COLLECTIVE DREAMS: COLLABORATION AND IDENTITY IN CROSS-CULTURAL FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY PRACTICE

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Abstract

This thesis began as a practitioner's perspective on the subject of Chinese fashion photography, a relatively new but rapidly progressing phenomenon. However, as a British fashion image maker, it focuses on the links between my shifting identity and working methodology as a result of cross-cultural collaboration in fashion photographic practice in China. The research investigated the process of fashion photography and its teamwork through the evolution of my practice as a result of working in three Chinese cities between 2016 and 2020. Shifts in the collaborative aspects of my practice toward greater interchange of team roles were highlighted during my work in Ningbo, Wuhan and Hong Kong. This prompted me to re-examine these changes through a detailed practice review undertaken using techniques of autoethnography. The experience of building a new identity in a foreign environment led me intuitively to ways of working that aided in the construction of place and identity. These included wandering excursions to collect images of textures, as well as self-portraiture deliberately portrayed as 'other' in local environments. Such enabled a form of cultural hybridity to develop that was brought to teaching and collaborative work.

Evidence on changing practice was also generated through interviews with twenty-one former students or collaborators in China, focusing on key shoots in which the fluidity of collaborative roles was exhibited. The participants from Ningbo and Wuhan were first met as students, but relationships later continued as professional colleagues. It is acknowledged that the power relationship of lecturer-student is asymmetrical, with students wishing (overall) to please, which will have influenced their interaction on photoshoots. Nonetheless, these shoots were designed in keeping with a professional environment, with little difference in practical terms apart from not having a commercial directive. The works considered in the thesis thus include self-initiated projects with student collaborators (Ningbo, Wuhan), professional collaborative projects (Hong Kong) and an online project open to collaborators.

The interviews were conducted online using an interpreter. Informalities introduced to suit the needs of translation led to calling these conversations. The conversations not only provided crucial alternative perspectives on matters of collaboration, but contributed to emergent themes of translation, the fashion shoot as heterotopic space, and aspects of control (and relinquishing control). These were interpreted using Homi Bhabha's idea of cultural hybridity as an overarching and unifying concept, The ideas of Foucault (heterotopias), Benjamin (the dialectical image), and Facer and Pahl (productive divergence) were important to the theoretical understanding.

The evidence presented in the thesis extends Lochmann's historical correlation between Dada and Dao into the contemporary art and fashion arena. This research also claims the fashion shoot space as a heterotopia in which the studio and the atmospheric realms co-exist, alongside the layering of the past onto the present (often arising from nostalgia in an environment of rapid change). The research contributes to knowledge by extending the area of application of the relationship between Dao and Dada, and by extending the concept of heterotopia to include the fashion photo shoot. It provides a new perspective on translation that includes the productive nature of 'mistranslation'. Finally, it connects the 'border crossing' of translation, the movement between past and present/ real and fantastical of the heterotopic space, and the process of relinquishing control in creative collaboration as actions that support cultural hybridity. New creative work revisiting the archive of work created in China accompanies the written thesis.

#Hybridity #chinesefashionphotography #Dao #dada #heterotopias #nostalgia #fashionphotography #collaboration

Contents

Introduction

0.1. Out of Fashion

I am a fashion image-maker who works in collaboration with make-up artists and stylists to create and present narrative tableaux. I am a filmmaker who creates fashion films. And I am a fashion photographer whose work is more frequently exhibited in galleries than in magazines. In all of these roles my practice incorporates a range of readily identifiable photographic methods, styles, and processes. I began my photography education in 1996, during a pivotal point in fashion photography with the introduction of new narrative tools and methods, including 3D scanning and fashion film, as well as new narrative themes with intricate storylines that connect to contemporary social and political themes. Since then, this expanded practice, which recognises multiple image-making styles and techniques (and fluidity between these), has become familiar for photographers working in fashion.

Fashion photography is a commercial discipline that pushes creative boundaries, inspired and regulated in part by a system that sells clothing. Scholar Margaret Maynard (2008) remarked that this dual role of fashion photography deals with the transitory and the conventional, but also with the radical and the artistic. Catherine Chermayeff (2000) describes the evolution of fashion photography to cover this wide terrain: fashion photography was something that had to be 'attractive and persuasive, if not downright deceptive' in order to sell fashion to a consumer. She moves from its origins as a means of presenting apparel in 'flattering and beautiful' conditions to its shift toward 'innuendo' and 'recording a mood, a moment,' and the beginnings of a fusion of these two techniques. More recently, Marlène Van de Casteele (2021), utilising art sociologist Howard Becker's concept of 'art worlds,' questioned the role of the multitude of authors participating in fashion-image production and their representation.

Starting out, I was influenced by the work of Nick Knight, Mario Sorrenti, and Solve Sundsbo, who pushed the boundaries of fashion image by emphasising individual characteristics of either image or subject. Nick Knight examines the relationship between photography's materials, light, and technical aspects. Sorrenti investigates the emotional connection between model and photographer, while Sundsbo integrates the technical expertise he gained as Nick Knight's assistant to bring a romantic, playful, and innovative perspective on fashion to the forefront. Fashion, for them and for me, is a visual domain of discovery, creation, and experimental testing, only partially constrained by commercial and client needs. My work traverses the boundary between fashion and fine art photography. Due to the fact that the same images can be presented online, on gallery walls, and in magazines, reading my work is context-dependent. While fashion photography is frequently used to market and sell clothing, this is not the case with all fashion photographs. Editorial fashion photography focuses on narrative, with clothing functioning as a prop to support the photographer's and stylist's individual perspectives. Editorial fashion shoots serve wider promotional purposes, appealing to the readership's desire to link themselves with an atmosphere of artistic or fashionable activity that is frequently avant-garde or boundary-pushing.

Whilst Roland Barthes ([1967] 1990), Judith Williamson (1978) and Paul Jobling (1999) have each explored and deconstructed the fashion image, its meanings, and symbolism, there is little critical work analysing the processes of its production. Shinkle (2008) acknowledges this gap, adding that photographic criticism has 'yet to engage with fashion photography in a sustained way' due to a 'kind of unspoken aversion to the medium' because of its links with commerce and frivolity. The critical readings of fashion photography (all from a Western perspective) that have been produced have resulted in an acknowledgement of fashion photographers as integral to the image's construction and art direction, and they are now frequently credited not simply as image-takers (on the edge of the photo) but image-makers (in the body of the editorial).

0.2. The Shift: 2016 - 2020

After receiving my BA degree in 2005, I began a career as a fashion image-maker, from 2010 teaching Fashion Photography and Fashion Communication alongside my professional practice. In 2016, I accepted a teaching job in China and moved to Ningbo to teach Fashion Styling and Image-Making.

At this point in China, the landscape of fashion communication was experiencing a transformation. Due to Chinese students' lack of exposure to the historical development of fashion image-making, my experiences teaching Fashion Communication in China sometimes felt like a kind of time travel, with my students' excitement and openness to the possibilities of their future work mirroring my own student experience in the 1990s, given that local dissemination of fashion was relatively new in comparison to Western fashion media (Zhang, 2021). Their work felt like a 'creative explosion' that resulted from viewing fashion image history 'all at once' after years of censorship or lack of access (Sailor, 2017).

My role as a lecturer in China was to demonstrate a wide range of photographic practices and theories to students, for which I worked alongside a teaching assistant and interpreter. From my teaching experience and observation of students in mainland China, I discovered that they often perceive Westerners/Western teaching methods as 'more creative' than Eastern methods. While this assessment of transcultural creativity is not correct, it reflects that Western-style teaching methods place emphasis on creative process whilst Eastern-style teaching methods focus on technical detail and the final result (Dineen and Niu, 2008). During my time teaching in China, my Chinese colleagues and I discovered that by blending Eastern and Western viewpoints and approaches, we were developing a hybrid form of pedagogy in which both the process and the final product could be explored in tandem.

Interpreters did not always have the exact words to translate photographic techniques and concepts. Even the word photography has multiple translations in Chinese that have altered over time (Gu 2013, Soutter, 2018). Consequently, I developed non-verbal

communication techniques to communicate. No single all-purpose method served, but a range of actions, including drawings, and immersive environments opened up pathways for response to confirm what had been understood by the students. What started as a way to gain control, seemed to work best when it enabled the greatest freedom from control. I witnessed other Western teachers asking impossible questions to students because they were applying Western thought and language and expecting a direct translation to make sense to a Chinese student. In China, where it is usual to 'talk around' the subject, the abruptness and apparent clarity of Western communication did not always succeed. It was important to provide context-specific explanations, frequently for concerns that would be deemed minor by Western standards. Even in creative areas, being 'right' or 'wrong' was considered extremely important, and any ambiguity made my students anxious. This could be exhausting because it meant constantly questioning and explaining a task I thought to be simple. My solution was to use both Western and Eastern approaches together to create a framework for communication, giving enough information and context explained in a Chinese-specific way to make the student feel safe, while leaving enough space for a creative interpretation. This teaching practice spilled into artistic practice in embracing multiple viewpoints.

0.3. Fashion Photography in China

Between 1978 and 1983, the post-Mao administration of Deng Xiaoping spearheaded an economic liberalisation and globalisation programme. Following this 'opening up and reform period', *Elle* became the first fashion magazine to launch a syndicated Chinese edition in 1998, followed by other Western titles that were later dubbed 'Eastern magazines with Western mothers' (Tay 2009) due to the content's similarity to the Western publications they represented.

The emergence of independent magazines through the 1990s and 2000s such as *Amoeba* and *WestEast* created by and for Asian consumers, and the visibility of Asian models and photographers internationally from 2005 onwards, heralded a more localised shift in fashion image. Fashion magazines in China began to centre their searches internally for content and creative inspiration for publications that were representative of the culture of their consumers (Fung 2002, Tay 2009, Zhang 2021). Alongside this transition, art photography in China grew 'from zero to infinity' in a single decade (Smith 2002, Stojkovic 2013): '...ten years ago, China was really focused on the idea [of] bringing international top photographers into the market and now because of the rise and rise of Chinese local photographers, that trend has really reversed' (Zhang, 2021).

Contemporary fashion photography from China has been showcased widely in the West through online international youth culture magazines (White 2019, Fletcher 2019). However, there is little English-language academic research on Chinese fashion photography. Recent articles on the photographer Leslie Zhang (Fig. 1) have explored how he combines a variety of cultural, textual and historical influences to create a 'new language' within Chinese fashion photography (Isabella 2018, Sauer 2020). Writing about the fashion photography of Chen Man (Fig. 2), T. S. Yuan and others (2018) introduce the term *Chinese-style* to refer to the particular use of symbolic and traditional Chinese elements to promote and disseminate modern Chinese culture.

Fig. 1. Zhang, L., *Untitled*, 2017. [Photograph].   Fig. 2. Man, C., *Love and Water*, 2012. [Photograph].
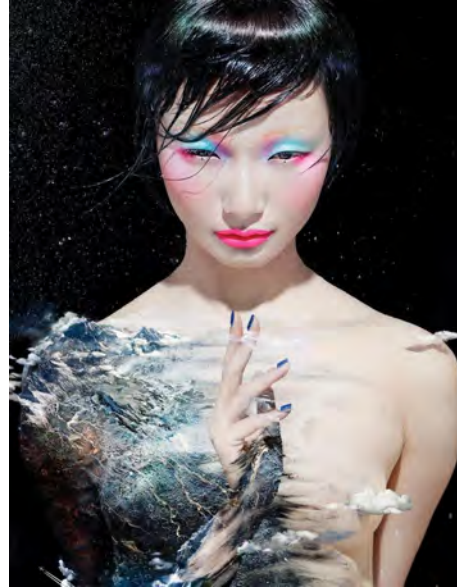
It is usual to suppose that cultural differences create observable differences in image-making, often described in terms of national borders, however globalised the practices. This research grew out of my observation during my years in China (2016-2020) of a shift in imagery produced for Chinese fashion magazines from borrowed Western aesthetics to a 'language of fashion photography…not just centred around European or American ideals' (White, 2019). This appeared to achieve an integrated, rather than a national aesthetic, and to be worthy of further exploration, especially as this seemed to coincide with a shift in my own practice in a similar direction. This thesis is the result of that exploration.

0.4. Collective Dreams 集体梦想

Fig. 3. *Collaborative photo shoot in Hong Kong with Layla Sailor*, 2020. [Photograph by M.Yip].

> I think there is the great beauty in China from the past 40 years, but it's often
> ignored in terms of aesthetic importance. It's in the collective living memories of
> my generation. I think it's a hybrid of modernist, communist and traditional
> Chinese influences, also hit by waves of post-modern movement from Hong
> Kong, Taiwan and the West. (Zhang 2019)

An interview with photographer Leslie Zhang, quoted above, inspired the title of this thesis. This expression 'collective memories' was used in an effort to comprehend my experiences working on collaborative fashion photography projects in China. Over time, the phrase was modified to Collective Dreams, which seemed more appropriate since I was investigating the co-creation process and the (enjoyable) uncertainty surrounding the end result inherent in cross-cultural fashion photography. Collective Dreams is not intended to be read as a statement of fact or as a final definition; rather, it is a question raised at the beginning of the research process that continues to evolve.

0.4.1. Research Questions and Aims

My primary motivation for undertaking this research was straightforward: I wanted to understand the change in Chinese fashion photography that I had witnessed during my time in China. Initially, this was interpreted as cross-cultural distinctions that were also reflected in my own shifting practice, notably in the differences in collaborative working in China I had observed in my own fashion shoots. As I investigated this topic further and related it to my artistic practice, I formulated the following research question:

How can the knowledge of Chinese fashion photoshoots gained through my evolved working practice contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary Chinese fashion photography?

As I developed the methodology and reflected on my own collaborative practices, additional questions arose, most notably, how can the cross-cultural fashion photoshoots that contributed to the evolution of my working practice offer insights into the processes of fashion photography? How can contemporary Chinese fashion photography be interpreted internationally and cross-culturally?

After conducting interviews with former students and collaborators, some of my original presumptions and misunderstandings became apparent, and I began modifying and reframing the research's aims. These became: (1) To impart critical understanding to artworks created as a result of my evolving practice (the intuitive values and shifts that occurred in the practice). (2) To investigate contemporary Chinese fashion image-making in order to identify underlying theories, and to compare these to Western theoretical frameworks. (3) To investigate concepts of nostalgia, mirroring, and fractured identities in relation to the overarching concept of hybridity in order to comprehend transcultural fashion photography practices.

0.4.2. Methodology

My artistic practice is directly influenced by my daily life and the environment in which I am working, which changes often. As a result, my work is recognizably mine, but it also encompasses a wide range of concepts, motivations, and improvisations. This again applies to my approach to academic research when reflecting on works created in different spaces, times and cultures. Throughout my research, I reflected on how difficult it was to interconnect my choices of mixed methods, as they represented significantly different approaches. Despite the fact that this was challenging for me, these deliberate decisions reflect the complexity of the questions and objectives posed as well as the necessity of adaptability when investigating them.

This study is divided into four parts, the first of which consists of a practice review entitled 'The Practice: Journeys', which is divided into three sections that focus on Ningbo, Wuhan, and Hong Kong. I am a practitioner first and foremost; the way in which I explore and investigate emotions, situations and daily life is embodied within my photographic practice. The practice review, framed partly as autoethnography, explores memories of my experiences before the start of this research to identify significant themes. Autoethnography was chosen as an appropriate method because it captures lived experience and maps onto the critical reflection that is part of most creative practice. Ellis (1991: 25) aptly described the value and character of autoethnography:

> Writing about the personal and the emotional has emerged as the central concern of recent practitioners of experiential or emotional ethnography…Rather than providing dispassionate descriptions of events and outcomes, experiential ethnographers advocate writing field-notes about the fieldworker's own 'lived emotional experience' of unfolding events and interactions.

More recently, Lucy Soutter (2018: 329) has stressed the importance of lived experience for understanding photographic culture:

> Reading texts about a photographic culture can round out the picture. Understanding deepens most effectively through dialogue and personal

experience. Books and the internet have their merits, but for this work to accelerate, actual people must make actual journeys.

Soutter's concept of journey was used literally as well as figuratively, mapping the route of my Chinese experiences alongside the developing practice. The re-staging of memories, using photographs and other mediums as a visual prompt, can be a valuable tool for the researcher as Annette Kuhn (2000: 186) elaborates:

> Memory work undercuts assumptions about the transparency or the authenticity of what is remembered, taking it not as 'truth' but as evidence of a particular sort: material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined, for its meanings and its possibilities. Memory work is a conscious and purposeful staging of memory.

My experiences in Wuhan, Ningbo and Hong Kong are comparable to a three-sided mirror. All were within China, but the experiences I had in each place were distinct, as was the work produced. Living and creating artistic work through these experiences allowed me to examine China and Chinese fashion photography from three distinct perspectives, which in turn have reflected and shaped each other within the research study.

In the second chapter of this thesis, evidence from interviews with collaborators and fashion industry professionals is presented. In this section, I describe the acquired and interpreted data and the emergent themes are uncovered. The third chapter is a reflection on the practice portion of this research, where I employ the preliminary findings from the practice review and interviews to inform and shape the new artworks. In the fourth chapter, the conclusions are presented.

0.4.3. Conversations

To more specifically address the research question, I decided to explore several key fashion shoots through interviews with my collaborators on the shoots. This would provide crucial alternative perspectives on my evolving practice at the time.

The immersive experience of living and working in China without direct access to English social networks tempered my Westernised perceptions, but as a Westerner

experiencing Eastern culture, orientalism would always be present due to the embedded frameworks of art education and cultural norms in which I was raised. It was important to me that my collaborators had a voice and an authentic presence that was not solely based on my perception. Translation was an important aspect of the interview process, and the imperfections of translation are fully acknowledged here, preserving the on-the-spot rendering of the translator rather than offering a grammatically corrected version. Semi-structured interviews with open questions were devised to enable my previous collaborators to share memories and reflect on the experience of working cross-culturally with me. As the interviews progressed, they became more conversational with a fixed structure of questions, though digressions were permitted, and my collaborators and I were able to reflect actively together. On balance, the term 'conversations' is felt to be more appropriate than 'interviews'.

0.5. Revisiting

Alongside the interviews and practice review, I revisited the archive of photography, video and behind-the-scenes images/films accumulated from my period of working in China. This archive was examined to identify themes within the collaborative work that I was able to apply to the curation and creation of new works informed by analysis of the practice review and conversations, and incorporating elements from both. This new work reframes the past work within the emerging concepts of the research, most notably that of hybridity. These three methods, practice review, conversations with collaborators, and revisiting of work provided the evidence used for analysis applied to the research question.

0.5.1. Hybridity, language and transcultural collaboration

> Because of migrations that have been ongoing, in multiple directions, throughout the past century, there are practically no places left in the world which are not hybrid in terms of culture. (Van Alphen 2002: 55)

Following Homi K. Bhabha's (1994), and Gayatri C. Spivak's (1987) germinal works, an entire community of postcolonial thinkers has examined cultural hybridity, however the concept of hybridity has not been explored in depth within the context of Eastern and Western fashion photography. Homi Bhabha's 1994 work *The Location of Culture* developed a set of key concepts: hybridity, mimicry, difference, and ambivalence (Huddart, 2006) that underpin this research project.

Bhabha who is Indian-English describes the contradictory strains of 'learning to work with languages lived and languages learned,' which has 'the potential for a remarkable critical and creative impulse' (Bhabha, 1994). In this study, I examine cross-cultural fashion photography practice through the use (and non-use) of language in both practice and research methods.

0.5.2. Fashion Photography (in) Practice

All fashion photographers and image-makers have their own working methods on a photo shoot, but most commercial and non-commercial photoshoots are generally organised along similar lines and involve the same team roles. In my practice, I change some elements depending on my needs at the time. I decide on a beginning concept or find visual references that I would like to reinterpret and select a team that I think would fit with the aesthetic. The concept is sometimes introduced by another member of the team and they will decide on me as a potential collaborator. The next step is ideation and sharing of references, choosing models and locations together as a team, and then a date is booked. Whoever introduced the concept will book the studio or venue, be responsible for catering and call-sheets, and generally be in charge of the overall production and art-direction of the photo shoot. Typically, the photographer or stylist will

assume or share this responsibility. Commonly, the objective of the shoot is to produce a creative, unified fashion story that incorporates the clothing and provides all participants with a piece of work that can elevate or, at least, sustain their preferred aesthetic and career to date. If the shoot is for commercial purposes, the objectives and significance of the concept may vary. On the day of shooting, each individual is responsible for their own role and that of their assistants, if any.

