

**School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts**

**Self-representation of Chinese Migrants Using  
Digital Storytelling for Social inclusion**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
of  
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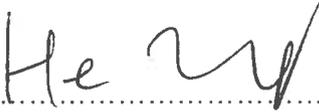
**October 2017**

## Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

**Human Ethics** The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number # RD\_35\_14.

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# Abstract

This study builds on the scholarship of digital literacy to explore the democratising potential of emerging forms of narrative. Specifically, it explores how migrants' take-up of digital technology, especially new media technologies, may constitute the practice of cultural citizenship in the digital age. It examines the participatory media practice of digital storytelling (DST) for Chinese international and internal migrants in Australia and China, to reveal opportunities for having a voice that digitally afforded self-representation may provide to Chinese people on the move.

The study asks how opportunities for having a voice emerge and are made use of by Chinese migrant groups in their respective destination societies. Based on a mediation view on DST, it develops a storytelling approach to reveal the migrant narrative, the researcher narrative and the technology user narrative that emerge in DST to emphasise the complexities of voice formation and amplification. Comparative DST case studies are designed for Chinese international migrants in the state of Western Australia and, for the first time, for Chinese internal migrants in China's southeastern coastal province of Zhejiang.

The findings indicate that migrant participants form bottom-up participatory dynamics, which are most notably demonstrated in participants' cross-cultural communication, improved self-expression and craftsmanship in video creation in Western Australia and participants' self-provision of devices and playful handling of the workshop in Zhejiang. The stories, based on personal lived experience, follow common themes of leisure, work and study and diverge from the socio-economic assumptions of migration that has prevailed in dominant migrant stories in both destination societies. However, international and internal migrant participants were participatory and self-expressive to different extents, due to a number of constraints, including language and cultural difference, technology literacy, audience anticipation and privacy concerns. As a result, participatory dynamics formed for the two participant groups did not lead to completely unreserved expression of critical viewpoints in most digital stories.

The study further discovers the possibilities and challenges for DST in the context of rapid technological advancement. Many countries have digital inclusion policy

agendas encouraging wider engagement with new media. An organiser of DST may reduce reliance on institutions, in view of migrants' increasing familiarity with new media and the existence of non-digital resources that have been underutilised. However, a heightened consciousness of privacy risks in online environments is causing existing new media users to withdraw from content distribution over online platforms.

In conclusion, the study argues that despite the constraints, DST has potential for improving the social inclusion of migrants. The practice proves effective in reaching different Chinese migrant audiences and providing them with quality access to new media technologies. It can also be developed as a practice-based research method, which has advantages over traditional methods in inquiring into the participatory, collaborative, creative and innovative spirit of media production in the current era. There is a need for further research to adapt DST for experimentation with other migrant groups who are more difficult to reach than those addressed in this study, and to continue to explore its methodological usefulness.

# Acknowledgements

The past four years of my PhD study has been an arduous journey. I can still remember the miserable days in which I could not make the painstakingly collected data speak to me. When I finally felt strongly about the data, I had to fish up Lego parts from the swamp to rewrite a good part of the first draft. Most of the time, I could not see or imagine an end to the journey. This is why at this point of thesis completion, I am so grateful to people who have helped me, encouraged me and shown me kindness and care.

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# Dedication

*This work is dedicated simultaneously to my mother Mrs Xiaoying Bai who has unconditionally believed in my decisions to leave home and 'drift' from city to city, and to my father Mr Tian Zhang whose unresolvable doubt about my ability to endure hardship has driven me to stay strong in whatever circumstances.*

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# List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACMI	Australian Centre for the Moving Image
B & R	China's One Belt One Road Initiative
CDS	Center for Digital Storytelling
CNNIC	China Internet Network Information Center
DST	digital storytelling
ICTs	information and communication technologies
UNSD	Statistics Division of Department of Economics and Social Affairs, the United Nations
WA	Western Australia
ZUMC	Zhejiang University of Media and Communications

# Chapter 1 Introduction: Digital technology, mobility and citizenship

When I turned 18 years old, I left my inland home province of China to search for an ideal place in which to study, work and live. The mobile app WeChat, created by Tencent, has been my close companion. Whether I was in prosperous East China or a developed country in the West, exchanging daily encounters with family, friends and strangers through the instant messaging and blogging app was a routine part of life. This is not unusual since humans are social beings who interact and expand their interaction all the time. But with the emergence of innovative digital technology, the easy, immediate and affordable exchange of stories over a long distance is unprecedented. Storytelling is more capable than ever to help individuals and groups express a demand for (among other things) dignity, equality and justice in the public realm. It serves as the soil that has nurtured a participatory media movement: digital storytelling. Interestingly, coinciding with this waning sense of distance and proliferation of self-representation, we have started to talk about people on the move in relation not only to geographical locations, but also to citizenship in the destination society, an association that used to belong only to the immobile: those who stayed. This study contributes to scholarship about migrant citizenship in contemporary digital culture. It asks, to what extent does the use of digital technology connect migrants to citizenship, in both local and global contexts? Given the increased fluidity of people for work, professional practices, study and tourism in the context of deepening globalisation, the question opens a bigger concern about whether communication via digital means is of assistance to migrants' often arduous pursuit of a better life. The study seeks to identify potentialities and problems in technological innovations have brought to the search for improvements in social inclusion. Given the dramatic rise in anti-immigrant reactions during the recent European refugee crisis and elsewhere, including Australia, it is ever more pressing to address these questions.

