. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed also because it is imperative that responses and findings are closely linked to the participants' identities. Their notions of what the social categories of Chinese, Canadian, and female mean to them and the nuances of how they conceive their membership within them cannot be separated with who they are as people, because it is precisely these elements that make up their identity.

Going back to the beginning, one of the possible next steps for this research is considering Chinese Canadian artistic practices broadly to explore what constitutes Chinese Canadian art—if such a category can be constructed. If a Chinese version of South Asian Visual Art Centre (SAVAC) were to be established, what kind of art would be displayed—traditional brush painting, calligraphy, and/or contemporary visual arts? What types of themes, issues, or narratives would be included or excluded? Would this ethnic grouping seek to bring in works about Chinese people or address topics that are culturally relevant to the Chinese? Which artists would be considered relevant: individuals who “look” Chinese, are born in China, or self-identify as Chinese? What does this identity label mean to those who belong in the community and those who are outside of it? More research needs to be done to address these issues and to explore the broader institutional context that the artistic practices of Chinese Canadian women are situated in.

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Appendix A: One-on-One Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview Questions (1.5 hours)

Personal Aspirations, Artistic Practice and Process

1. How did you choose or decide to be an artist?
2. What is your artistic medium of choice? Why do you work in this medium?
3. What are your career and/or personal aspirations for pursuing arts professionally?
 - Where do you see your work taking you?
4. Whose work or what genre(s) do you relate to and get inspiration from?
 - How or why do you relate to it?
 - How do these elements translate in your artistic practice?
5. What is your artistic process like? How do you usually start a piece?

Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Identity

6. How do you identify yourself?
 - In terms of race and ethnicity?
 - In terms of gender?
7. Have you visited China before? Where in China? What was/were the experience(s) like?
8. How do you come to understand and navigate your hyphenated, dual, or hybrid identity?
9. Do you see your practice as diverging from or conforming to:
 - Cultural roots and family values? How?
 - Western values? How?
10. How is femininity constructed? How do you feel about them?
 - In your family
 - At school/work
 - Among friends
11. How are your multiple identities reflected in your artistic productions?

Socialization and Meaning of Success

12. Where did you get your art training (i.e. public education, private lessons, extracurricular group classes)?
13. What does success mean to you?
 - In your family
 - At school/work
 - Among friends
14. What constitutes a successful and an unsuccessful piece of art?

Show and Tell (15 minutes)

Show and walk the interviewer through a piece that represents your identity in some way.

1. What is this piece about? What is the title of the piece?
2. What are your intentions for the piece?
3. What inspired this piece?
4. Do you think this work is successful? Why or why not?

Appendix B: Focus Groups Prompts and Questions

Arts-based Focus Group: Collage Prompts (2 hours)

1. Create a collage about :
 - Femininity
 - Being Chinese
 - Being Canadian
 - Your identity

Image-based Focus Group (2 hours)

Collage Narrative Inquiry (1 hour)

Explain how your collage relates to the prompts.

Photo Elicitation (1 hour)

1. Take and bring two photographs about:
 - Femininity
 - Being Chinese
 - Being Canadian
 - Your identity
2. How do the photographs you created relate to the prompts?
 - Share stories about the subject(s) within the picture.
3. Based on the collages and photographs as well as experiences and stories shared, what are some similarities and differences you see across how we, as a group, conceive our:
 - Femininity
 - State of being “Chinese”
 - State of being “Canadian”
 - Our identity holistically