0.5.3. Collaboration and Control

> I don't think I'm a control freak. Well, I think I like to be quietly in control [of] what I'm doing. (Sonia, 2021)

> It is better that someone can understand her and that someone can obey her opinions, then [it] would be perfect. (Viola, translating for Rnan, 2021)

Working creatively necessitates ongoing negotiation of what I term *control*. I define this in fashion photography, and within this study, as keeping track of the art direction on a photo shoot and ensuring a balance between commercially-driven and creatively-expressive requirements. Sometimes *control* can mean maintaining creative objectives foremost (Is my style being lost?); sometimes it means attending to narrative flow (Do I need to modify the styling/makeup to retain the unity of the story? Do team members require clarification to preserve mood?). Sometimes there are more prosaic needs (Can I obtain photographs for my portfolio from this photoshoot?), or managerial ones (What does the team need to complete the task?) There needs to be a level of trust between team members for this work, which is why many fashion photographers prefer to work with the same team repeatedly. My own practice incorporates some elements borrowed from my teaching methods in which ambiguity is explored and embraced.

Charlie Engman is a fashion photographer renowned for his conceptual visual approach and numerous collaborations with his mother as muse and assistant. His method, like that of many other conceptual fashion photographers, strikes a balance between

collaboration, commercial requirements, and retaining an artistic identity. Engman uses the metaphor of a game to express the teamwork requirements of the shoot:

> But you once said to me that you also kind of create this kind of game, in which the participants… know the rules…or you tell them the rules of the game. (Ceschel 2021 [in conversation with Engman])

Attention to such rules, often understood and unspoken, enter into the sense of control. What is meant by control is not commanding the team (forcefully controlling), but retaining directorship (quietly being in control).

Part 1: The Practice – Journeys

1.1. Ningbo (2016-2017)

The past is a country from which we have all emigrated. (Rushdie 1982)

Fig. 4. Sailor, L., *Employment Permit*, 2016 [Photograph].

The image is of a woman with black bobbed hair in the style of a passport photograph (Fig. 4). She aims her gaze directly at the camera, just above the lens. Her hair is neatly brushed back over her ears, her jaw is fixed into a neutral expression. She is wearing pink lipstick, a red top and a high collared jacket. The woman in the photograph is me, and it was the first photograph I had taken in China for my Ningbo Employment Licence application in 2016. As a newcomer to another country, I quickly became accustomed to posing for identity photographs. Since IDs, licences, and visa photos must adhere to specific guidelines, in China they are typically photographed at a studio or at the Public Security Bureau (PSB) by a police officer, rather than in an automatic photo booth. Looking through the collection of identity photos I gathered during my time in China

(2016 - 2020) I can identify markers for each move, life event and the emotions experienced. My hair and makeup change throughout and provide cues for me to determine whether the visit was planned or unplanned based on my facial expression, appearance, and posture. On some occasions, my face is blank; on others, I appear bored, annoyed, or resistant.

In the above image I look unusually smart. I remember this image was taken in a local photo studio in Ningbo. Possibly, I had tidied myself up because the image was to be used for an official purpose, or I had been told by co-workers to 'look professional'. After the photo was taken, I watched in amusement as the photographer airbrushed my skin and removed my fringe completely without explanation. It was the first time I had seen an official ID photo retouched. It was a cold day, so I had pulled the collar of my jacket up and now it unintentionally looked like a Mao suit.[1] The image was taken at the end of December and I was wearing a new red Christmas jumper, which appears as a block of red. There is a circular red stamp seal at the bottom of the page with the recognisable red star surrounded by Chinese characters identifying the branch of the PSB. The combination of all of these elements gives the photo the visual effect of 1980s-era Chinese studio photos, and a friend had joked that it was my first *state-approved*[2] portrait due to the formality of my appearance. This photograph later became the cover image of my zine 'Red Room' (2017), the first project in which I started to reflect on the images I had captured and collected during my time in China. The cover image was chosen and changed to halftone to knowingly play with the Western expectation of Chinese visual styling (Fig. 5).

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[1] See: Montefiore, C. S. (2015) on 'Why the Mao suit endures'.
[2] See: Roberts, C. (2013: 115) for a discussion of official photographs in China.

Fig. 5. Sailor, L., *Red Room*, 2017 [Photograph].

After living in China for a year and during my frequent visits home, I became aware of the enormity of cultural misconceptions about China in the West, some of which had previously been guilty of myself. China remained foreign to me, and little was known in the UK about the authentic everyday life in the smaller cities – my slim understanding of China stemming from the 1990s wave of Chinese filmmakers and Hong Kong youth culture that gained exposure in Europe. I anticipated encountering a glamorous reimagining of 1930s Shanghai and other postcolonial film tropes. What I discovered instead was a rural area outside of a growing city, with its own textures and history that I had not seen in media accounts. UK television programmes were still presenting China in a Western-centric way focusing on the bigger cities Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong.

My experiences of China through employment and campus life was more paradoxical: colourful, frequently more mundane than life in the UK, and significantly different than what I had previously seen portrayed in media. Chen Man was already one of my favourite photographers prior to moving abroad, but her work lacked the small-city realism I was encountering[3]. She had previously discussed the disconnect between what European visitors expected of China and what they observed in an interview with *i-D Magazine* explaining 'Europeans watch *Farewell My Concubine* and then come to

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[3] See: Chen Man's website (Chen, M. 2022) for more information and examples of her work.

China with all these expectations, but then when they arrive they're met with skateboarders, break dancers, fashion photographers and a hip hop scene' (Raphael, 2014). This sentiment reflected my experience of taking in the students' and locals' distinct street style, which was not frequently documented outside of China at the time. Unsurprisingly, my fashion students explored and subverted their identities through clothing and appearance (as all students do and have done) but there was a breadth of styles and semiotic references with distinct Asian characteristics that I found fascinating and began to capture (Fig. 6, 6a & 6b).

Fig. 6. Sailor, L., *Wendy, Ningbo*, 2016 [Photograph].

Fig. 6a. Unknown photographers, My Students Jessie, Ningbo & Lela, Wuhan [Photographs].

1.1.1. Collecting

After my initial move to China, I began religiously to photograph textures, plants, and daily life as I adapted to the new culture and its routines. On return to the UK, I discovered that one of the plants I had been obsessively photographing in China grew on my street here, but I had never noticed it before. This made me question my perception of my surroundings whilst in China. I had been desperate to discover something, to explore past the boundaries of the campus that I lived and worked on; access to the campus grounds was controlled, residents and visitors were monitored by security, and there was an 11pm. curfew. I bought a bike and started cycling across the city as much as possible, sometimes purposely becoming lost and retracing my steps using phone mapping. Occasionally, my phone's battery ran out, and I used my camera to photograph landmarks and locations so that I could find my way home.

Fig. 7. Sailor, L., *Painted Walls, Ningbo (Series), 2016* [Photographs].

Fig. 7a. Sailor, L., *Drape, Ningbo* Series*, 2016 [Photographs].

In Chinese philosophy *dao* is the Way, Road or Path. My understanding of *dao*, and its relation to my practice in China, is taken from interpretations of the Daoist classical text *Zhuangzi* (Mattice, 2017).[4] In his book illustrating *Chinese Thought*, Roel Sterckx (2019) introduces *dao* with the metaphor of becoming lost in a bustling city, trying numerous ways to escape, and realising that the enjoyment lies in simply walking along the road. By 'not analysing a map or even following the road to its end' we are able to encounter *dao* (Sterckx 2019: 67)*.*

In my daily life, the purpose and technique of photography shifted toward literally and symbolically examining myself and my new environment, related to the 'simply walking' instruction of the *dao*. I documented my surroundings by photographing surfaces, plants, and objects that I saw on a daily basis, adopting processes for noticing,

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[4] 'The *Zhuangzi* is a compilation of his and others' writings at the pinnacle of the philosophically subtle Classical period in China (5th–3rd century BCE). The period was marked by humanist and naturalist reflections on normativity shaped by the metaphor of a *dào*—a social or a natural *path'* (Hansen, 2008).

collecting and thoughtful repetition (Figs. 7 & 7a). This for me was a way to ground myself, to use photography to try to find my place in the unfamiliar landscape. The repetition and ritual of cataloguing these unfamiliar textures enabled me to spend time in new surroundings without feeling isolated or uncomfortable. Some photographs were used while others were not published or viewed; the process became more important than the final result. This was a significant change in my working practice; at the time, I did not know why I was doing it other than to explore the environment and to place myself and my practice (literally) within it. Living in another culture and country began to stir up feelings of nostalgia because I no longer had the safety net of my regular team in the UK, my usual studio and props, and the confidence of being known as a photographer. While I became fascinated with the urban and natural landscapes of Ningbo, I also started to look backwards and inwards. I wanted to uncover and explore the identity that I was forming in my new life by going back to the beginnings of my photography practice. Salman Rushdie (1982: 10) writes of a similar longing in an article entitled *Imaginary Homelands*:

> Writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by an urge to look back. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from [a place] almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost: that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands...

What was the genuine reason for my yearning? Could it truly be interpreted as nostalgia? Although the shift of location, residence, and employment destabilised me, I thrived on change and found Chinese history, philosophy, and daily life fascinating. Thought in China was different and frequently made more sense to me than Western logic, and I came to recognise that components of Asian culture had already influenced my artistic practice since I began creating art as a student.[5]

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[5] When preparing material for a lecture in 2017 and reviewing my prior work, I was surprised to find repetitive elements of Asian culture permeating my artworks since 1995 (Appendix A). These often consisted of embroidery techniques, colour combinations, references to Chinoiserie motifs, and props. It had been a special treat in my family to visit Chinatown as a child, and collect props and items that I

Homi K. Bhabha (1994) contends that all identities are combinations of different cultures and interactions, and they are not fixed. I was able to recognize the instabilities within my identity. Rather than making creative representations of myself in a studio, of a fantasy world (or a reinvented homeland), as I had done prior to China, I felt compelled to situate myself in the textures of contemporary reality. It wasn't for the UK that I had a nostalgic yearning; rather, it was for the security of the past and the sense that I wasn't always a stranger. I was enthralled by my new identity within the unfolding present of Ningbo and China, but I had not left behind my past identity which had so strongly marked my working methods. Reality had begun to take on the qualities of fantasy, while creative construction held the position of authenticity.

1.1.2. Fractured Self

While being situated in 'rivers and lakes, one has little choice but to succumb to its protocols 人在江湖, 身不由己 (Tenzin, 2017)[6]

Working within an international faculty in China is much like the UK but with some obvious differences. In Ningbo the institution was more conservative in its approach and its attitude towards foreign workers. As the university's foreign branch, we had ten

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much later used in my photographic work. There was a confluence between what I perceived to be Chinese, Japanese, and Thai. For instance, prior to living in China, I would not have identified the subtle distinction between Hong Kong, Thai, Japanese, and Chinese iconography and textures, and I frequently used all of these elements together unawares.

[6]My supervisor Philip Sykas, in conjunction with a Chinese colleague, translated this as: *Caught in the currents of the world, one's body is not one's own*, and discovered the author is Gu Long. The phrase 'Rivers and lakes' that first appeared in the Daoist classical text *Zhuangzi* is commonly understood to represent 'society'. One English translation of the phrase in Gu's novel is 'Once you get into the world, you have to deny yourself, more or less'.

English lecturers with approximately six Chinese staff. We were also the only foreigners on campus and in the surrounding area. I quickly became accustomed to the use of Chinese idioms to convey a message and the complicated hierarchy, and there was a societal pressure to conform and assimilate. I was torn between wanting to assimilate and wanting to rebel which pushed me to investigate myself and my motivations.[7]

Self-portraiture was a genre I used heavily during my photography degree (Appendix A), and this practice has influenced how I set up before a shoot. Working alone on self portraits gave me the luxury of time for contemplation and no external pressure towards the final image. This meant I could experiment fully with the lighting, set design and atmosphere. I needed to create a world and feel immersed in it, for the right emotions to transmit through the camera into an image. Later, when I entered the commercial world of fashion photography and collaborative image-making, I would still put extra time aside before a photo shoot to play, experiment and have this immersive time alone so that the conditions were ready to shoot from the moment my collaborators arrived.

The first self-portraits in China were situated in my living space on campus in Ningbo. The space was sparsely furnished with floral curtains, dark wood furniture and chintzy tablecloths. I moved to China in October 2016 with my husband, who left in April 2017 due to his disillusionment with Chinese culture and the stifling atmosphere at the University. This loss exacerbated the sense of confusion and fragmentation I felt about my identity. On the day he left, he purchased some flowers for me, which I placed throughout the apartment and then filmed, experimenting with stillness and long takes – evoking the boredom, and quietness of being alone in a home that was not mine. The

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[7] Academic practices in China are intrinsically the social practices of the broader Chinese society, which are politically driven (Tenzin, 2017). At the time, the course's Dean was outspoken in her resistance to excessive foreign influence, and she frequently admonished me when complications arose. On one occasion she quoted the Chinese idiom *qiāng dǎ chū tóu niǎo* 槍打出頭鳥 or 'The shot hits the bird that pokes its head out' after I had arranged a collaboration with the UK fashion website SHOWstudio. This partnership focused on the role of visual censorship in China and the surprising ways in which it can occasionally result in beneficial effects for creativity (Johnson-Wheeler 2017).

work, which I eventually titled 'Double Happiness'[8] (Fig. 8), was intended to be ironic, as I had never considered myself to be a 'wife' in the traditional Western sense, and there was a disconnect between the adventure I had anticipated on moving to China and the mundane day-to-day existence I was experiencing. I was living in a patriarchal culture, where comments about my marital relationship were commonplace in work settings. The perceived stability of my personal relationship impacted my social position both at work and outside of work. The pressures of my new circumstance caused me to reflect upon the female experience in contemporary China and the challenges endured by my female friends, co-workers and students. This investigation led to the collaborative piece 'Dolores' (Figs. 9 & 10), in which my student Barbara's poetry was combined with my images and films of a sex doll I purchased from a Ningbo night market vending machine. For another experiment, I filmed myself performing 'impossible tasks' such as picking up dry rice with chopsticks and blending into my household environment to comment on the conflict between wanting to fit into the 'rivers and lakes' (currents) around me and exploring my new identity (Fig. 11).
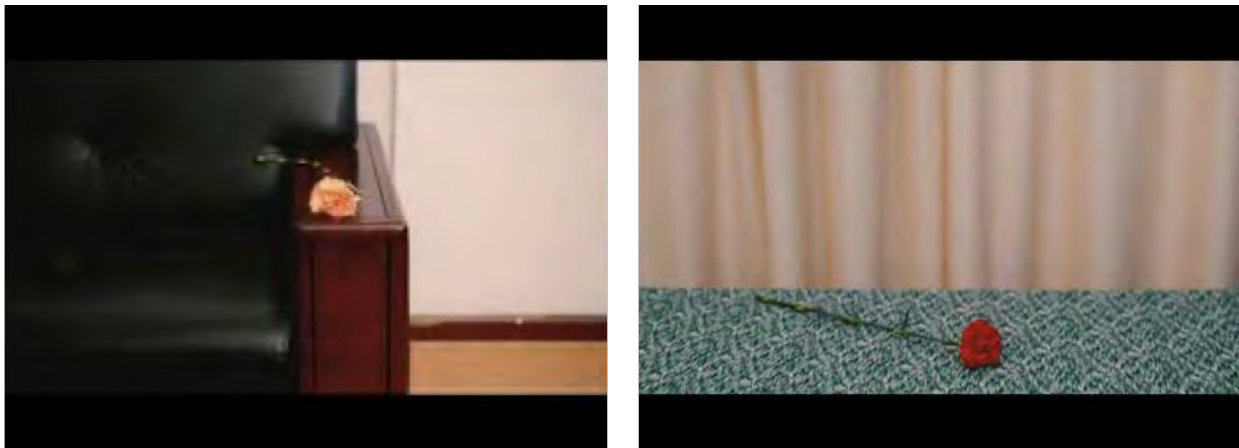

Fig. 8. Sailor, L., *Stills from Double Happiness* Series, 2017 [Film].

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[8] The *Double Happiness* symbol has traditionally been associated with marriage in China (Rubin, 2021).

Fig.9. Sailor, L., Still from *Dolores*, 2017 [Film].

Fig 10. Sailor, L. & Bird, B.,
Dolores, 2017 [Installation].

Fig.11. Sailor, L., Still from *Impossible Tasks*, 2017 [Film].

I began to consider how I could expand on these ideas and connect them to the collecting was doing; I was feeling alienated from both my past and present lives and decided to embody this in a light-hearted manner by creating narratives around the fashion design students' clothing, the materials of which were also a product of testing and uncertainty. I felt my previous work ('Double Happiness', 'Dolores', and 'Impossible Tasks') had been too introspective and pessimistic in nature; there were elements of representing China as the *other*, as a binary to Western values (Said, 1978). There appeared to be no consistent relationship to my previous artistic practice, and I hoped to restore playfulness, humour, and fashion themes into my work, while remaining engaged with the textures I photographed on a daily basis.

1.1.3. Foreigner

Being one of a small group of foreigners in a rural area, I became accustomed to hearing *laowai* 老外 ('foreigner') being shouted or spoken whenever I was in public. Stemming from a combination of historical trauma and cultural influence, Chinese people routinely use the words *laowai* and *waiguoren* (foreign-outsider person) to point out and separate Western foreigners, generally by physical appearance (Liu and Self, 2019). This clearly marked me out as *other* and *outsider*. I could never be invisible. I was attempting to blend in but constantly found my appearance was sufficient to undermine any attempt at assimilation. I found these interactions humorous as well as alienating, and was aware of the irony of the situation in light of China's colonial history. *Laowai* is often said as a respectful and friendly greeting; however, many foreigners in China perceive the word as stereotyping (Liu and Self, 2019). Dervin (2015: 448) defines *othering* as deriving from 'the presence of different and politically labelled minority others in our societies' and interprets the effects of *othering* as 'turning the other into an *other*, thus creating a boundary between different and similar, insiders and outsiders'. Using Foucault's method of discourse analysis, Edward Said in *Orientalism* examined the manner in which European writers and philosophers employed *othering* to portray the Orient, constructing and perpetuating the sense of a cultural dichotomy between East and West (Said 1978, Brons 2015).

In my experience, the meaning of *laowai* hinged upon the context in which it was used and how it was said/shouted/muttered. Embracing the humorous elements of being the local *laowai* and revisiting the playful self-portraiture of my early photographic practice, I borrowed clothes from fashion design students and created a series of photographs and films entitled 'Foreigner' (Figs. 12, 14 & 15). The clothing was chosen for its outlandishness and construction from common materials found in nearby markets. By

embodying my daily surroundings through clothing, I cast myself as a 'local alien' mirroring the surreal nature of my experiences.

Fig. 12. Sailor, L., *Foreigner*, 2017 [Photograph collage].

The process of these films and photographs was witnessed by passers by who became a part of the work through portraits from my viewpoint as 'alien' (Fig. 15), beginning a new phase of non-verbal dialogue and play through the process of creation. I was in part inspired by the artist Cao Fei and her series of staged photographs and films from the series 'Cosplayers' (Fig. 13) which depicted young people dressed as superheroes within Chinese cityscapes and ruins. Cao's works comment on the emergence of neo-liberalism alongside rapid urbanisation in China and function 'as documents that hold up a mirror to the city and its transformations' (Berry, 2015).

The terrain is a stage upon which the actors in Cao's photographs perform, but it is precisely these textures and evocative landscapes that 'render them fragile' by revealing the image as an 'escapist utopia' (Stojkovic, 2013). Combining the surrounding textures, natural materials and futuristic student designs was a consciously futile attempt to blend into the environment and a mirror of my recent situation.

Fig. 13. Cao, F., *Housebreaker*, 2006 [Photograph].

Adversity has always felt strangely liberating to me, and it frequently serves as a catalyst for motivation in my creative practice. The fragmentation I was feeling became embodied in a scattered photographic approach. I was revisiting the technical and emotional aspects of self-portraiture and reflection, creating films of objects and the uncanny, and photographing portraits of students, staff, and events occurring in my immediate surroundings. 'Foreigner' marked the convergence of these components into a single work that was both a place for further exploration and linked to earlier practice.

Fig. 14. Sailor, L., Still from *Foreigner #1*, 2017 [Film].

Fig. 15. Sailor, L., *Foreigner #1 Audience*, 2017[Photograph].

Through my daily experiences in China that things always shifted at the last minute, I realised that I couldn't make definite plans in a life that fluctuated between being highly rigid and extremely fluid. It became a skill to cease planning and let things just happen. This process of 'giving up' control became instinctive to me and the way that I began to produce work.

Previously, I was primarily studio-based, and my occasional outdoor shoots were structured closely to studio shoots. My photography practice was now ad-hoc, centred around the textures of Ningbo, without a crew or the ability to hire one. Shooting in this way injected more unpredictability into the work: random lighting, random backgrounds, random characters. However, my understanding of cultural norms in these situations and my language skills were lacking. Typically, I would interact with individuals nearby through conversation and negotiate a balance in order to achieve my goals. This enabled me to maintain a sense of artistic control. Now I needed to place my faith in the process.

1.1.4. Shenmezine

In some areas of my practice before Ningbo, the unknown and uncontrollable were familiar to me. When teaching video editing, layout and zine projects I preferred to allow space for randomness and 'happy accidents', something I had learned at college through discovering the Surrealist and Dada art movements.

Alongside these small projects, I continued documenting flowers, textures, people, domestic objects, food, and my chosen themes on a daily basis, reflecting on these collections became a daily ritual that culminated in the creation of a daily blog or zine: *什么 zine* / *Shenmezine.*[9] *什么 Shenme?* was the first word I learned in my capacity as a teacher; it translates as 'What?' Students frequently inquired, 'Sketchbook, shenme?' Occasionally, they'd use the term in jest, claiming ignorance of the subject ('Homework, shenme?') As a result, I felt it was appropriate to use the term as the title of the zine. Shenmezine (Fig. 16) was a creative experiment involving a dynamic layout that varied depending on the computer or other device it was viewed on, incorporating into the design the same loose grip on control that I had when taking the images. Sometimes text would be obscured, and the viewer would be unable to return directly to the home page and be forced to stumble around onto other pages until they could find their way 'home'. Videos and sound would play simultaneously and merge together, the randomness of the aesthetic experience felt close to my own heightened reality. To give some structure and ritual to the process of posting I came up with a formula to use daily when posting, which was as follows:

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[9] 什么zine/Shenmezine was originally published as a website (now closed), and later moved to Instagram https://www.instagram.com/shenmezine/

1 image (textures captured by myself) + 1 fashion image (captured by myself, students, or lecturers) + 1 gif or film (created by anyone) + 1 optional element (text/sound).

Fig. 16. Sailor, L., Screen capture from *Shenmezine*, 2017 [Website].

Working to this framework, I posted one page daily between 23 March and 13 June 2017.

Creating an image-based zine enabled me to communicate and share with students in a non-verbal manner, demonstrate my confidence in their work (selected for the zine), and share the reality of my daily experiences with my UK-based friends and colleagues.

This also served as an introduction to curating work by others alongside my own, motivating me to continue observing and collecting to develop and curate everyday material from my chosen themes. The fluidity of the visual arrangement reflected my own experience of needing to adapt to rapid changes on a daily basis; no day was ever the same. The curatorial amalgamation required of the zine paralleled my feeling of cultural multiplicity and shifting.

My earlier influence from the Dada and Surrealist art movements explored automatic writing and the use of the unconscious in the creative process. The surreal and Dada-esque aspects of *Shenmezine* reflected my daily reality of living and working in China. I now understood the meaning of what Tristan Tzara, one of the central figures of the early Dadaist movement, meant when he claimed 'Chouang Dsi [Zhuangzi, the classical Daoist philosopher] was just as Dada as we are' (Mattice 2017: 254). Dada's incorporation of spontaneity and chance in the creation of art (seen in its use of readymades) is fully in tune with Daoist principles (Lochmann 2018).

1.1.5. Red Mountain

Towards the end of my stay in Ningbo, I organised a fashion shoot with two collaborators, Barbara and Summer (Figs. 17 & 18). Again borrowing items from the fashion design students, I chose by texture and colour rather than style, drawing inspiration from Barbara's recent work with the colour red. Barbara and Summer spoke little English, and my Chinese was limited, so we spoke primarily through Wechat, a messaging service, Google Translate, and by using images as language. Together in the studio we worked almost in silence, using sign language, intuitive movements and the mirroring of gestures to communicate.

To construct postures, we used photographs of landscapes and street food as a reference. At the beginning, I struggled with the lack of directorial command; I was accustomed to having a strong concept before a shoot, and communicating my

thoughts to collaborators in depth. I was concerned that if I could not adequately influence the conditions or concept, that the resulting images would be weaker technically and creatively. Alternatively, if I instructed my partners in detail, this would negate collaboration and would impede innovation. This is a balance that all fashion photographers negotiate regardless of location, but lack of a shared language and cultural references adds new tensions.

Fig.17. Sailor, L., *Red Mountain*, 2017 [Photograph].

Fig.18. Sailor, L., *Untitled*, 2017 [Photograph].

There was a surreal freedom in verbally directing in English, knowing that only parts of my speech would be understood. I recall distinctly asking Summer to 'look like street food' and other abstract concepts, mimicking the movements I desired by using body language.

> *Thinking is not merely taking place in the head…, it is a bodily experience.*
>
> Robert Wilson (quoted in: Schewe 2002: 73)

Play has been utilised as a tool in fashion photography since the 1930s, a topic that Eugenie Shinkle (2011) examined more closely, linking to the historian Johan Huizinga's concept of play. She believes that images of the playful body offer the viewer 'the chance to act as a creative agent' experiencing the body not merely as a symbol, but as a 'mode of feeling' (Shinkle 2011).

Fashion photography is a medium in which multilingual and multicultural teams collaborate more frequently than in other photographic mediums. Even when speaking the same language, a photographer cannot always express what they want from a model. The pressure of concentrating on the technical aspects of a photo shoot, the overall dynamics among the team, and the client's needs, in addition to being creative, can make it difficult to find the right words. Therefore, it is customary for fashion photographers to employ body language as a secondary means of communication, mirroring postures when unable to explain completely. On my own photo shoots, if I am uncertain of what I want and have no visual reference to show the model, I will remain silent and use my posture or my hand movements to guide the model into position. This is especially useful when the photo shoot is going well and I don't want to interrupt the ambiance by speaking.

Within the process of fashion photography, play can also be used to communicate and transmit ideas within the situation of limited and intercultural communication. Manfred Lukas Schewe, a language teacher and researcher, utilises the preceding quote by Wilson (2002) to illustrate how kinaesthetic intelligence can be 'tapped' by employing drama to teach a foreign language. Wagner, quoted in the same book (Culham 2002: 98), wrote, 'As an infant, every part of our body was engaged in making sense of our world – in constructing meaning. Words surrounded us, but they were not a predominant way of knowing. Before we could talk, we used gestures to communicate.' Applying these theories to cross-cultural fashion photography can assist in understanding what another of my models and collaborators, Zoe, refers to when she said, 'once their emotions are at a certain point they can understand everything. Language, she said, shouldn't be a barrier' (Zoe, 2021).

> She was happy, is kind of in a very playful state. You can make her feel very emotional. You can make her feel, express her emotion. (Viola, translating for Summer, 2021)

> She said, a half understanding. Because of the English barrier. She cannot fully understand what you mean. But luckily, you will show her the position. (Viola, translating for Barbara 2021)

Even while speaking the same language, body language is frequently utilised in fashion photography to embody feelings. Gestures and movements gain new symbolic connotations in cross-cultural collaborations, and open up a 'third space' of communication. Homi Bhabha (1994) describes the 'third space' as a liminal place where cultures collide and interact, the uncertainty of these interactions create a space 'which gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation' (Bhabha, quoted in Rutherford 1990: 211). It is a space of hybridity and ambivalence where cultural mixing can be enacted and essentialism is contested.

Barbara saw this explorative space as one that enabled play:

> ...it's not so over-posing. That you, you have tell them what kind of feeling you want, and they can play. They can play the posture. They don't have to do something very do something that you ask them to do that, like, specific posture, they can decide for themselves, and they think, she think this kind of playful is most interesting part. (2021)

When working creatively, the ambiguity of a liminal space allows participants to freely explore and create, slipping in, out and through modes of control. Neither collaborator is able to verbalise the end result to the other, leaving a space for discovery. Wagner clarifies the strength of using theatre workshops to enable cross-cultural communication 'Because the scene in a drama is an imaginary one, the participant is free to exaggerate or assume a persona that frees him or her to experiment with a wider range of language than ordinary exchanges might evoke' (Wagner 2002: 4). The link between my fashion photography process on set and theatre, can sometimes run parallel as my collaborator Kary noted 'It's almost like we're doing… a performance… there's certain kind of performative ideas in your work' (Kary 2021).

My response to the othering of Ningbo was initially wandering and feeling a part through the collecting of images. This developed into a new mode of practice that brought the collections together with curating under the *Shenmezine* format, reviving Dadaist

notions of indeterminacy now finding parallels in Daoism. This freedom from control extended into the fashion shoots as I began to embrace a playful approach in an ambivalent space where cultures could connect without the hierarchies imposed by words.

The experience in Ningbo dismantled and reconstructed my creative process, bringing in aspects of Dao and Dada that became integrated into my artistic practice, from the gathering of daily imagery to the subsequent dissemination of the work. These new modalities of practise and embracing of ambiguity allowed for communication through play and the merging of my teaching and artistic practice.

1.2. Wuhan (2017-2019)

这是一个朋克城市--武汉!

This is a punk city - Wuhan!

<div align="right">

Lyrics from 大武汉 'Big Wuhan' by SMZB (Wu, 2008)

</div>

Trains pass along the bridge above our heads
While the river flows on below
All this seems to be happening
In the life before this one.

<div align="right">

Excerpt from 'Spring Comes to Hanyang Gate'
汉阳门的春天, Zhang Zhihao 张执浩 (Ming 2020)

</div>

When I informed one of my Chinese co-workers in Ningbo that I would be relocating to Wuhan, she expressed shock and stated: 'Wuhan is a big polluted, dirty city where everybody shouts all the time.' Wuhan is now widely recognised as the origin of COVID-19, but when I introduced the name in 2018, the majority of people simply asked 'Where?' My first thoughts were unfavourable; it was a hilly megacity with no discernible bike lanes, forcing me to rely on lengthy taxi rides. After an hour's trip from the airport to the university, I noticed only two distinct structures; the remainder were identical sand-coloured high-rise flats, and most notably, there were no flowers along the roads, something I had grown accustomed to in Ningbo. Strangely, I never considered Ningbo to be particularly beautiful whilst living there, but now in Wuhan, I realised it to be undoubtedly more visually appealing, greener, and more colourful. Wuhan fascinated me; it was the first time I noticed the red soil of China, but I remained taken aback by the absence of any other colour.

Wuhan is the largest city in Hubei province and central China's most populous region. The name 'Wuhan' stems from the historical fusion of Wuchang, Hankou, and Hanyang, collectively termed the "Three Towns of Wuhan" (Finnane, 2020). I was living in

Wuchang and would travel to Hanyang and Hankou on weekends to visit the city's centre and historical sites. Travelling through Wuhan required planning, as the city is surrounded by lakes and congested highways. I worked eight kilometres away, and the trip could take up to two hours during rush hour. It takes between one and three hours to Hankou each way, depending on the time of day, and after my speedy journeys about Ningbo, I found this to be dismal and solitary. Taxi drivers appeared fearful of foreigners and repeatedly refused to pick me up. Wuhan gradually eroded my independence of travel outside of work and once again the only way to deal with it was to embrace it.

The campus was a former agricultural college located in an area of canals and parks, which allowed me to continue collecting photographs of textures within my allotted lunch break. My investigations were limited by the heat, traffic, dust and heavy pollution, but I was drawn to the city's history. The more I discovered about Wuhan, the more I understood it to be a city tied to pivotal moments in Chinese history (Liu and Liu, 2017) and one of the major Chinese 'punk cities,' replete with its own hierarchies and fashions (Xiao, 2018; Novia, 2020).[10] In Wuhan, I had significantly more autonomy as a lecturer and worked with a talented translator, Viola, who consistently attempted to delve deeper into the context of whatever we were teaching.

Fig. 19. Sailor, L., *Jiangxia, Wuhan*, 2017 [Photograph].

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[10] In Wuchang there was a thriving underground music scene, anchored by a band called SMZB, who also ran a bar called Wuhan Prison, while Hankou (formerly Hankow) housed the remnants of five international concessions: the United Kingdom, France, Russia, Germany, and Japan and the famous Yangtze River Bridge.

Wuhan was the first Chinese city in which I attended an alternative festival (on campus), replete with vintage clothing market and student-made jewellery. I was attracted by Wuhan's punk past; in the 1990s in England, punk had already existed for two decades and had merged with a variety of musical and fashion styles. Wuhan's first post-punk scene emerged in the 1990s;[11] at the same time my brother-in-law was a member of a very similar post-punk subculture in Bolton. Consequently, I felt connected to it and it aroused memories, a sort of nostalgia grew as I witnessed parallels between living in the north of England and Wuhan everywhere around me, and I believe that my time in Wuhan began a transition to free me from my orientalising view of China. It was ordinary, life was routine, and people were 'normal.'

I continued to photograph plants and the textures of the city, with a stronger focus on daily life on the compound (a 1980s *danwei* style housing estate[12]) and cultural traces. As I navigated my new living space and city, I was still grappling with the notion of 'home.' This motivated me to create photographs of my apartment and the compound where I lived (Figs. 20 - 23). I was surrounded by working-class families, and a community that cautiously acknowledged and accepted my existence as the only foreigner. As in Ningbo, photography allowed me to explore and reclaim (uncertain) spaces. However, unlike Ningbo, I was able to observe the customs of a Chinese community on a daily basis from within, and engage more authentically, as I would have in the UK. My Chinese language abilities were stronger but not fluent, so in conversations with my neighbours and co-workers, I would try to fill in the gaps of their histories, relationships, and backgrounds through observation.

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[11] See Goldthread [pseud.] (2020) for a discussion of Wuhan's punk scene.

[12] *Danwei* were cooperative housing blocks built in the 1950's by socialist architects; originally *danwei* were also places of work. My compound had its own supermarket, launderette, school, dancing area and a meet-up space where the older residents would congregate to play mah-jongg. Many of my neighbours had been living there for over thirty years, and had children and grandchildren living with them. When I left, several of my neighbours gathered to wave me off even though we had never been able to communicate fluently.

Figs. 20 & 21. Sailor, L., *Wuhan Home* Series, 2018 [Photograph].

Fig. 22. Sailor, L., *Wuhan Home* Series, 2018 [Photograph].

Figs. 23 & 23a. Sailor, L., *Coordinate Garden Changcheng* from *Wuhan Home* Series, 2018 [Photograph].

1.2.1. China Dream

Fig. 24. Sailor, L., *Rnan, Wuhan* from *China Dream* Series, 2018 (collaged over Ningbo). [Photograph].

Figs. 25 & 25a. Unknown photographer, *Vicky's mother and friends in Wuhan*, 1990s [Photograph].

My personal nostalgia and connection to both Wuhan and Bolton and my closer relationship with my work friends and students, allowed me to share anecdotes with my students, and in turn listen to their family stories, gathering history and writings alongside images, collecting people's experiences and the culture that surrounded me in a variety of forms. Alongside this gathering, I was reading a book (created from a research project) by Liu Yu, vice-curator of Wuhan Art Gallery, and Liu Mengying (2017). Alongside Liu Yu's own experiences, images, and visuals, the author narrates

the history of the Yangtze River Bridge (see Fig. 26) and discusses its artistic significance, its significance as a symbol, and its connections to Mao and the Chinese Communist Party, and also the hybridity of its Sino-Russian architecture. This book was my constant companion for my second year in Wuhan and I visited and photographed the bridge often, reading about the past whilst photographing the spaces in the present.

Fig. 26. Sailor, L., Wuhan Yangtze River Bridge, 2019 [Photograph]

A photo (Fig. 27) of my student Max's mother became the basis for a project entitled 'China Dream', named from the phrase 'Chinese Dream' which is closely associated with Xi Jinping and the CCP leadership's political ideology since he assumed power in 2012. Although the phrase can be (and has been) interpreted in numerous ways, I interpreted it as a call to action to Chinese citizens to dream for the future while not forgetting the past.[13] The concept was implemented at colleges to ensure ideological direction for students and prevent foreign influence; hence, for lecturers like myself, the phrase was discreetly pervasive. I pondered how the reality and hybridity of cross-cultural collaboration would coexist with this and what it meant to merge creative (as

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[13] This concept is discussed in more detail by Zheng Wang, who summarises part of the core concept as 'National rejuvenation is a concept essential for the construction of China's national identity, having embedded itself in China's education, popular culture, and social narratives' (Wang 2014).

opposed to political) views and histories to create art.[14] How did my own 'Chinese Dream' compare to that of my students and co-workers and what would happen if we combined them?

Fig. 27. Unknown photographer, *Max's mother, Xinjiang*, 1980s [Photograph]

The visual influences of both Communism and the opening-up reforms – which brought exposure to media from the West, Hong Kong, and Taiwan – served as a source of inspiration for the 'new wave' of fashion photographers (and other positions in fashion) in China after 2015. Parallel to China's rapid economic rise (and often destruction of the old) is nostalgia and the yearning to remember the past. A lack of photographic archives and the fact that the visual language of fashion is still evolving gives modern photographers the opportunity to create their own version of 'histories' from memory.

Chinese fashion photographer Leslie Zhang has spoken at length about the influence of his childhood memories on his fashion photography: 'My memories of growing up in China inform a lot of my work…I want to tell those familiar stories in the images I create' (Sauer 2020). Although there are elements of fantasy in Zhang's work, there are symbolic references scattered throughout his work alluding to the everyday in China,

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[14] Although I would argue that all personal histories have elements of the political.

whether it be the locations and textures within a Buddhist temple, or colour schemes reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution era posters. Colour has 'a long history of artistic, symbolic, religious, and mythological use in China' (Avina 2021), and in his use of colour Zhang is taking a recognised visual language of differing eras in China (and Japan) and applying it to contemporary fashion photography, a juxtaposition that Walter Benjamin termed the 'dialectical image'. For Benjamin, the link between historical and contemporary images resembled the montage technique of filmmaking. The premise of montage is that the juxtaposition of two images creates a third meaning, rather than the inherent meaning of each image (Evans 2007). Zhang's photography brings symbols from China's collective memory into the present (Figs. 28 & 29).

Fig. 28. Zhang, L., *Face of Shanghai*, 2021 [Photograph].　　Fig. 29. Zhang, L., *A Magazine*, 2018 [Photograph].

In China, the symbolic and the ordinary coexist, 'a visual universe in which the fictional and real are intertwined' (He and Lundgren 2020:2); the views from my journey to work in Wuhan consisted of a mixture of industrial construction sites and residential neighbourhoods, interspersed with reproduced ancient pagodas, Bavarian style villas

and a large golden dragon statue (Fig. 30). Zhang's fashion photographs triggered for me a recognition of these truths and contradictions. 'Whether it be a fantasy or a place I visited as a child, it has to be a real impression I've had in my mind' (Sauer 2020: online). According to Homi Bhabha, culture is always temporally and spatially confined. Consequently, every current cultural representation of what is 'traditional' is a reproduction, a synthesis of the past and the present (Bhabha 1995).

Fig. 30. Sailor, L., *Canglong Island commute*, 2018 [Photograph].

1.2.2. Constructing Nostalgia

Fig. 31. Sailor, L., Sally from *China Dream* Series, 2018 [Photograph].

The author and political commentator Martin Jacques makes the observation in his writings on modernity in China that the 'past is heavily imprinted on the present', most notably that the correlation between the past and present is more 'visible and pronounced' in East Asia than it would have been in nineteenth-century European cities (Jacques, 2009). If keeping the past in close proximity to the present is one aspect of Asian modernity, then another is the paradoxical 'embrace of the future and a powerful orientation towards change' (Jacques 2009: 125).

Fashion media have begun to reflect these temporal ambiguities, with photographer Leslie Zhang exploring 1980s and 90s eastern iconography (Fletcher, 2019) and recreating collective memories with fashion brand Peacebird and stylists Moodsight (see Fig. 32).

Fig. 32. Zhang, L., (commissioned by Moodsight) *Me and My Memories*, 2018 [Photograph].

My own fascination with the alien and constantly shifting, dystopian landscapes of Ningbo and Wuhan led me to constantly photograph the changes in place, and show this in my own fashion photography. When I last visited Wuhan in 2020, a city I had lived in for two years, parts of the streets had entirely altered, and I became disoriented. The city's motto, 'Different Everyday,' reflects these ongoing changes. For a long-term resident, this motto becomes more pertinent with time as the ongoing building and landscape changes move faster than attempts to document them, becoming as much a part of the city's identity as the Yangtze River Bridge.[15] Photographing urbanism in China can be a nostalgic holding onto the present before the next change occurs.

For China Dream, starting with the image of Max's mother (Fig. 27) and Vicky's photos of her mother and friends (Fig. 25), we (the team) discussed memories, gathered images, and developed a moodboard as a collective. As Vicky recalled, 'You let her join your plan right in the beginning so she can learn a lot.' I prefer not to plan too much in

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[15] The Yangtze River Bridge is a double-decker road and rail bridge completed in 1957 in a Western engineering style.

order to leave opportunity for experimenting on the day, but we did have a basic framework. 'She remembers that it was about the style of 1980s and you show them a lot of pictures for references' (Viola, translating for Vicky, 2021). I prepared music for the photo shoot, which I would normally do; however this time I created a particularly eclectic soundtrack that included emotive electronic music, Chinese Mandopop and Cantopop from the 1980s, and Shanghai singers from the 1940s, directly influenced by these initial discussions.
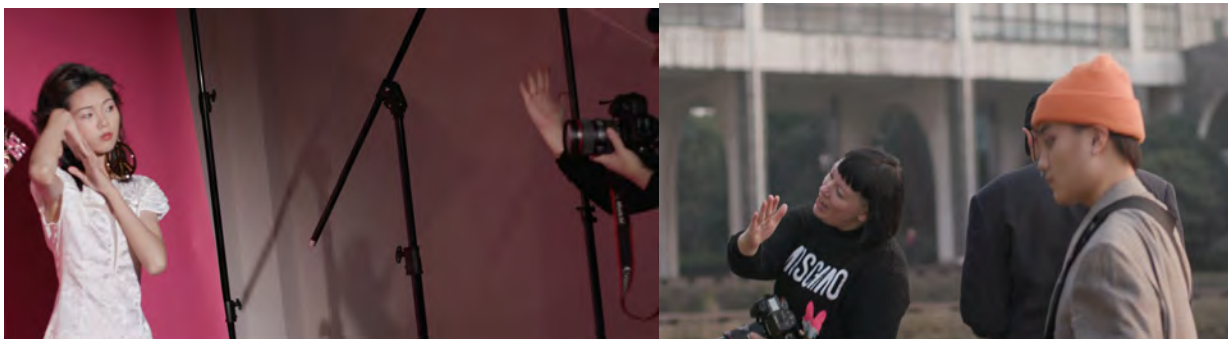

Fig. 33. Ran, V & Huang, J., *Behind the Scenes of China Dream* photo shoot, 2018. Directing the models through body language. [Photograph].

Vicky was the stylist, Max was in charge of hair and makeup, Jenny was the assistant photographer and videographer, and Rnan and Sally were the models. This photo shoot was one of the first where I observed fluidity between roles on set. Max would jump between makeup and styling, and Vicky between styling, filming video and behind the scenes photography. Vicky was the most proficient in English and served as an interpreter for more complicated instructions, whilst I employed hand gestures, WeChat messaging and photographs throughout the day to communicate (Fig. 33). Sally reflected on how communication worked: 'you seemed…[to]...understand their simple expressions and they use some of the body language to communicate with you' (Sally, 2021). The space between comprehension, control, and letting go also became an interpretive and exploratory environment for the models themselves: 'this kind of interaction between Sally and Rnan… there were a lot of interesting postures. So it's not only the shooting itself, but also some kind of communication between them' (Sally, 2021).

Rnan described the atmosphere on set as 'more like a part of creation job… [the] spirit is more vivid' citing the use of music as particularly inspiring: 'she remembered that the music is a very important part of it. She believed that the music influenced a lot' (Rnan, 2021). This was part of a strategy I developed while teaching in Wuhan, in which, when students were creating moodboards or writing, I constructed an immersive environment consisting of multiple fashion film projections, films on Wuhan youth culture, and live fashion shoot feeds from Showstudio, playing simultaneously, choosing one of the audio sources for the sound. It served as a way to convey fashion influences without distracting from the activity at hand or concentrating on a particular viewpoint, and it proved beneficial for generating inspiration outside of social media. By using music on the photography set that was informed by experiences, emotions, and eras (that would evoke collective memories), I was able to conjure an atmosphere without explicitly dictating or verbalising the outcome. Foucault describes a heterotopia as being capable of 'juxtaposing in a single real space several real spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault 1984: 6). Music creates another real space through its temporal associations and its emotional connections.

Fig. 34. Sailor, L., *Perfect Girlfriend* from *China Dream* Series, 2018 [Photograph]

Fig. 35. Sailor, L., *Rnan with Hankow er Chang Soda* from *China Dream* Series, 2018 [Photograph].

My motivations were not to re-create a moment in time, but to merge the visual symbols of a time and place in the past with our 'Collective Dreams' forged in the present. The German theorist Siegfried Kracauer, in his 1927 essay 'Photography', explored the difference between the 'memory image' and the 'photographic image', remarking that the memory image, although 'full of gaps' retains an authentic truth whilst in a photographic image 'a person's history is buried as if under a layer of snow' ([1927] 1995, 50–51). I wanted to play with the viewer's perception of what is history, what is memory? Whose memory is this if we combine collective memories into a 'Collective Dream'?

In one image (Fig. 35), Rnan holds a bottle of Hankow er Chang as if it were an advertisement. The pose was inspired by 1980s Chinese advertising photographs that were already a hybrid of modern and nostalgic due to their combination of classical

poses with 1980s colour schemes, soft focus and styling.[16] This was collaged in post-production with another photograph of fabric captured with an intense flash (a more contemporary photographic technique). The disruption of form and placement dislocates the original photograph from any particular era, and the final images combined as collages over textures collected in Ningbo and Wuhan create the appearance of a diary or scrapbook. My memories and experiences were becoming layered and this became embodied through the forms of post-production. As Dagmar Brunow elegantly writes 'Memories do not simply replace each other, but overlap and are entangled.' (2015: 64).

I directed the models' body positions by showing them photographs and demonstrating with body language, although I intentionally left the facial expressions up to the models. The directness and sharpness of a modern woman's gaze to the camera within an image that is presented as nostalgic has a jarring effect and gives the viewer pause. Some images were manipulated to have soft black-and-white tones, evocative of a Chinese photo studio from the 1950s; in other images a photograph was sliced and cut, sometimes as if ripped in half (Fig. 31). By playing with the textual meanings of the photograph and manipulating the presentation of the final work, I was also playing with collective memory and the nostalgia of the 'snapshot' buried within a personal archive, the object itself 'a memory form to be remembered' (Cross and Peck 2010: 130).

Wuhan saw the playful encounters of Ningbo evolve into practice, a space where collaborators felt free to exchange roles and collectively support the process. Atmosphere was important to this process, and music became an important aspect of this. Importantly, the conceptual inspiration was springing from Chinese sources: Wuhan punk, 1980s advertising styling, and the 'dream' offered by new economic policies. Layering evoked past and present, collage also adding to the sense of heterotopia.

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[16] Hankow er Chang soda (Er Chang means 'second factory', was an original, state-run soda brand from Hankou in Wuhan which was popular in the 1970s until the factory closed in 2000. In 2018 the factory was re-opened and the product remarketed, capitalising on the nostalgia of the original product and using the older city name of Hankow

1.3. Hong Kong (2019-2020)

Hong Kong is a transient space in a time out of chronology, an exception to history.

(Blake 2003: 343)

Hong Kong culture is not something that exists so as to be defined: it can only be defined through the very traces of its existence.

(Stringer 1998:148)

I arrived in Hong Kong in September 2019 to begin a one-year secondment in the midst of protests and widespread unrest due to the proposed National Security Law (BBC 2020). My new position was split between lecturing and recruiting for a UK university. Every two weeks I would leave Hong Kong to recruit and teach in Taiwan, Thailand and mainland China. I was required to cross the border to work in mainland China, sometimes returning the same day, before attending a remote meeting in the United Kingdom. The working cultures of mainland China and Hong Kong, as well as Hong Kong and the United Kingdom, differ greatly. Therefore, I had to 'code switch' between cultures numerous times every day. After living in China for three years with twice yearly visits home, my code switching became fluent across physical and metaphorical borders whilst simultaneously holding all three places in my head. My co-workers in Hong Kong communicated in a fluid blend of Cantonese, English, and occasionally Mandarin, reflecting a sample of the languages I would encounter on a daily basis. Hong Kong is simultaneously futuristic and authentically Chinese: temples, shrines, traditional Chinese and colonial architecture and fortune tellers coexist with skyscrapers and ultra-modern shopping malls.

Andreea Ritivoi (2002) writes that Hong Kong's 'search for identity' is problematic due to the absence of a single heritage and acknowledges the effects of its colonial past and awkwardness of its relationship with China's mainland. Catherine Chan (2015: 145) takes Ritivoi's writing on immigrant nostalgia and identity, and applies it to Hong Kong's advertising during the affirmation of the sovereignty handover from UK to China in 1997, noting that there was 'a creative rush to nostalgia in cultural manufacturing that 'swept across the city'. In parallel, Hong Kong filmmakers of the 1980s and 1990s explored their anxieties through works centred on nostalgia, loss, and cultural identity. Ritivoi asserts that by rewriting the past, nostalgia can 'signal the breach between the past and present' (2002: 39). For several of my students, nostalgia served as an outlet for their anxieties as they struggled to adapt to the looming changes in their lives. Many referenced Wong Kar-Wai[17], *Amoeba* magazine[18] and vintage motifs of Hong Kong culture as inspiration. As I had discovered in Ningbo and Wuhan, documenting, reflecting, repeating and recreating are all reactions to displacement and attempts to make a home or rebuild an identity. Hong Kong held up a mirror to my own transient identity and felt like a temporary home.

1.3.1. Protests in Hong Kong 2019-2020

From the moment I arrived in Hong Kong, it was impossible to ignore the turmoil; my co-workers, students, and neighbours were all affected by what was happening, and the majority of us lived in the midst of it. I began to consider the fact that I was witnessing a historic event and wondered how I could accurately document it. During the peak of the demonstrations, I would regularly turn a corner and find myself in the midst of violent clashes between police and protesters, and thirty minutes later the same area would be back to normal with barely any traces of what had just happened. I explored this feeling of unreality through the use of Augmented Reality applications, the virtual placement of

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[17] Wong Kar-Wai, influential Hong Kong film director, screenwriter and producer. His fame is especially associated with his early successes of the 1990s.
[18] *Amoeba* is a popular youth-oriented style magazine published in Hong Kong since the 1980s.

artworks in the ocean or in unfamiliar locations in the city, and combining pictures, textures, and sounds in a three-dimensional spaces (Fig. 36).

Fig. 36. Sailor, L., Screenshot of *Warning Tear Smoke* AR collage, 2019 [Augmented Reality].

Augmented Reality was another technique in which I could layer images over each other, and move around and through them virtually. Even though the size and position of the images could be predetermined by me, in their presentation this was dependent on where the viewer chose to place them, and their interactions with the surrounding environment were unpredictable.

1.3.2. Preserving Fragments

Anything about which one knows that one soon will not have it around becomes an image…

Walter Benjamin (1973: 87)

Hong Kong was so often photographed that when I sought to capture everyday pictures and videos, as I had in Wuhan or Ningbo, they lacked originality and appeared

derivative; I did not experience the same sense of excitement or fulfilment. I chose to use Adobe Capture to record the textures of my daily life as a method to motivate myself and explore an alternative approach. These images ultimately created a collection of surface textures I could utilise in 3D imagery. Hong Kong for me is an unmistakeable set of textures and colours, the striped tarpaulin at markets, the colour of the water at Tsim Tsa Tsui, the mirrored facia of a building and the faded 'ice-cream' colours of curved buildings. Alongside these collections, I scanned the flowers and textures I encountered every day in order to create an archive of Hong Kong textures for other artists and for future 3D rendered artworks (Fig. 37).
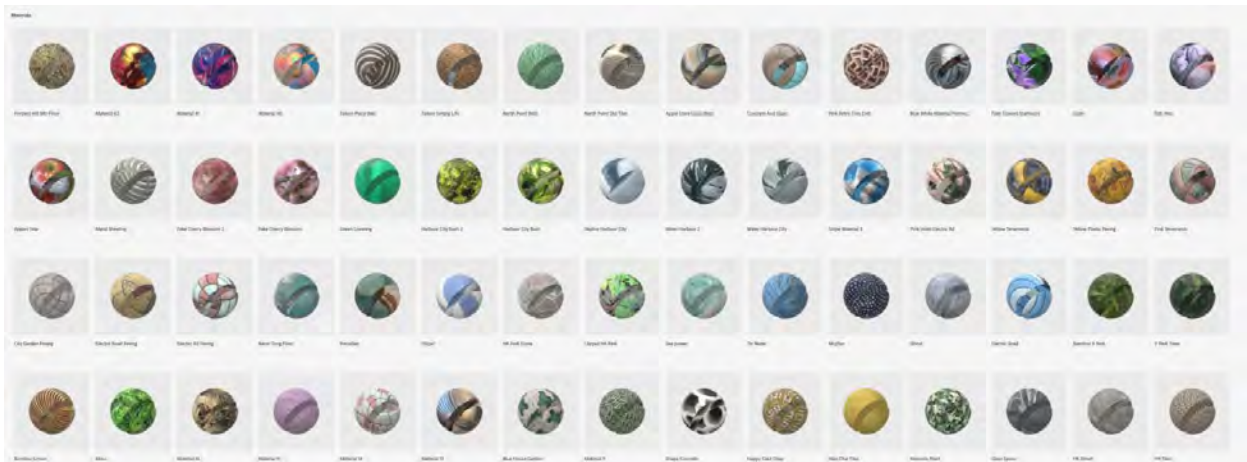

Fig. 37. Sailor, L., Partial Screenshot of Hong Kong Textures, 3D surface texture library, 2020 [Photograph].

Salman Rushdie compares the nostalgic recollections of the displaced to a 'fragmentary vision,' a 'broken mirror' in which fragments of memory are lost. Our memories are 'remains' comprised of 'trivial things' and the mundane that acquire 'numinous qualities' (Rushdie, 1982). Long-term Hong Kong residents have grown up in a city that is neither wholly Chinese nor completely English, a 'borrowed place on borrowed time' (Hughes 1976) with an identity built on collective cultural symbols in place of nationalism. When I first met someone new, they would frequently say, 'Hong Kong isn't what it used to be' or 'This isn't Hong Kong; you're not seeing the real Hong Kong.' There was a constant atmosphere of loss and remembrance. I was affected by what Ackbar Abbas termed

Hong Kong's 'culture of disappearance' (Abbas,1997). The materiality of everyday Hong Kong became for me like a living museum, knowing that the way of life (and laws) were changing rapidly on a daily basis, led me to obsess over what might be lost and how it could be captured, resulting in 3D renderings of flowers I encountered everyday entitled 'Preserving Hong Kong' (Figs. 38 & 39).

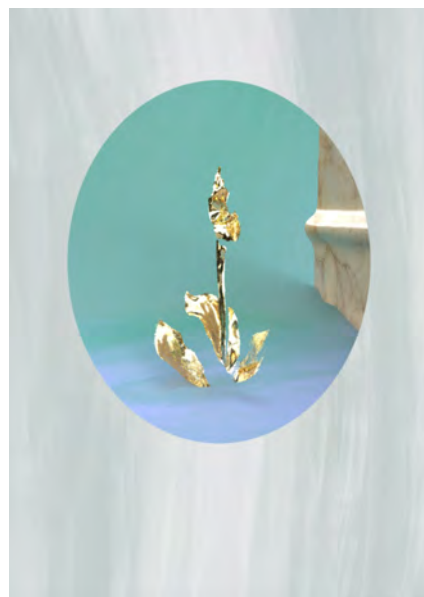Fig. 38. Sailor, L., *Flower in Hong Kong Park,* From *Preserving Hong Kong* Series, 2019 [3D Collage].

Fig. 39. Sailor, L., *Fortress Hill Market,* from *Preserving Hong Kong* Series, 2019 [3D Collage].

As a student in the 1990s, I was a fan of the director Wong Kar-Wai and vaguely recognised a few filming locations while commuting to and from work. I began to rewatch his films as a result of my newly adopted practice of collection, immersion (into local culture and history), and interpretation into artworks, which I had initiated in Ningbo. In my collecting and preservation of textures in Hong Kong, I recognised the same 'repetition compulsion' that Nancy Blake (2003) noticed in Kar-Wai's films.

1.3.3. Magick Meltdown (2019)

In November of 2019, I organised a photoshoot with local collaborators in Hong Kong (Figs. 40 & 41). My objective was to bring my experiences and experimentation with new technology to fashion photography with a cross-cultural team. In 2003, Nancy

Blake described Hong Kong as 'both dream fantasy and nightmare' and my working title for the shoot: 'Magick Meltdown,' echoed this perception. The city's instability, superstitions, rapid changes, modernity, and sense of melancholy reminded me of the symbolic imagery of tarot cards, and these components served as the basis of my visual inspiration. Abbas (1997) described Hong Kong as 'not so much a place as a space of transit' that deals with its dependency on change and progress by 'developing a tendency toward timelessness…and placelessness' that does not necessitate the formation of set identities. Hong Kong's reality is heterotopic since its culture is multiple and transitory, fragmented and layered. A heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place different sites that are incompatible with one another, thus Blake's dream and nightmare analogy.

Cao Fei's artwork is a response to urbanisation in China (mainland), created in collaboration with local inhabitants. She characterises her work as 'magical metropolises', bringing a magical quality back into the photographed city, an 'attempt at re-enchantment and redemption' (Berry, 2015). Magick Meltdown also aimed to 're-enchant' the city through photography, born from a desire to build a positive heterotopic space for my collaborators, where anything was possible for the duration of the day. I was able to exercise greater control over the shoot, similar to my working practices in the United Kingdom, due to the ease of communication in English and common history of fashion image-making influences. Because we were filming in a commercial studio, the environment was both professional and creative, with studio assistants, lighting and props at my call. The colour palette was influenced by the pastel hues of Hong Kong's buildings, one of the first things I noticed that were distinct from mainland China. I selected mirrors, painted glass, and reflective materials to accentuate distortion, representing the city's chaotic and nostalgic impulses.

Foucault (1984: 3) defines heterotopias as a site in which the physical arrangements of the real are 'simultaneously represented, challenged, and inverted'; the heterotopia acts as a mirror to the real world whilst also creating a 'a sort of mixed experience which partakes of the qualities of both locations'. The heterotopia of the studio also served to

remove markers of time, space and place. Unlike the photoshoot in Wuhan, where the textures and historical references were designed to situate the work in China, Magick Meltdown mirrored Hong Kong as 'floating between two worlds' (Abbas, 1997: 5-6).

Fig. 40. Sailor, L., *Untitled*, Magick Meltdown Series, 2020 [Photograph].
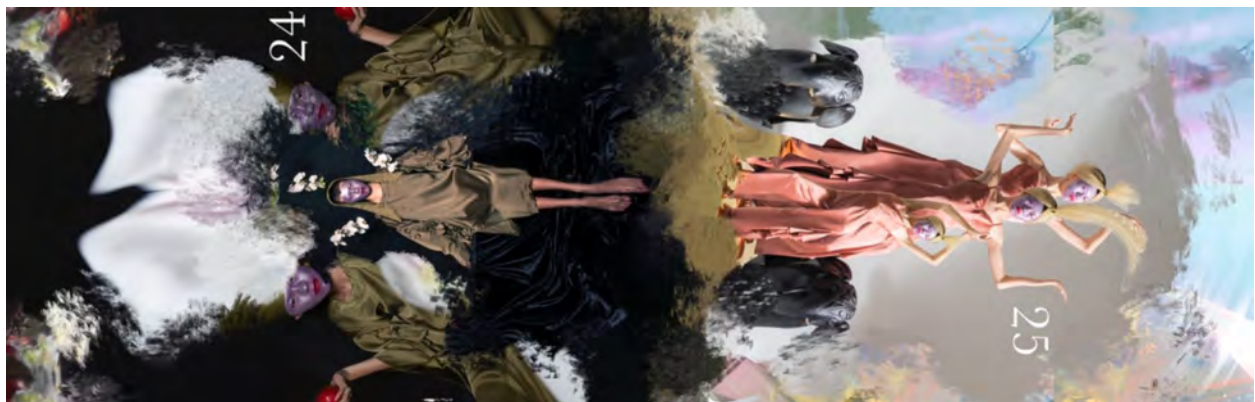

Fig. 41. Sailor, L., *Untitled*, Magick Meltdown Series, 2020 [Photograph].

Point Studio is a Hong Kong-based art collective comprised of Gary Tam, Victor Wong, and Ip Siu. Moving between editorial and commercial photography, they intersperse

high production qualities with daily textures to create experimental and poetic fashion photography. I encountered them in 2020 and recognised some of the same aesthetic patterns of distortion, fluidity, and allusions to Eastern and Western classical art that I had attempted to produce in Magick Meltdown (Figs. 42-43).

Fig. 42. Point Studio HK, *Untitled*, 2020 [Photograph].

Fig. 43. Point Studio HK, *A Star from the East*, 2020 [Photograph].

For young artists in Hong Kong, the protests had shaken their already uncertain identities. From 2019, contemporary fashion photography in Hong Kong began to take on a surreal quality, with models enacting gestures of support and protection. It is difficult for me to view these photographs without recalling the blue tear gas from police cannons or the student protestor who drowned. For me, the images also evoke the paintings 'A Water Baby' by Herbert James Draper (1864-1920) and 'Sappho' by Auguste Charles Mengin (1864-1933), both of whom had served as childhood influences. Point Studio's motivations have been to 'create storylines with newness' (Cheung, 2020) by using abstract motifs, which allows the viewer to apply their own interpretations. This combination of remembrance, nostalgia (which is sometimes familiar to a Western viewer), and the pursuit of 'newness' is what distinguishes Hong Kong fashion photography, but also connects it to the work of English photographers such as Nick Knight. Whereas Leslie Zhang's fashion photography introduces a new language of Chinese fashion photography through collective memories evoked by

colour palette, textures, and objects of remembrance, the work created in Hong Kong by Point Studio and myself was marked by its liminality and escapism.

In Magick Meltdown some images were designed to be read from multiple angles, taking inspiration from the mirroring of playing cards, and reflecting my belief at the time that situations could flip and change at any moment. Raul Sterckx, when explaining the Chinese concept of Yin and Yang, explains that contrary to what is commonly believed about Yin and Yang (often considered to be stationary complete opposites), each side contains a seed of the other: 'What is *yang* now will produce *yin* and *yin* will change into *yang* again' (Sterckx 2019: 85). This also relates to common understandings around cultural difference that Homi Bhabha unpicked in *The Location of Culture*: 'The very forms of cultural contestation, the ability to shift the ground of knowledge… marks the establishment of new forms of meaning' (Bhabha 1994: 233). The fashion photo shoot for me again became a site of play, where collaborators were able to negotiate control. For my collaborator Kary, the studio was a site of 'trying out' recalling 'the process of it… you were very experimental'. He described the collaborative energy on set as 'really like dynamic, you know? We're like trying all this and, and all that', with collaborators not 'afraid to suggest' or to try ideas out spontaneously (Kary, 2019).

Fig. 44. Sailor, L., *Untitled*, Magick Meltdown Series, 2019 [Photograph].

Fig. 45. Sailor, L., *Untitled*, Magick Meltdown Series, 2019 [Photograph].

Other photos were conceived as large format images of varied sizes and shapes, deviating from the usual photographic proportions and dimensions (Fig. 44). This was partially the result of experimenting with distortion and mirroring in post-production, and

partly the consequence of combining my two primary influences: Flemish and Chinese traditional painting techniques, notably Shan shui 山水 paintings.[19] Typically, Shan shui paintings (often presented as a scroll) are not intended to be viewed completely unrolled, but rather observed in sections, with interpretations emerging as each section is viewed. To merge photography and painting, I used digital techniques of painting and collaging over the images (Fig. 45). As in Wuhan, post-production further embodied my experiences of fragmentation – not of my identity this time, but rather fragmentation of the future of the city and its creatives.

In Hong Kong, the convenience of a shared language (English) and access to studios and equipment allowed me greater control over the photoshoot; however, my evolved practice discovered in Ningbo and developed in Wuhan had opened up an enjoyment of creating safe collaborative spaces and relinquishing control. My practice in Hong Kong became a synthesis of my previous technical working methods, the playful giving up of control and collective narratives developed in Ningbo and Wuhan, combined with the heterotopic influence of Hong Kong as a shifting space.

1.4. Returning

When returning home from living abroad my identity was troubled. I no longer felt completely English but more at home in China, where I had rented an apartment. I didn't feel completely integrated anywhere. My beliefs had changed, I had picked up rituals – drinking hot water and using Chinese medicine – that now appeared strange and foreign to my family and friends in Manchester. I noticed that at work I now wanted to behave more passively and be more aware of the collective. My temporary home in the United Kingdom was filled with keepsakes and objects from China, and when I acquired new items they would be designed with an Asian aesthetic. This seemed

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[19] 山水 Shan shui literally translates as 'mountain water' and is a type of painting that commonly depicts mountains, rivers and waterfalls and motifs influenced by Daoism. Ch'eng Hsi describes Shan shui as 'a kind of painting which goes against the common definition of what a painting is. Shan shui painting is not an open window for the viewer's eye, it is an object for the viewer's mind. Shan shui painting is more like a vehicle of philosophy' (quoted in Wikipedia from Maeda et al. 1970: 16).

unusual, given my residences in China were decorated in a Western style; I was not recreating 'home' but a *bricolage* based around a hybrid of three Chinese spaces. This is in accordance with Malpas's (2012, quoted in Chan 2015) claim that nostalgia must always be both spatial and temporal, originating from an aching or longing that comes with a separation from the past and an apparent contact with an 'experience of familiar sounds, smells, sights that invoke the presence of home even in its absence.'

2. Findings

2.1. Conversations - Creating a Space

It was important to me that the collaborators should have the same level of collaboration in the interviews as they would normally have when on a photoshoot with me. At the same time there should be a formal and identifiable process that would lead to clear findings. I decided on semi-structured interviews of twelve questions covering three topics: the photoshoot we worked on together, their personal creative process (in their own professional work), communication and collaboration. Using this framework, twenty-one collaborators from selected key shoots were interviewed online.

As with my photoshoots, I briefed the interpreters and participants beforehand and answered any general questions. The project was explained again at the beginning of the conversation, and then we would informally catch-up before beginning the questions.[20] Nevertheless, in the first interview with Zac Lam, a collaborator from Hong Kong, there was an awkwardness in the conversation which I surmised to be because I was not normally so formal, and for Zac this was a different scenario than accustomed to. In my own revisiting of the photoshoots, I noticed in tutorials I would keep referring to the 'conversation' (meaning non-verbal interactions) between collaborators, and between images. Engaging in conversation in this sense is part of the practice. With other participants, the process gained this ease. With some of the students (Max, Vicky, Zoe, Summer and Barbara) there would be a lot of laughter and friendly joking.

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[20] The conversations were undertaken online due to Covid restrictions. Participants were able to request a Cantonese or Mandarin interpreter, and were able to request a copy of the questions beforehand.

After transcription, the conversations were coded as a first level of analysis and then further explored for consistent themes. Important aspects that emerged were translation, the fashion photography process as a heterotopic space, collaboration and control, and energy.

2.2. Conversations: Translation

Viola Tai was commissioned as an interpreter for Chinese (Mandarin). We had closely worked as teachers with the students in Wuhan, and she was well acquainted with the students as well as an experienced at understanding and interpreting creative concepts. As a Taiwanese woman living in mainland China, she understood what it's like to be a foreigner in China, although her foreigner existence differs greatly and presents many more intersectionalities within China, we were still able to connect and our professional relationship was intuitive. Among the interpreters I worked with in China, I knew she was not afraid to nudge the interviewee and rephrase questions, while also being sensitive to students' shyness and self-consciousness. She had grown accustomed to interpreting directly, even when she did not fully comprehend the context. I had previously worked with other interpreters in China and encountered frequent resistance to pressing further or attempting to engage with the expressive concepts, questions, and ideas of students or lecturers. Occasionally, sensitive issues were censored or omitted, or students' comments were ignored. I needed an interpreter I could trust to ensure the results were authentic.

The majority of the Hong Kong-based participants could communicate fluently in English and, with the exception of Miffy Yip, did not request an interpreter during the interviews. In this instance, I asked Kary Kwok, with whom I had previously taught at HKDI, to serve as interpreter. Kary is a Hong Kong-based art director and lecturer who spent the 1990s studying and working in the United Kingdom. He formerly served as fashion editor at *Amoeba* magazine, which was highly regarded and frequently cited as an inspiration by Hong Kong's young creatives. His experience as an interpreter is informal;

he would teach alongside me and interpret when necessary, and he has a strong grasp of creative concepts and a gift for encouraging students to open up.

'Hammer?'
'Hao de!'

In Ningbo (2017) I was installing the end of year exhibition with Judy, a Chinese member of staff from the ZJFIT team who spoke fluent English. I had been practising my Chinese and sometimes dropped in and out of basic Chinese phrases. I was on a stepladder holding a photo in place when I needed the hammer and shouted 'Hammer?' Judy replied 'Haode!' I thought she was talking to someone else so kept saying hammer, whilst she kept replying with the same phrase. It took us a while to realise we were misunderstanding each other through our pronunciation and assumed context. She had thought that I was asking 'Hao ma?' which roughly means the equivalent to 'Is this good?' And had responded 'Hao de!' which means 'Yes, good!'

Later on in Hong Kong (2020), I attended an exhibition at Tai Kwun named 'They do not understand each other' One piece of work in particular stood out to me – a video made in 2014 by Tsubasa Kato with the same title as the exhibition (Fig. 46). In this piece, a Japanese man and a Korean man are filmed attempting to complete a physical task together on an island situated in Tsushima islands that lie halfway between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago. Neither can speak or understand the other's language, and they use familiar techniques of repetition, body language and humour to try to come to a basic understanding of the task. I was reminded of the 'hammer' conversation in Ningbo and countless other absurd moments in Wuhan while watching this film. It was the first time I had seen a visual representation of what I had been experiencing on a daily basis for the previous four years. Although the lack of a common language was frustrating and isolating at times, I was not unfamiliar with the situation of having to explain without words; and trying to articulate creative concepts that can be difficult for me even in English.

Fig. 46. Screenshots taken from Kato, T., *They do not understand each other*, 2014 [Film].

In the exhibition catalogue for the film mentioned above, the participants come to a similar understanding to complete their task, using empathy (Uematsu and Yap 2020). There is also a great deal of humour found in the film, something which became another communication tool for me. One participant uses a word repeatedly to desperately try to tell the other where to go, while the other participant just repeats the word that is being said and asks 'What does it mean?' The only person that can fully understand what is happening is the viewer who is reading the subtitles. Even then, one of the participants is off screen for a part of the conversation and there is room for ambiguity:

> Tsubasa Kato employed the surrealist technique of "exquisite corpse", whereby a narrative is composed through the fragmented contributions of different participants with none having knowledge of what has already been said. The resulting work forms a satirical remark on the incommensurability and fabricated nature of nationhood, as the two men are made to temporarily set aside inherited belief systems in order to achieve their shared goal. Within the gaps of communication they discover that empathy is the best means of overcoming boundaries. (Yap and Lin 2020)

As a creative tool, the 'space' between understanding and misunderstanding has always intrigued me. When I first began experimenting with filmmaking, I enjoyed purposefully misdirecting models and collaborators in order to 'see what would happen' taking inspiration from Dada and Surrealist artistic techniques.

For instance, I might pronounce something strangely or say a nonsense word to elicit a reaction, or I might remain silent and act as if filming had concluded to observe the model's reaction on camera. This approach frequently results in spontaneous, natural responses. Having to communicate across a language barrier takes this into a new dimension, where communicative crutches present themselves, such as a reliance on humour.

> She said, there's one thing very funny. Because I (Viola) was not there for you guys. The students can only communicate with you half English, half Chinese that time. She talked with Max. And she said in half Chinese half English. 'If you are hungry or not, we can go out to eat?' and everything use this as a funny joke between them. (Viola translating for Rnan, 2021)

Communication was sometimes easier on a photo shoot due to the participants' awareness of visual communication (being fashion photography students) and roles and expectations given before the shoot, translated through Instant Messenger.

> She also mentioned that Zoe as a model, sometimes because of the language barrier, she didn't understand what you mean but weirdly, she still can…come up with what you want. Correctly. It's weird. (Viola, translating for Vicky, 2021)

> …but I still feel that no language barrier between us because photograph…is sort of art field. Sometimes we don't need language we don't need to communicate really clear, because sometimes you make the light, if you take a camera, I can understand what you want I think, so there's no big issues between us. (Florence, 2021)

Ultimately, developing a commonality of practice was more important than language. In Ningbo and Wuhan, where language was deprivileged, play and music were given a higher role, while in Hong Kong shared language made old

familiar directing devices easy, and the new modes of practice had to be more consciously evoked.

2.2.1. Lost (or found) in translation?

To undertake this research, I first needed to examine my photography practice and *bricolage* [21] way of working and developing creative ideas. I found myself asking how can I connect the practice and research conversations in a meaningful way? The link seemed to lie in the understandings and misunderstandings generated from working together across languages and cultures. The strength of the photographic outcomes undoubtedly connected to this process, what I am calling the space for conversation, or a liminal space similar to Homi Bhabha's 'third space', where 'the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew' (Bhabha, 1994: 37).

As mentioned above, everyday translation tasks in China are usually undertaken with translation apps on mobile phone devices. Automated translation does not understand accents, regional colloquialisms, and contexts. However rudimentary the results, they are often evocative and sometimes poetic. I found this useful for creative applications. Consider the following example from Max's interview (audio 34:40 - 34:53)

> *You are the first teacher, of the photographer, teacher that he got. He'll remember for all his life. (Viola's live interpretation)*
>
> *Is one of my photography teachers, is me. I am very very best and will remember him for 10000 years. (Google audio translation)*

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[21] In art or literature, 'construction or creation from a diverse range of available things' (Merriam-Webster dictionary).

It was my first photography teacher, he is one of my love for you, one of my photography initiations, anyway, I am really grateful to them, remember him for a lifetime. (Bing translator[22])

It was my the number one photography teacher, I'm very very thankful and I will remember her for all my life. (Google Translation from Chinese transcript of audio)

Comparison of two versions of Rnan's interview reveals another type of difference:

It was also played for one night, I remember it very clearly, and then it can be bigger for us, that is, every time we shoot from then on, people who are the same as me will also like to play music, just because they can feel it, let alone relax my mind. Then how about opening? The effect that comes out must be the same as what my mother did? (Bing translation)

She said the most enjoy part is the indoor shooting. So it is the first time that she acts as a model aside at those photograph, photographer class OK? and she remembered that the music is a very important part of it. She believed that the music influenced a lot. She felt relaxed. So after that she will have the music when they are doing the shooting, it is very enjoyable during the shooting if they have the music. (Viola's live interpretation)

Rnan possibly spoke about her mother's experience and how she recreated this on a shoot, but the live interpreter left this concept out, trying to capture the main point and dropping some of the complexity.

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[22] To compare the outcomes, I used Google Translate and Bing Translate in conversation mode (where voice is simultaneously translated and written/edited) and then in ordinary translation mode (where input text is translated as a paragraph). Bing (Microsoft) was chosen to compare with Google as Google software was inaccessible in China, thus Bing (Microsoft) was employed instead. Both Bing and Google use Artificial Intelligence. As a result of its ubiquity in Chinese workplaces, I reasoned that translations might be more precise and accustomed to colloquial speech.

Audio recordings can be repeatedly fed into Bing, eliciting different variations (Fig. 47):

有可能是当时我们在室内可以拍的时候，然后因为那1次也是我算是除了我们第一次上摄影课以外，我第一次就是说去郑州的给别人当模特啊。

我当时我在室内可以拍的时候，然后因为那1次也是我算是除了我们第一次上摄影课以外，我第一次就是说去这次的给别人当模特啊。然后呢？当时也是。

Maybe it was when we could shoot indoors, and then because that was also the first time I took a photography class, I said that I went to Zhengzhou to model for others.

I was able to shoot indoors, and then because that was the first time I was in a photography class, I said I was going to model for someone else this time. And then what? It was also at the time.

Fig. 47. Sailor, L., *Screen captures from Bing Translate*. [Photographs]

There is an emotiveness to directly translated Chinese that is smoothed out through human interpretation in the attempt to gain lexical sense. My experiences of China were shaped by my recognition of a few Chinese words I knew by sound. Interpreted in the particular context through experience and emotion, sometimes mistakenly, I found these misunderstandings were close enough and gave me a space around those words – my own 'third space' of understanding. They illustrate the concept that Keri Facer and Kate Pahl (2017) call 'productive divergence' in reference to disorienting ways of gaining new understandings when working collaboratively.

I knew Rnan had travelled to Zhengzhou, and could picture the images in my mind as I read the first translation, although it was a throwaway remark; my recognition of this scenario and the picture in my mind influenced how I read the translation afterward. The other translation gave me an understanding of how working with me on set had influenced Rnan's future practice. Directly interpreting the interview through AI, the text changes each time, and although the translation software begins to *learn* eventually, the meanings retain enough difference to leave space to question and interpret.

These translation findings validate difference in the same way that images are truth and untruth at the same time. I 'know' there is an element of truth in each translation. Even able interpreters that are well versed in the subject leave a space for a creative interpretation. Facer and Pahl (2017: page 216) described translation as 'border crossing', whereby 'knowledge and understanding is transformed through its move from place to place and person to person.' In the same way as staged recreations of the memories of others may lead the viewer to elements of truth, mishearing or mistranslating can actually give the listener a voice in the conversation.

Translation, of course, does not have to be linguistic. It is customary for fashion photographers to employ body language as a secondary means of communication, mirroring postures when unable to explain completely.

Kary recognised this part of the practice:

> You know, I have to be… You know, more like a mirror to them. Because you know the hand gesture or the posture, I need to maybe show them like how to do it before that we shoot and also we will show them more visual references so therefore they can understand without any language. (Kary 2021)

For artists, responding to these movements engenders a new space that incorporates our own subconscious links to the conversation.

2.3. Fashion Photography Process as Heterotopia

Analysing the interview transcripts for attitudes toward collective working led instead to a realisation about the fashion photography shoot as a heterotopic encounter. Heterotopic sites link to other sites by both reflecting and inverting them, but they remain real environments, environments that have transformative effects on those interacting with them. (Foucault, 1984, Johnson, 2006). The site of many of the Wuhan

shoots was university classroom space that we would use on evenings and weekends as studios. The teaching room temporarily turned into a magical space, inverting the rigidity of the schoolroom. This had an effect that Zoe described as an 'open eye experience' (2021).

The fashion shoot studio acts as a stage that is transformed and inhabited for a short period of time through set building, lighting and atmosphere formation. Participants move mentally and physically between studio space and transformative space. While acutely aware of the paraphernalia of photography, fashion, music, and the working team, the elements nonetheless combine to create a temporary setting that allows clothing to come 'alive and have meaning' (Poletti and Cantarini 2016: 7).

The transformative space is characterised by atmosphere. Jenny remembered:

> Because she was standing there and talk with the models, it was nothing different [than other photo shoots]. But after all the set it was ready, and the lighting is ready, she suddenly found out. That was the atmosphere of the art design... It was a creation. (Viola, translating for Jenny, 2021)

Entering the atmosphere of the transformative space, models embody a role, the rest of the team acting as spectators: Sonia recalled, '**...**she [Jessi] just turned it on... she just seemed to embody the spirit of the outfits… she just was that character' (Sonia, 2021). Kary referenced a similar encounter in Hong Kong. 'We [were] thinking, oh my god, it's like a performance piece' (Kary 2021).

Sarah Mattice (2017: 251), introducing Daoism and its influence on the Chinese aesthetic experience, describes the 'transformative relationship between the everyday and the fantastical' as an 'integration that leaps beyond.' In Chinese aesthetics, the aesthetic experience is not split between 'visual experience and inner experience' (Jullien 2007, 38). Emotion (of both artist and viewer) is a key component that is cultivated and encouraged. Foucault, on heterotopias, speaks of a space that 'draws us out of ourselves'. These temporary fashion photography spaces, created in Wuhan,

Ningbo and Hong Kong opened up experimental and emotional impulses in myself and my collaborators in tune with the Daoist principle of embracing ambiguity. We were drawn out, gestures and ideas reflected and confronted through experimentation. For Barbara, the playful experience on set in Ningbo was 'more like express the emotional and feeling' (Barbara, 2021). It was within these experiences that I witnessed my students moving fluidly across different roles:

> Vicky said that actually in the shooting with you she plays maybe not only one role, sometimes she was model and sometimes she was the assistant...that time when she and Zoe were the models and they didn't do any preparation beforehand...but it turned out it's a really good result. (Viola, translating for Vicky 2021)

In the fashion photo shoot, the heterotopic encounter is enabling for collaborators, inviting movement not only between the studio reality and the transformative reality of the set (the everyday and the fantastical), and between emotional states, but also between roles.

2.4. Control and Collaboration

What I had hypothesised as 'possibly the result of a collective culture', was quickly disproved. Roles on both commercial and creative photo shoots were organised in the same way as the UK. Nearly all participants stated that when organising their own shoots they would prefer for themselves and others to have one role so that they could focus and conserve energy. However, participants mentioned an experimental atmosphere on my sets that allowed them the freedom to experiment with roles. This environment initially arose from an inability to exert strong control over the photo shoot owing to the language barrier and other unfamiliar components present. But I was also mirroring the freedom that my fashion shoot team felt. Vicky commented on this spontaneity: 'during your shooting process you will add many new thoughts and last is not what you plan in the beginning' (Vicky 2021). Miffy felt liberated 'You give me space to do it and you help me with some props when I've no idea. So I think that's good, because you don't limit me' (Miffy 2021). Kary recalled: '[I] wasn't afraid to suggest you

ideas' (Kary 2021). He contrasted this with photo shoots outside of our collaborations that were more controlled:

> It's quite extreme…they know exactly what they do, They don't like you to suggest. They would just say no, no, no, they don't do that... and they don't try things. (Kary 2021)

Vicky also acknowledged her own willingness to relinquish control as a collaborator in order to discover a new end result: '...plus with Layla's post-production and her own concept and that become a different artwork..' (Vicky 2021).

When asked how they approached the themes of control and collaboration in their own photoshoots, some participants mentioned the tensions between support and supervision and how they overcome these challenges. Barbara highlighted the importance of respect and careful communication 'You, you need to tell them your role…And so you communicate with them in a... polite way, but you cannot be too soft'. (Barbara 2021). Surprisingly, anger and emotional responses were not viewed as harmful, and Barbara goes on to say, 'Sometimes, proper anger will help, anger, sometimes you can be angry about something, so they want to feel some[thing' (2021). This strategy does not work for Miffy: '[This was]... my first time to edit a fashion video shoot but [participant] thinks I don't do good job so I ignore [them].' However, Jessi understands that conflicts may lead to an end result and are not taken personally in her case: '...sometimes the difficult thing was, you have different ideas, Maybe… [you] might argue, but finally…' (Jessi 2021). Sally, interviewed alongside Rnan, revealed how their approaches differ and made a light-hearted comparison to Rnan: '… she said she's not a control freak, therefore she will listen to the other team members to see what they want, unlike Rnan [all laugh]' (2021). Kary, a more experienced practitioner, reflected on the contradictory notion of control in fashion photography: '... So you need to be in control but you need to be *open*…'.

Zoe equated creative collaboration poetically to the combining of colours:

> ...she believe creative idea, all creation is, is that two different ideas go together. Then you have a creative idea. Or...like two colours...you mix them together, you have a new colour. (Viola, translating for Zoe, 2021)

2.5. Energy

Energy was a word that cropped up regularly in the conversations with Chinese participants, particularly when asked a question about working across multiple roles on set. I attributed this to the importance given to health in Chinese society with health and energy discussed regularly in Chinese workplaces. As most creatives are accustomed to working long hours on a photo shoot in the United Kingdom, an assistant expressing tiredness is seldom seen as a request for a break. However, in my experience, health is given greater attention in China, even in creative fields.[23]

Barbara discussed the importance of managing a team's energy in a supervisory role: '[I] ask them to take a break to have some coffee, or have some snacks, and then they can come back with a better status to continue the shooting' (Barbara 2021). Florence, when asked about taking on dual roles asserts that 'one only has so limited energy and ability' (Florence 2021), while Rnan compared her current role with the work in Wuhan as 'post production is not so full of energy' (Rnan 2021).

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[23] I frequently do not take a lunch break or forget to eat during a shoot since I am so engaged in shooting and accomplishing my goals within the timeframe we have the studio, and other UK participants who work with me will take breaks and eat whilst I am shooting. This was a difference I noted in Chinese-based productions; in all of them, there was a scheduled lunchtime where everyone orders food, rests, converses, and takes a lengthy break. I attributed this to the custom in my own teaching settings (and in the majority of offices) of having a clear lunchbreak at the same time as the rest of the employees, during which you would typically eat together and then sleep or relax for one to two hours. Health and energy are spoken of regularly in Chinese workplaces, I was always lectured on what food/behaviours/weather was "good for health" in all three places and encouraged to take this seriously. Raoul Sterckx in *Chinese Thought* (2019: 77) links energy or *Qi* to both Confucianism and the beginnings of Chinese medicine with *qi* explained as 'the life force' which together with blood animates the body and provides the nourishment for both our body and our emotions.

A lack of energy seems to also be fused with a lack of focus as explained by Max:

> ...he believe that [to] have one specialist is better, that one focus on his role. Because if one is, is having too many jobs. This one might feel very tiresome and he or she will be lack of energy... after Max have finished the makeup, maybe for a model he won't have enough energy to do another job. (Viola, translating for Max 2021)

The significance of energy on set and its value in fostering an engaging and creative environment as a collaborative team was emphasised by Jessi when encountering the opposite: '... just like silence, I was asking, like, feeling like, I want some feedback, but nothing there' (Jessi 2021). In contrast, Kary repeatedly emphasised the collaborative spirit on the Hong Kong set, describing it as 'dynamic' and 'experimental' (Kary 2021).

The conversations uncovered a more nuanced perspective of the collaborative fashion shoots than I anticipated. While enthusiastic about the multi-role teamwork and experimental atmosphere of my shoots, my collaborators had not brought this attitude to their own shoots. Differences between Chinese and British fashion photography processes and group dynamics may lie in cultural attitudes toward energy as life force.

3. Revisiting

3.1. Reframing the Archive

Having gained new insights into the changes in my practice during my time in China, and the ideas underpinning the work, the final part of this investigation involved revisiting the work, reframing it to bring to it this new understanding (Fig. 48). In parallel with the collaborative exhibition work in China, a separate investigation of my own working archive was commenced.

laylasailor Rather than creating representations of myself in a studio (of a dream or fantasy world), as I had done prior to China, I felt compelled to situate myself in the textures of contemporary reality, rather than the textures of my homeland. It wasn't for the UK that I had a nostalgic yearning; rather, it was for the security of the past and the knowledge that I wasn't always a stranger. I was simultaneously enthralled by the history of Ningbo and China, as well as my imagined longing for the past.

"While being situated in 'rivers and lakes, one has little choice but to succumb to its protocols" 人在江湖, 身不由己 (Tenzin, 2017)

不像我在中国之前所做的那样，在工作室（梦想或幻想世界）中创造自己的形象，我觉得有必要将自己置于当代现实的纹理中，而不是我家乡的纹理。我怀念的不是英国，而是英国。相反，这是为了过去的安全和我并不总是陌生人的知识。我同时被宁波和中国的历史以及对过去的想象向往着迷。

Image: Rnan,Wuhan & Ningbo (collage 2022)
#nownessearthday @pahc_mmu

Fig. 48. Sailor, L., *Rnan, Wuhan and Ningbo* with text from C*ollective Dreams Research Process – Revisiting*, 2022 [Photograph, Screen Capture].

How is new work derived from an archive? Confronted with the task of sifting through it all, I frequently felt overwhelmed. Occasionally, I would discover that I had mislabelled the image's location and date at the time it was taken, and it was only after spending time with the work that I was able to correctly re-identify it. Some such images had been posted to social media near the time of creation, having a 'life' now with the incorrect date. These contradictions amused me because they reminded me of my first days in Ningbo and of getting lost on my bicycle. Following the timeline Ningbo – Wuhan – Hong Kong – Manchester to stay on track, occasionally, images would appear outside the timeline, adding another dimension of unexpectedness. I stumbled upon some forgotten videos that I had captured when the students in Wuhan were working to create a fashion shoot on location in their first year. Several of my interviewees are featured in the videos, and there are a number of lengthy takes in which group dynamics were recorded, looking toward later assessment of the module. Getting lost by revisiting the visuals felt authentic to the original conception of the work, connecting to the Daoist concept of roaming. Sarah Mattice, in discussing Daoist creative practice, argues that 'Wandering is what one should do in the world, but also in many forms of art' (Mattice 2007: 261).

Combining excerpts from these videos with different translations of Rnan's interview text, I experimented with Chinese and English texts and modifying the colour so that portions were obscured. These evoke the feeling of communicating across languages and cultures where there are flashes of recognition, but you must fill in the blanks, while the speed of speech distorts the process.

Fig. 49. Sailor, L., Screen captures from *Collective Dreams Research Process – Revisiting*, 2022 [Film, Photographs, Instagram stories]

I took inspiration from my collaborator Kary Kwok. In the early 1990s, Kwok studied photography in the UK before returning to Hong Kong to work at *Amoeba* magazine as an art director. In 2020, he began the process of revisiting his self-portraits, photographs from London fashion shows, and images captured in Hong Kong during the 1997 handover era. We discussed how our respective archival investigations revealed parallel themes of displacement, identity, and timelessness (Joyce.com 2021). In his work, Kwok examined the connections between the political and social tensions of 1997 and 2019 in Hong Kong, while mine was rediscovering parallels between fashion photography in 1990s UK and contemporary China (Fig. 50).
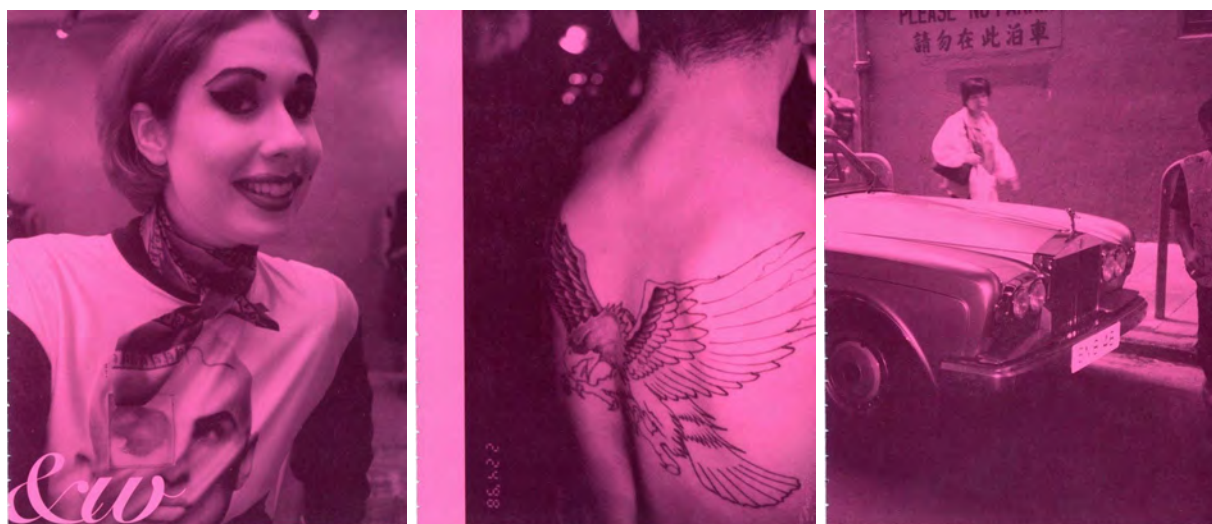

Fig. 50. Kwok, K and Sathish, A., *Revisiting*, 2021 [Photographs]

My studio notes from this period recount the anxiety of trying to recreate and reimagine new work from an archive:

> When I put things together, I usually look for patterns, similarities, or opposites (colours, shapes, textures) that work together – usually the sound or video is more abstract, to break up the harmony of the images, or I will add an image/video of everyday life/textures to give context to the fashion image – I remember this as being significant at the time [of Shenmezine]. Now, it feels self-conscious to arrange things in the same manner; I want to embody the fragmentation of my experiences and memories. And the mispronunciations and misunderstandings that frequently occur. (Studio Notes, March 2022)

We both termed our archival work *Revisiting*. Kwok co-curated his archive with artist Aaditya Sathish for an exhibition of that name in 2021, using spatial components to produce new interpretations of the work. Kwok combines several eras, subjects, and locations through colour, tone, and form, which are intentionally 'supplanted and (dis)ordered'.[24]

I began to consider how I could present my archive work in the same zine-style and loose format as the original *Shenmezine*, while also reflecting my perception of the experiences as memories, fragments of Ningbo merging with Wuhan and Hong Kong. These personal archives would have to communicate with bilingual audiences while remaining true to the layered times, dates, and images. And how to prevent the images falling into orientalism? Crucially, I needed to incorporate the insights on collaboration and relinquishing control emerging from the research.

I began to look at following on from the formula created for the original *shenmezine* but in the form of a blog that would include reflective notes and the work of other photographers. The blog would serve as a companion to the research and a sketchbook of my recollections for readers to explore as if they were 'inside my head.' As I did when

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[24] Kwok's archive images were taken from his 1999 book: *109 men, 69 women, and 10 in-between*.

I first encountered China, I wished them to become disoriented in order to discover things that resonate with their own experiences and memories.

The blog layout I chose is created from a Tumblr template that displays posts (videos, images, text) translucent and randomly stacked. Each time a user wants to view a different random selection, they can refresh the page. The visual effect is that some posts merge together and create new image forms and meanings. This work is called *Shenmezine Revisited* (Fig. 51).[25]

As an alternative space where some formal boundaries would be present. I created a website called Collective Dreams. This serves as an online exhibition space where viewers are able to move and reposition images and text to curate their own page (Fig 52).[26]
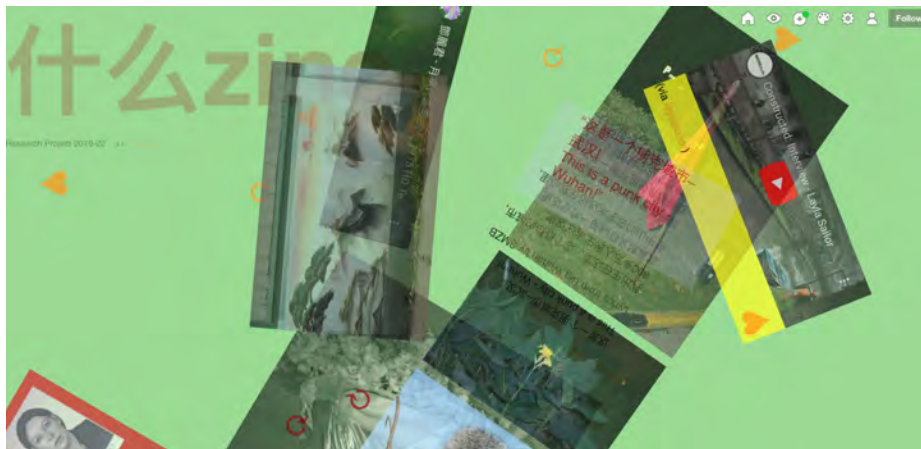

Fig. 51.Sailor, L., 2022. Screen capture from *Shenmezine Revisited.* [Website].
https://shenmezine.tumblr.com/

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[25] https://shenmezine.tumblr.com/

[26] For the Collective Dreams website, I loosely followed the original *Shenmezine* structure, which included two images, a text taken from my research, and images taken from the overall project, comprising of my artworks, student works from collaborative exhibitions, and photo shoots from China and the United Kingdom that were not included in this study. Images can layer over one another, however the bricolage/collage effect is much more subtle, allowing viewers to engage easily with the work.
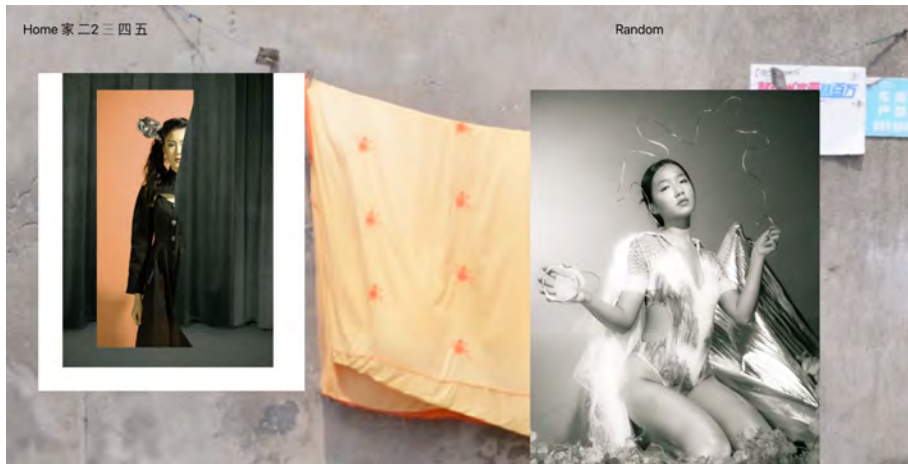
Fig. 52. Sailor, L., Screen capture from *Collective Dreams*, 2022 [Website][27]

3.1.1. Collective Dreams Collaborative Exhibition with WIDS Wuhan, December 2021

The above-named exhibition was the first in a series of travelling exhibitions that were intended to begin in Wuhan, travel to Ningbo, Hong Kong, and afterwards 'return' to Manchester, collaborating with students and creatives from each university where I had worked, who would act as curators and exhibition designers. The purpose was to investigate the constraints and limits of the themes of *collaboration* and *control* that were emerging from the interviews, as well as the regional variations in the work. In the exhibition proposal, I presented the project as a 'visual conversation' where the emphasis is on collaboration from beginning to end, with students serving as curators of the artworks. The exhibition took place in the same classrooms as the 'China Dream' photoshoot, in collaboration with the students I had taught as first-years at Wuhan Institute of Design and Sciences (See Appendix B).

3.2. Revisiting

The research-related creative work described above is represented in an exhibition to accompany this written thesis. In the design plan for the installation, initially, floor

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[27] https://collectivedreams.cargo.site/

markings were intended to replicate the aesthetic spiral shape of my changing process (see Appendix D), however for practicality the shape that the visitor 'travels' through was revised to a partial shape inspired by a Chinese nine-turn bridge.[28] Wandering through the installation should mirror disorientation and discovery of the actual journeys and also the parallel process of revisiting the work for this study.
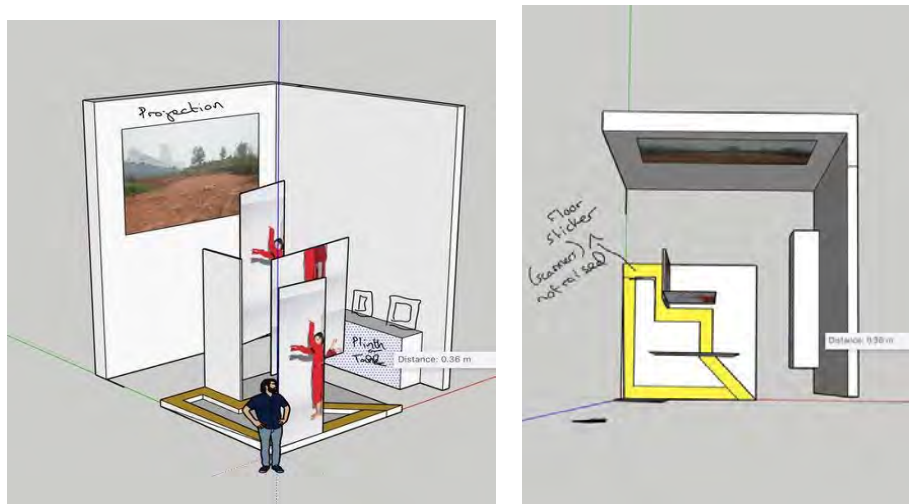

Fig. 53. Sailor, L., 2022. *Revisiting* exhibition plan. [Website]

Fabric hangings were selected to symbolise the laundry that is commonly hung in a Chinese housing complex (Fig 22). Fabric was also chosen as a medium to investigate my initial study themes of layering and fragmentation. Depending on the time of day and the strength of the light, printed words and images on materials with varying opacities will merge and combine.   In keeping with the heterotopia theme uncovered in the research, the exhibition space is vital to the development of installation approaches. In keeping with my practice, space is left for testing and for spontaneous audience encounters.

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[28] The design of Chinese gardens vary and each element within them (rocks, water, bridges etc.) acts as a metaphor with layers of meaning. In ancient China it was believed that evil spirits travelled in straight lines, therefore the zig-zag bridge was designed to ward them off (Zhang, 2018). The floor marking design in Fig. 53 was based on the nine-turn bridge in the Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou, a place I visited often. The metaphor of the Chinese garden also appealed to me because of its Daoist and Confucian links, and Foucault's reference to a garden as a heterotopia in 'Of Other Spaces': 'We must not forget that in the Orient the garden, an astonishing creation that is now a thousand years old, had very deep and seemingly superimposed meanings' (Foucault 1984: 6).

4. Conclusion

4.1. Summary and contributions to knowledge

This research began with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of Chinese fashion photography. Fashion photography, having only taken off in China in the first decade of the new millennium, the phenomenon has not yet received much coverage in English-language literature. Even less is known about the process of photoshoots in China. This thesis presents a practitioner's perspective on fashion photography, investigating how my practice evolved as a result of experiences working in three Chinese cities between 2016 and 2020, and what this understanding can contribute to existing knowledge and debates about Chinese fashion photography.

Fashion photography is a teamwork practice that necessitates a number of collaborators, notably models, make-up artist, stylist, photographer and their assistants. The study started with the observation about my practice in China that collaborators moved fluidly between different roles instead of remaining firmly in their invited role as is generally the case in the West. It was hypothesised that this was due to a Chinese cultural habit of collective working. This notion was quickly dispelled in conversation with my Chinese collaborators about several key shoots in which the role switching had been evidenced. They consistently agreed that this arose from my own ability to foster an environment where freer modes of working were welcomed.

I set out to find how I had evolved this new approach by tracing the journey of my practice through my experiences in Ningbo, Wuhan and Hong Kong. This practice review saw the fractured state of my personal identity in Ningbo and my search for connectedness through photographic practice. I evolved new creative activities that drew upon previous sources of inspiration in Dada and Surrealism. These took the form of wandering in the city and obsessively collecting images of everyday textures and similar themes. The collecting process and the resultant collections forged links with

place and proved useful in both creative and teaching practice. Reflecting on this period, I discovered that Erin M. Lochmann (2018: 21), in her 'Art of Nothingness', began to correlate the links between Dadaism, Daoism and Zen; she found the Zurich Dada artists 'allowed these forms of Eastern thought to influence their artistic examination of the world at large and encourage an alternative mindset that they had already begun to cultivate.' Their resultant work looked toward interrupting established modes of cognition, distorting language, and welcoming chance and spontaneity (Lochmann, 2018: 28). It became clear that in my embrace of Dadaist working methods, I had actually moved closer to Chinese practice. Gaining more knowledge of Chinese philosophy, I was able to more consciously bring Daoist ideas into the work utilising chance, and working across and through language. The research presented in this thesis extends Lochmann's historical correlation between Dada and Dao into the contemporary art and fashion arena. It reveals the continuing viability of this important juncture between Eastern and Western creative practice through the heritage of Dada.

Interviews with my past collaborators privileged a creative and playful space, recognised here in the term 'conversations'. These enabled me to comprehend what had not been consciously understood at the time: how the conditions of my photographic practice in China engendered, in Bhabha's terms, a *third space*. In third space theory, ambiguity and ambivalence foster an environment in which 'the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew' (Bhabha, 1994: 37). This third space fostered cultural hybridity, facilitating new forms of meaning. Through a consideration of hybridity within my own practice, I gained a greater understanding of hybridity within Chinese fashion photography. For example, elements of colour or texture that once were seen as merely decorative, took on meaning as cultural references to particular periods, places or artistic works. My research uncovered a number of themes key to how this hybridity operates: translation, heterotopic spaces, and relaxing the modality of artistic control.

I have described how playful means of communication became part of my practice due to the difficulties of translation, for example, using body language to connect the emotions of models on-set to my aesthetic objectives. Translation, whether through an interpreter or through advanced technology platforms, instead of a tool to gain precise equivalence, became a process to uncover multiple meanings. Working within the third space, mishearing and mistranslating did not detract from understanding, but provided a new type of meaning, rich in creative possibilities. Facer and Pahl (2017) described translation as 'border crossing', whereby 'knowledge and understanding is transformed through its move from place to place and person to person.' These transformations incorporate the listener's subconscious links into the conversation; 'flaws' in translation become a marker of the listener's engagement in the communication process. These findings about translation validate difference in the same way that images are truth and untruth at the same time.

The fashion shoot was seen as a stage that is transformative through set, lighting and music forming an atmosphere that can be inhabited for a short time. This research claims that space as a heterotopia in which the studio (prosaic) and the atmospheric co-exist. In Wuhan, where practices of observing and reflecting local culture became embedded into my teaching and artistic work, this enabled an additional layering of the past onto the present, manifesting what I termed *collective dreams*. The co-presence of the past further enriched the fashion shoot heterotopia. Memories acted with atmosphere and setting to evoke emotion and collaborative expression, creating a space for experimentation. Alongside applying Foucault's heterotopias to the fashion shoot process, Benjamin's theory of the *dialectical image* can be applied to its resulting images. In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin wrote, 'It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, an image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill' (Benjamin 1999: 1-463). This constellation of past and present was revealed most strongly in my work in Hong Kong, a place where rapid change imbues the city with a continual sense of loss and

nostalgia, characterising it as a 'liminal space, a place of transition, uncertainty, and disorientation' (Agustin 2021: online).

This investigation began with an observation about collaborative working and fluidity of roles. The tension between collaborative freedom and directorial control, and their relative importance was a continual provocation wanting resolution. My relaxation of control initially stemmed from unshared language and unfamiliar cultural expectations; I found that I was mirroring the freedom my photoshoot team felt, which they in turn found liberating. Despite this experience, the conversations revealed that my former collaborators found continued tensions surrounding the issue of control in their own practice. Kary succinctly summed up the contradictory notion of control in fashion photography: '...So you need to be in control but you need to be *open*…' This evokes Facer and Pahl's (2017) notion of *productive divergence* in reference to disorienting ways of gaining new understandings when working collaboratively. This research found the heterotopic space fruitful ground for fostering collaborative working, and inhibition of ordinary communication by language, an equalising force that encouraged empathetic response.

In China my practice synthesised prior working methods from the United Kingdom, with playful giving up of control, entering into collective narratives based on Chinese cultural references, and embracing the heterotopic shifting space and its border crossings of translation. This synthesis brought cultural hybridity to my own work and enabled me to relate to hybridity in Chinese fashion photography, unclouded by the distorting lens of orientalism. This thesis describes this journey, theorising it, and relating my practice to that of Chinese fashion photographers. It contributes to knowledge by extending the area of application of the relationship between Dao and Dada, and again by extending the concept of heterotopia to include the fashion photo shoot. It provides a new perspective on translation that includes the productive nature of 'mistranslation'. And it connects the 'border crossing' of translation, the movement between past and present/ real and fantastical of the heterotopic space, and the process of relinquishing control in creative collaboration as actions that support cultural hybridity.

4.2. Revisiting

My encounters in China altered my working methods, compelling me to deconstruct and reconsider my entire approach to practice. Greater understanding of the changes of this period through this research brought about the desire to revisit the images of the time and apply concepts now with conscious understanding. Returning to the archive was a form of memory work. Annette Kuhn (2010: 15) found that 'everyday visual media such as film and photography, engage, produce and embody distinctive kinds of memory-stories and narrative discourses.' It is likely that artistic images can also be read in this narrative manner, enabling relationships between personal and collective experience to be revisited and reinterpreted. By preserving and elucidating the past alongside my collaborators, I felt able to reimagine the work from the perspective of the present, eliciting new interpretations. This revisiting process generated new creative work that is presented in an exhibition accompanying this written thesis.

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Appendix A – Practice before 2016

Kokoshnik, 2012

Commission for Sassoon Manchester, 2014

Self Portrait, 2004

Commission for Bernard & Edith, 2015

Appendix B – Collaborative Exhibition, Wuhan

Collective Dreams: Collaborative Exhibition, Wuhan (2021)

My notebooks provide a record of the communication difficulties, the successes, the shortcomings, and the remaining questions about the exhibition:

Meetings with the students online were productive but it was difficult to have a two way conversation, partly because they were sandwiched in between other projects / internships, and partly because the electronic format whereby my video is on a big screen watched by a large group of students is not conducive to a real conversation. It is a structure that lacks the intimacy of small group or one-to-one conversations. The development of the initial ideas became easier through WeChat, where I could explain in more detail in text that would be automatically (and quite accurately translated), and where photos could be posted, saved and shared easily and quickly to a group. The video calls instead became almost like a lecture, in the way I would normally teach - to show a variety of inspiration and artists' work on similar themes: something that the students could then go away and develop. Tensions between what was expected from students, by myself, and by the leaders and staff at their university became apparent. I had parallel discussions with different members of staff about dates, availability and plans that were confusing for both sides, it reminded me of the frustration of similar conversations when working in China and I had to remind myself not to panic, that the situation would make sense over time, which it did. (Reflection on online planning meeting from Studio Notes March 2022: edited)

Huang, J., 2021 *Collective Dreams*, Wuhan. [Installation Image].

> Reflective material, mirrors and actually mirroring the shapes and textures of both China and the digital worlds I'd created, the images were facing each other sometimes on plinths, sometimes ignoring each other (back to back) I'd really like to understand more why they chose to present the images together and which ones are 'talking' to each other. Some are overlapping and trailing over and around surfaces. Some images are hiding inside others, crumpled up and hard to see. Interestingly there is no overlapping in the terms of framing, each image is printed without cropping and without the other images interrupting them. Was this a formal choice? The students' images have their own room and space, alongside my work but also kept distinct and separate with the bigger images being mine – that are placed all together on large banners, not mixed in with the student work but sometimes facing it. (Wuhan exhibition reflections from Studio Notes, December 2021)

The exhibition was held in the teaching spaces where the original images of Rnan and Sally were photographed. Jenny, who was a team leader for the exhibition explained the installation and the ideas behind the process:

> The silver installation is made of photographic warehouse tinfoil. I like to use industrial materials to express the form of natural mountains. The contrast is very strong. I hope to create scenes with waste materials to break the stereotype that fashion is luxury and waste…although very tired, it really simulates the daily work of a curator. (2022)

Link to Exhibition videos:

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLMUCNW5BW42SrPWGwydBOPKBO2wzTPEGD

Appendix C - Exhibition Proposal Letter

Layla Regan (Layla Sailor - artist name)
PROPOSED EXHIBITION WITH …….2021/22

与 …… 2021/22 的拟议展览

PROJECT Title: Collective Dreams
项目：集体梦想

Organiser: Layla Sailor, (layla Regan) representing Manchester Metropolitan
University as a MA by Research student 主办方：Layla Sailor，代表曼彻斯特城市大
学作为硕士生

Proposed Participants:
WIDS Wuhan, SINO-UK Zhejiang Fashion Institute Ningbo, Hong Kong Design
Institute and Manchester Metropolitan University
拟议参与者：

WIDS武汉、中英浙江时尚学院宁波、香港设计学院、曼彻斯特城市大学

As a part of published research MA (Masters by Research) into collaboration, identity
and cross-cultural fashion photography practice to be awarded by Manchester
Metropolitan University (Exhibition dates from December 2021 - March 2022)

作为曼彻斯特城市大学授予的合作、身份和跨文化时尚摄影实践研究硕士（研究硕
士）的一 部分(2021 年 12 月 - 2022 年 3 月）

<u>Proposed Exhibition Dates:</u>
1st Exhibition: 2nd - 16 December 2021
2nd Exhibition: 11th - 25th February 2022
3rd Exhibition: 11th - 25th March 2022
Final Exhibition: 13th - 27th May 2022

WIDS can choose to be the first, second or third exhibition in the schedule to suit their schedule. If possible I would like to use a space in the Canglong Art Gallery. WIDS可作为日程中的第一、二、三展，以配合WIDS的日程安排. 如果可以，我想使用苍龙美术馆的一个空间

拟议展览日期:

第一届展览：2021年12月2-16日

第二届展览：2022年2月11-25日

第三届展览：2022年3月11-25日

最终展览：2022年5月13-27日

<u>Project Theme:</u>
项目主题：

This piece of research is investigating transcultural art collaboration through a travelling collaborative fashion photography exhibition. The participants in China (WIDS, ZJFIT, HKDI) have been chosen specifically.
本研究通过参观合作时尚摄影展来调查跨文化艺术合作。中国参与者（WIDS、ZJFIT、

HKDI）是专 门选择的。

The participants were chosen because the original artworks to be shown, were produced in each University and were collaborations with students from each area.
之所以选择参与者，是因为要展示的原创艺术作品是与各大学参与者的大学课程的学生合作制作的

<u>Project Aims:</u>

项目目标：

The aim of this project is to showcase and celebrate the work Layla has produced at each university whilst also offering students a chance to curate, install and collaborate by adding their work to the exhibition, which will then travel to the next location, and the next until the final showcase in Manchester, collecting work as it travels.

They will be guided by Layla remotely and if able - she will travel to the locations to help set up. This project is meant to be a 'visual conversation' where the emphasis is on collaboration from start to finish and the students are empowered to act as curators and artists alongside Layla.

She also hopes that these exhibitions will encourage future collaborations between the schools and create a conversation about the fashion photography students in China and their creative work, the project should also be a model for other artists to follow, and to inspire more UK artists to work with [university name]

Full credits will be displayed at all exhibitions, and all artworks submitted will also be displayed on a special website https://collectivedreams.cargo.site/#

该项目的目的是在每所大学展示和庆祝 Layla 的作品，同时也为学生提供了一个计划、安

装和协作 的机会，将他们的作品添加到展览中，然后前往下一个地点，然后直到上次在

曼彻斯特举办的展 览，边走边收藏。

如果可能的话，他们将由 Layla 远程指导——她会去不同的地方帮助设置。该项目旨在成

为"视觉对 话"，强调自始至终的合作。学生有权以策展人和艺术家的身份与 Layla 合作。

她也希望这些展览能够鼓励学校之间未来的合作，创造一个关于中国时尚摄影学生及其

创作的对 话，该项目也应该成为其他艺术家效仿的榜样，并激励更多的英国艺术家工

作 与....。

所有学分将在所有展览中展示，所有提交的作品也将在一个特殊的网站上展示
Artworks List:
作品清单：

Due to the collaborative nature of the exhibition, the number of artworks may vary in each location, however please use the following as an estimate:
由于展览的合作性质，每个地点的艺术品数量可能有所不同，但请使用以下作为估计

1 x Projected Film (to fit the space)

5 x 3.3m long roll prints (with works by both Layla and students)
7 x A1 prints (Layla and student Work)
15 A3 prints (student work)

1 x 投影胶片（以适应空间）

5 x 3.3m 长卷筒印刷品（包括 Layla 和 学生的作品）

7 x A1 打印（Layla 和学生的作品）

15 张 A3 照片（学生作品）

The size of the exhibition is based on the below image from the Supermarket Styling Exhibition at Canglong Gallery in 2019 - 3 walls (one large room on the 2nd floor of the gallery) and a space for video projection. The video is a film created from sound and images made when interviewing students from each area as part of the research project exploring communication and creativity between cultures, through fashion.

展览规模以2019年藏龙画廊超市造型展的下图为基准——3面墙（画廊二楼一个大房间）和

一个视频 投影空间。该视频是一部通过采访来自各个地区的学生时制作的声音和图像制作

的电影，作为通过 时尚探索文化之间的交流和创造力的研究项目的一部分
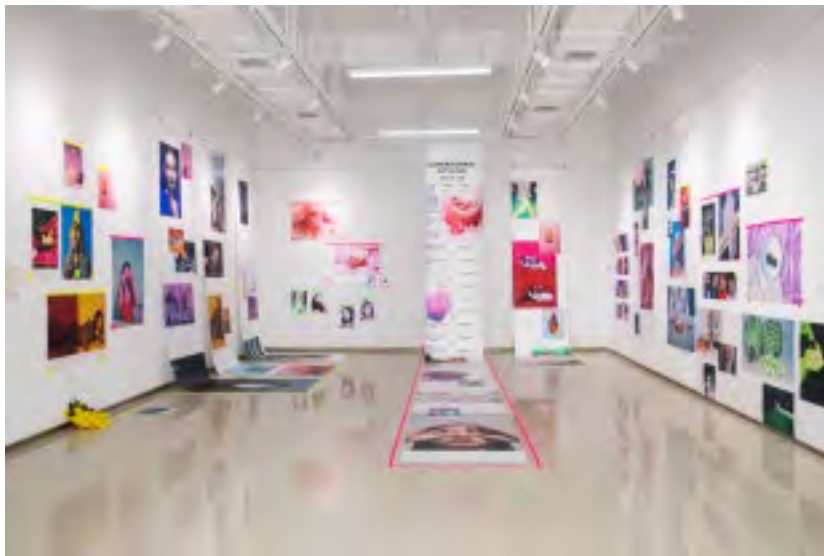
Examples of Layla's Artworks to be shown at
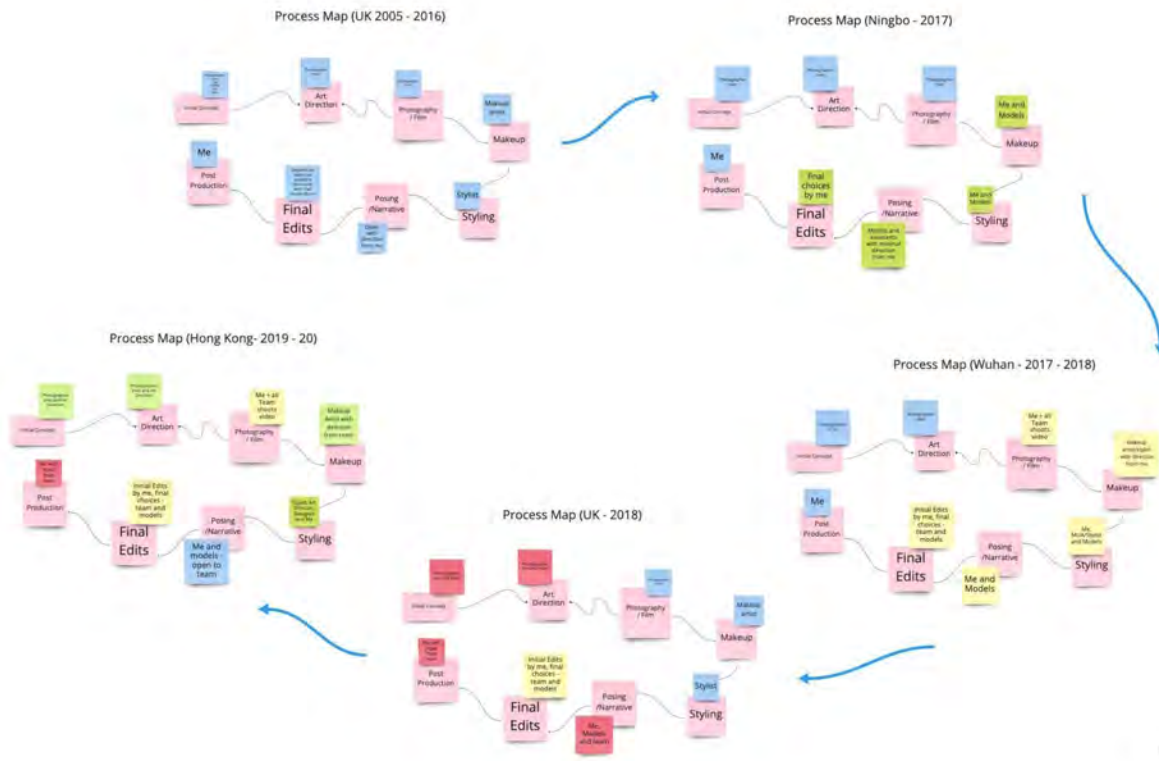exhibition: Layla 将在展览中展出的作品示例：
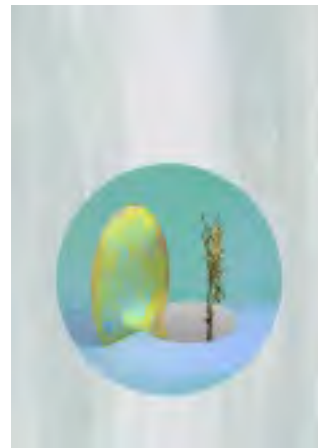
1 : Timmy (HK 2019)

2. Rnan (WIDS 2018)

3 : Sally (WIDS 2018)

4. San Yu (HK and Manchester 2020)

Appendix D - Mapping the changes in my Process

https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVO5GQNl4=/?share_link_id=511221180625

Layla Regan - Collective Dreams - Process Maps Diagram 2005 - 2020

Appendix E: Questions for collaborators

Collective Dreams - Questions for Collaborators V3 09Aug21 集体之梦- 给协作者的问卷

Collaborative Shoot 合作拍摄

1. Tell me what you remember about the photo shoot that we worked on together
   请告知关于我们合作的摄影项目你还记得哪些事？

2. Can you reflect on what you enjoyed about your role on the shoot?
   可否回忆在拍摄期间你喜欢你工作任务中的哪一部份？

3. How did your working process on the shoot compare to other shoots you have worked on?
   你的摄影工作流程与你参与的其他摄影工作有何不同？

4. How do your feel communication worked during the shoot?
   在拍摄期间，你觉得沟通是否顺利？

General / Their Process 一般/他们的流程

5. How do you go about planning the personnel for a photo shoot?
   你如何规划摄影人员分配？

6. How do you assign roles on a photo shoot?
   你如何分配摄影工作任务？

7. What roles do you think are most important on a shoot?
   你认为拍摄时哪些摄影工作任务最重要？

8. Do you think having a specialism in one role is more effective than having multiple roles on a photo shoot?
   你认为拍摄时专注于一项工作任务，或是进行多项工作任务更有效率？

Coordination and communication 协调与沟通

9. Tell me about your way of coordinating members of the shoot.
   请告知你协调摄影工作人员的方式。

10. When you work with non-Chinese speakers, how do you go about communicating your ideas?
    当你与不会说中文的工作人员合作，请问你如何与他沟通你的想法？

11. As a (insert role), do you value teamwork?
    身为(），你是否重视团队合作？

12. Do you feel a need to be in control? Do you ever fear losing control?
    你是否觉得必须掌控一切？你曾经害怕失控吗？

Appendix F: Collective Dreams Exhibition, Manchester, 2023

The practice component of this thesis: a newly curated and revisited version of work made in Ningbo, Wuhan, Hong Kong and the UK entitled 'Collective Dreams' was exhibited at the Cafe Gallery, Righton Building, MMU between January 17th and February 21st 2023.

From the start, I wanted the thesis exhibition to bring together still image, moving image, past work, past student work and mementos alongside new works 'revisiting' and reinterpreting imagery gathered during my years in China. With the materialisation of a definite space – an interior space with large windows facing outward, a defined space but one also blending with the much larger social space adjoining, a space with as much height as breadth – possibilities were presented for exploring the concept of heterotopia. As mentioned in the thesis, several of the photographs displayed in this exhibition were taken in Wuhan classrooms at the weekend, the same rooms used for teaching on weekdays. The teaching room temporarily turned into a magical space, inverting the rigidity of the schoolroom, this heterotopic transformation was now applied to another everyday university space, normally a cafe and social meeting area. When installing the work, a staff member asked if we could 'keep it forever' signifying a similar emotional reaction to the mundane and magical combined alongside an awareness of the fleeting nature of the heterotopic space. The introduction of Augmented Reality added an intentional interruption designed to replicate scattered, layered memories. Expected gallery etiquette was challenged by displaying printed text on seating, and by extending the exhibition into the adjoining café with table runners that invited spectators to engage with an alternative digital space using a QR code.

Windows were partially revealed to blend inside and outside, video screens were introduced at right angles to create an inner 'space' of activity seen against the still exhibits. The sculptural design of this section of the show was intended to visually illustrate the research themes of conversations and cross-cultural communication, with

the construction forcing the videos to 'speak' to one another. During the research I had literal and figurative conversations with collaborators, the work and myself. The process was never easy or clear, often repetitive and frustrating, something that I recreated in the edit of the confronting video screens. Voices overlap, cuts are swift, and clips finish abruptly, but all of a sudden there is harmony, echoing and mirroring, and an understanding is attained. The idea was to force the viewer to listen and to cede control, as I did, to eventually gain an understanding.

The videos also feature contextual imagery to immerse the viewer in my daily life in each city. Many of the selected videos and imagery used depict the same moment taken from varying viewpoints. The films begin with the same moment on both screens; on the left screen I am dressed as a local 'alien' in Ningbo whilst the right screen shows the photograph I took of the two people directly opposite me at the time of filming. Watching this, the viewer can experience the moment as I did, the screens acting as myself and my audience.

The new works also incorporate text, inviting the viewer to look at images through a semi-transparent layer of text, or through semi-transparent image at text. In the exhibition space this was effective, the time of day affecting the transparency of the layered fabrics and angle of view eliciting new meanings. The full height (over four metres) was used with large colourful banners including an overarching entry piece with overlaid texts. Texts and translations are so much a part of the China visual experience, in a way no longer so much a part of contemporary urban Europe, that blaring out of text was important, as also the fragmentation of its meaning.

Due to the installation time (bridging the Christmas holidays) and the lack of a formal exhibition launch, feedback was circumscribed as industry/academic contacts outside MMU had little opportunity to experience the environment. The intentionally fragmented banner of Chinese Simplified, Chinese Traditional, and English text in the archway (and in the accompanying zine) that was intended to question and tempt viewers to enter the space where the exhibition text introduced the themes, elicited some unanticipated responses from Chinese friends: 'You should have asked me to

translate!'. This opened up the possibility that the mistranslation and fragmentation themes could be misunderstood even in context, possibly causing offence or misconceptions. Residing in Amsterdam, without much time to install or test out this section in Manchester, in the future I would like to dedicate time to working with my Chinese collaborators and friends to discuss how to convey that mistranslation is an intended theme, not an error, authentically preserving the themes and ideas explored through the research.

Exhibition Zine: https://youtu.be/0ZMxJy1Q8Zc
Links to Exhibition Films: https://youtu.be/0ZMxJy1Q8Zc
Exhibition playlist: https://youtu.be/0ZMxJy1Q8Zc
Videos of installation:
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLMUCNW5BW42S5jeL60PDxwJVG2KpbDmMS
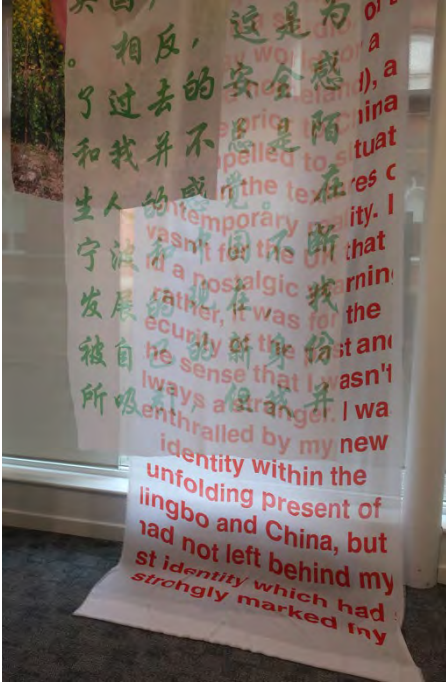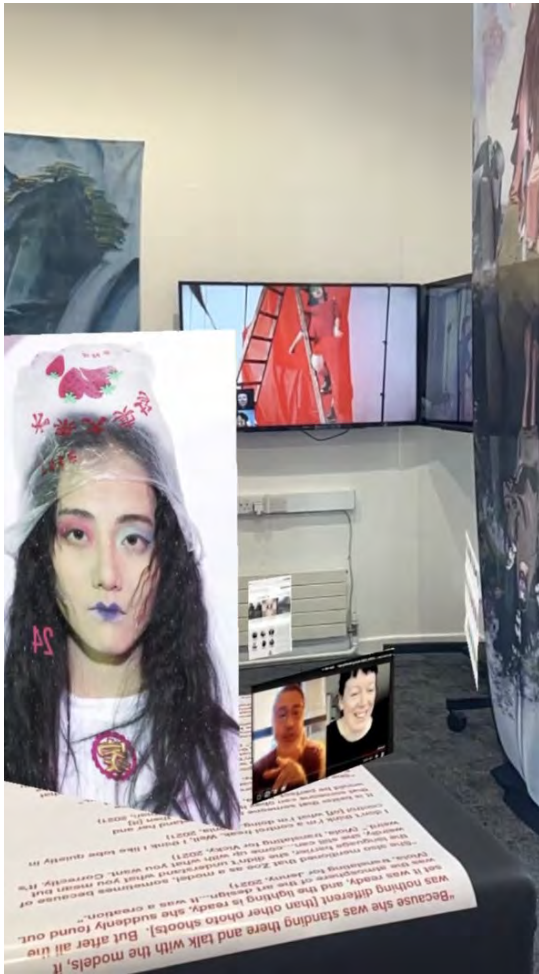
Installation views:

Looking toward the exhibition space from the café area adjoining.

New work presenting text layering

Video installation at the left of the space.

Installation Image incorporating Augmented Reality Content

Appendix G: Collective Dreams Exhibition Guide for Examiners

集体梦想　　　**Layla Sailor**

Collective Dreams

(Layla Regan 19095789)

Exhibition Guide for Examiners

Note to examiners: You are invited find and develop your own interpretations of the show and the presented artworks. This is an important point for me to highlight since it connects to some of the research's core themes namely collaboration and control, communication, wandering, and discovery. This guide contains optional supplementary information to support/enhance your understanding; please use at your discretion.

Introduction

Collective Dreams is an exhibition of newly curated work accompanying a written thesis submitted for a Masters by Research. As a fashion image-maker, my working practice changed in unexpected ways as a result of living and working in three Chinese cities (Wuhan, Ningbo and Hong Kong) from 2016 to 2020. My Master's research reflected on these changes, using interviews with former collaborators in China and revisiting the work itself.

Overall Exhibition Design

The original idea (as mentioned in the thesis) was to create a space that would be reminiscent of Chinese garden design, with a central 9 point bridge motif (inspired by one I encountered in Suzhou) that would guide the visitor through the work. When deciding on where to place the artworks, it was important to me that the viewer would be drawn to enter the main gallery area, but also interact in a way that is comfortable to them and not too controlled. As in my photographic practice, I wanted to create a framework for the visitor to wander more freely, so I changed the zig-zag bridge to a circular/spiral form, inspired by my Process Map (see Exhibition Zine p.5-6) and the circular nature of the research journey. The use of fabrics as a printed medium was to recall the concept of fluidity and hybridity that becomes a part of life when working across cultures. The 'Welcome' mat is not only to make visitors feel welcome but is the exact same mat that was placed outside the door at ZFIT Ningbo, one of the first images I took in China. For visitors who have been to China it is

an instantlly recognisable (while mundane) symbol seen at schools, offices and restaurants. Quotes from interviews with collaborators (9) are draped over a set of benches in the centre of the space helping to contextual- ise the work in the participants own words, disrupting the audience as they explore and allowing them to make unexpected connections.

Heterotopias

During the course of the research my interview findings led me to a realisation about the fashion photography shoot as a heterotopic encounter. Heterotopic sites link to other sites by both reflecting and inverting them, but they remain real environments, environments that have transformative effects on those interacting with them. (Foucault, 1984, Johnson, 2006).

Several of the photographs displayed in this exhibition were taken at the weekend in classrooms I used to teach on weekdays in Wuhan. The teaching room temporarily turned into a magical space, inverting the rigidity of the schoolroom and creating an effect that my collaborator Zoe described as an "open eye experience" (2021). This heterotopic transformation is now applied to another everyday University space, normally a cafe and meeting area. When installing the work, a staff member asked if we could "keep it

forever" signifying a similar emotional reaction to the mundane and magical combined alongside an awareness of the fleeting nature of the heterotopic space. The artwork Magick Meltdown (5) , created in Hong Kong in 2020, demonstrates the concept of a heterotopia in the exhibition, but from another perspective. As I wrote in my thesis: "Hong Kong's reality is heterotopic since its culture is multiple and transitory, fragmented and layered." The use of transparent fabric is intentional to signify this fragility, layering and fragmentation.

Conversations – videos

Youtube link: https://youtu.be/0ZMxJy1Q8Zc

Collective Dreams: Conversations (4) is comprised of two screens connected together at
a right angle. The sculptural design of this section of the show was intended to visually illustrate the research themes of Conversations and cross-cultural communication, with the construction forcing the videos to "speak" to one another. During the research I had literal and figuritive conversations with collaborators, the work and myself. The process was never easy or clear, often repetitive and frustrating, something that I have tried to recreate in the edit. Voices overlap, cuts are swift, and clips finish abruptly, but all of a sudden there is harmony, echoing and mirroring, and an understanding is attained. This resonates with my experience as a foreigner in China. You must listen, observe, and wait until the conclusion of a lengthy sentence for a translation. If you are interrupted, you may lose track of what is happening; nevertheless, sometimes you can intuitively "fill in the gaps." The viewer must give up control, as I did, to gain understanding.

The videos also feature contextual imagery to immerse the viewer in my daily life in each city. Many of the collected videos and imagery used are the same moment taken from varying viewpoints. The films begin with the same moment on both screens, on the left screen I am dressed as a local 'alien' in Ningbo whilst the right screen shows the photograph I took of the two people directly opposite me at the time of filming. Watching this, the viewer can experience the moment as I did, the screens acting as myself and my audience.

The films also incorporate footage of the photo shoots, taken at the time by me and multiple collaborators. Simultaneously the research interview runs on one screen while the second screen shows the photo shoot being discussed. There are humorous exchanges,
perplexity when speaking the same and different languages, memories, and translation errors. In the

same way as staged recreations of the memories of others may lead the viewer to elements of truth, mishearing or mistranslating can actually give the listener a voice in the conversation. At the exhibition's entry is a QR code for anonymous, open-ended feedback. My intention is that the comments will reflect the personal

responses of the audience and result in the creation of new work, thereby continuing the processes of discovery, collection, and collaboration.

2

Hybridity and Memory

Hybridity is a vast concept which is represented throughout the exhibition as an overall theme that underpins the creative work. The banner above the entrance entitled *Conversations* (1) contains excerpts of human interpretation merged with AI machine translation, Simplified and Traditional Chinese are combined together, with mixed fonts adding to the Bricolage effect. *Revisiting* (6) is an assemblage of three overlapping fabric banners. The banner at the rear contains extracts of text from Part One of my thesis, in which I reflect on a feeling of nostalgia I had when I first moved to China, but not for home (the United Kingdom), rather for the feeling sense of "not always being a stranger." While "revisiting" and remaking images from my archive of work, I created the second banner, which was an image of my collaborator Rnan composited into a 1980s-style heart-shape (a style I had seen in a Hong Kong wedding album) and placed over a field in Ningbo. The pose was inspired by 1980s Chinese advertising photographs that combined classical poses with 1980s colour schemes, soft focus, and styling to create a modern-nostalgic hybrid. The artwork represents the point in time when my memories and experiences fused with those of my students to form our own *Collective Dreams.* The third banner features a simplified Chinese machine translation of the English text. Each of the three fabric hangings have distinct degrees of opacity and are placed in front of a large window. Depending on the time of day and the intensity of the light, various words blend and combine at different moments, visually depicting my experience of cultural hybridity as something not fixed, fluid and evolving.

Dao and Dada

The thesis describes how Ningbo, Wuhan, and Hong Kong altered my working methods . My fractured identity in Ningbo led me to seek connection through photographic practice. I wandered the city and obsessively photographed daily textures and events, drawing inspiration from my previous influences Dada and Surrealism, later sharing the work through a digital zine. *Shenmezine* was a creative experiment involving a dynamic layout that varied depending on the computer or other device it was viewed on, incorporating into the design the same loose grip on control that I had when taking the images.

In this exhibition, *Shenmezine (7)* is remade as a physical version of the original *Shenmezine* website, reconstructed as a collage of images, artefacts, and fragments collected and created prior to and during the research process. QR codes contribute to the viewer's disorientation and offer heterotopic Augment-

ed Reality interactions, with virtual scenes collaged over tangible photographs. Sound, motion, and imagery work similarly to the original site, and are activated by the audience's movements and actions, compelling the spectator to cede control and travel through the work, echoing my

original Daoist (wandering/collecting) and DADA (play) influences. This randomness is reinforced in the Zine table runners

(10) placed on the tables outside the gallery in the cafe area (10). Elements of the work for this exhibition and thesis were reviewed and recreated in China, Dubai, the United Kingdom, and Amsterdam while at cafés and other public areas.

Repeatedly living as a foreigner has taught me to continuously adapt to each environment and use the resources available to me, leading me to allow Collective Dreams to spill out beyond the gallery space. In Hong Kong, with closures of heri- tage cafes reported regularly, the cafe environment represents a vanishing era and shared experiences. Visitors to the café area are interrupted and perhaps distracted by the QR codes and visuals that, like my memories, are scattered, layered and may lead to fresh discoveries or connections.

3

Exhibition Zine Link:

"The exhibition forms a sort of heterotopia where East meet West, inside meets outside, cafe meets gallery and on-site meets online". (Sykas, 2022)

Appendix H: Revisiting: Collective Dreams in Hong Kong

In February 2023 I travelled to Hong Kong and stayed in the hotel room that I had lived in for 10 months between 2019-2020. I reimagined the small space using images and materials taken from the thesis exhibition. The layering of my new work, revisited work printed on sheer fabrics and text, placed in the domestic setting of a hotel room gave me insights on how the work may travel in future. As the creator and a former resident of this space, I found the heterotopic effect surprising and surreal, with Hong Kong's sounds and textures interacting with the photographs. I would like to repeat this experiment with both internal and outside audiences (local housing directly looks into the hotel room window).


Installation views, February 2023

The 100-square-foot hotel room has a wide picture window, a glass bathroom, and multiple mirrors to give the illusion of being bigger. Reflections of the text in the window unintentionally evoked the research project's topics of fragmentation and reflection, while the small space and glass elements recalled the layering of the Manchester exhibition.

Videos from installation tests:
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLMUCNW5BW42QFNamWkhQI7muo1539htEk
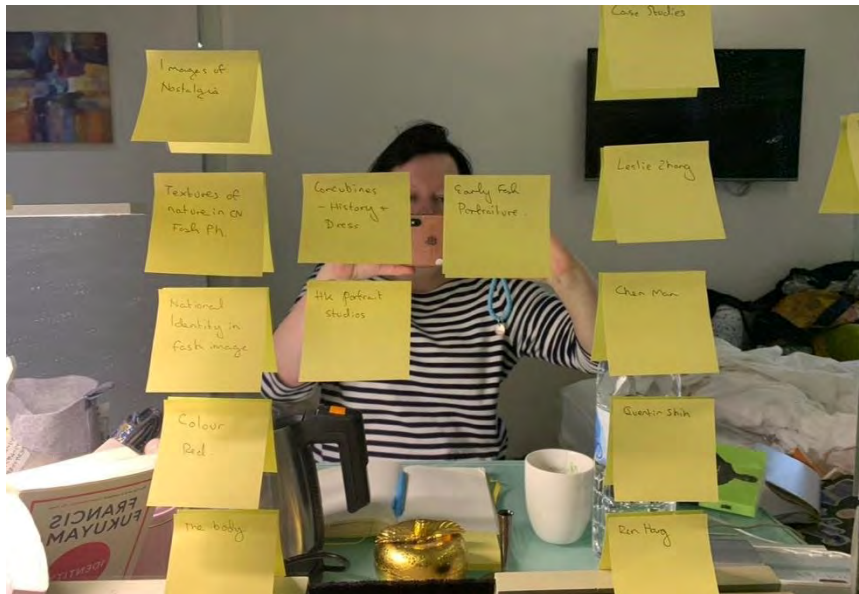
Research process, Hong Kong, 2020

Appendix I: Practice in Context – Behind the Scenes Documentation

Behind the Scenes of a photoshoot in Wuhan, 2018

Behind the Scenes of a Commercial photoshoot in Shanghai, 2019

Behind the Scenes of a Commercial photoshoot in Hong Kong, 2020

# Appendix J: Timeline of Pivotal Moments in Chinese Fashion & Fashion Media

1921 *Labor and Women,* the first Chinese women's magazine, was published by All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) under the guidance of the Communist Party in China.

1978 In 1978, Deng **Xiaoping** officially announces the launching of the 'Four Modernizations', which marks the beginning of the reform era in China.

1979 Pierre Cardin holds the first fashion show in China, Beijing, March 1979. (China Daily)

1980 China's first magazine dedicated to style 'Fashion' is launched, featuring advice on dressmaking.
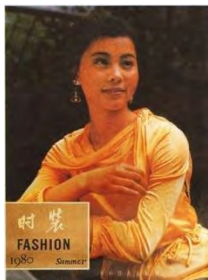
1987 Elle Hong Kong premiere issue is launched in November

1988 Elle China launched with two issues per year

1991 Elle Taiwan (originally Elle Taipei) launched

1994 Amoeba Magazine is launched in Hong Kong, focusing on youth culture and street style

1998 Modern Weekly – the first weekly magazine in China prints its first issue

2001 Shanghai Fashion Week founded

2001 Kevin Lee, launches his first magazine, *WestEast*, in Paris, later relocating the magazines base to Hong Kong. (Below Image: WestEast Issue 8)

2001 First Pingyao Photography Festival

2003 Photographer Chen Man (while still a student at China Academy of Fine Art) produces 4 covers for the magazine *Vision.* Her use of post production and Chinese motifs and fashion photography gains attention worldwide and by 2008 her work is exhibited in the V&A as part of *China Now Design.* (Below Image: Year of the Monkey Cover for Vision)

2005 (Sept) The First Vogue China is launched in Beijing

2006 Shaway Yeh takes over as Editorial Director at Modern Weekly. "To some extent, we were able to write our own rules because there was a vacuum when I started," explains Yeh. "The international franchises were all trying to make clones of their reader profiles here in China and, let's face it, that was always going to be awkward. As a homegrown magazine, we didn't have that baggage. I wanted to nurture a new kind of reader who would evolve with us," she says. (BOF). Modern Weekly (and later Modern Media spearhead a new visual approach, commissioning photographers including Leslie Zhang, Ren Hang and Zeng Wu to shoot fashion editorials.

Above – selection of covers from Modern Weekly between 2006 and 2023

2009 Tasha Liu opens the fashion boutique Dongliang in Shanghai (later Labelhood) only selling garments by young Chinese designers

2012 Photographer Li Qi photographs Ming Qi for the cover of Vogue China

2013 The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is launched by Xi Jinping

2016-2018 In 2016 SFW approaches Dongliang to produce a satellite event promoting independent Chinese designers. The retailer and platform merge into Labelhood in 2018. "..the goal was to create a space for homegrown design and resist the idea that Chinese designers had to receive Western success to become legitimate in the fashion world. Chinese design could be dynamic and exciting; it could prove itself with no help from anyone else, and develop a completely new way of comprehending fashion.."

2019 Dazed Magazine partners with Yoho Group to launch Dazed China as a bi-monthly print magazine and online platforms focused on global youth culture "curating stories that will bridge the East and West across fashion, art, music and film."