To explore the connections between migration and citizenship, this research investigates the significance of self-representation for migratory Chinese populations

in an age when digital technology has become pervasive in our everyday life. I focus, in particular, on digital storytelling (abbreviated as DST in the rest of the thesis except headings), which is a method for turning personal experience into short videos in informal workshop settings. Workshop-based DST has enduring appeal for researchers, activists and public institutions, but it has not yet been introduced in China. Following a qualitative research approach, I carried out DST workshops to observe the formation and negotiation of geographical identities through self-representation by two types of migrants in two migrant-populated locations: Chinese international migrants in Western Australia and Chinese internal migrants in Zhejiang, China. Using DST workshops as the primary means of collecting data, I examined self-representation as a place-making content creation and distribution activity, and its potential use for civic purposes. Since DST may not be a familiar concept for all readers, the following section describes this phenomenon and pertinent shifting terrains before introducing the background to the study.

## 1.1 Digital storytelling as self-representation in a digital age

Pioneered by Joe Lambert and Dana Atchley in the 1990s in California, DST is a creative digital practice rooted in the community arts movement. It typically takes the form of a workshop where a small group of participants are facilitated by experts to tell personal stories in the first person through short videos. Since a video consists of images and voice recordings, a digital story is typically a photo-voice story. Digital storytelling was invented, based on the belief that creativity is not ‘the province of experts’ (Lambert, 2009, p. 86) and as a means of guaranteeing one’s civil right to the freedom of expression. As digital technology is becoming more and more accessible to various populations, DST’s potential to provide opportunities for marginalised social groups has been explored in recent years, for poverty reduction programs in Southeast Asia (Tacchi, 2009), for the emancipation of women’s voices in Turkey (Şimşek, 2012), and advocacy for queers in Australia (Vivienne, 2013), to have a voice. As demonstrated in the aforementioned studies, DST proved to be adaptable to different parts of the world; more important, digital stories of marginalised groups, more often than not confessional and creative accounts of

personal experience, can serve as an alternative to hegemonic narratives and discourses around these groups.

Lambert and Atchley established the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) in 1993 to promote DST (it changed its name to StoryCenter in 2015). According to the StoryCenter website, the organisation is the ‘founder of the digital storytelling movement’ and has ‘helped over 20,000 individuals share their stories’<sup>1</sup>. So far, most DST workshops around the world have been conducted by cultural and educational institutions and community organisations (McWilliam, 2009, p. 39). Workshop-based DST was introduced to Australia by the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) and Queensland University of Technology at the turn of century. Both institutions are still running DST workshops as part of their community engagement program and part of coursework. The ACMI runs DST workshops for people with ethnic-minority or immigration backgrounds in order to build a participatory base for intercultural understanding and community cohesion (‘DST about immigration’, n.d.; Simondson, 2009, p. 123; ‘Young Chinese migrants in Melbourne’, n.d.). To date, there is no record of its adoption in China.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the original digital story telling initiative of Lambert and Atchley, British documentarist and photographer Daniel Meadows created a structured and intensive model for the DST workshop, which I have employed in this study. The DST endeavour *Capture Wales*<sup>3</sup>, which he undertook in collaboration with BBC Wales from 2001 to early 2008 (Meadows & Kidd, 2009), remains the largest and longest such project so far. The model he used is also known as the BBC model. Meadows’ workshop usually included three stages: story-circle exercises of first-person oral storytelling, making of photo-voice stories, and in-group screening of all stories.

However, with the sharp increase in internet penetration in both developed and developing countries, and the rise of smartphones that afford technological self-equipment, I call for an urgent repositioning of face-to-face DST workshops in an increasingly digitally literate world. As Henry Jenkins points out in a recent interview, if we understand DST in its broadest sense as including any stories

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.storycenter.org/about/>

<sup>2</sup> The commercial application of DST in China was presented by Qiongli Wu (2009) in *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling around the World*, but the application did not involve DST in workshop form.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/galleries/pages/capturewales.shtml>

produced through digital means, the term could be so dispersed across digital platforms that it ‘will outlive its usefulness’ (Jenkins, Lashley, & Creech, 2017). Even if we do not expand the concept, the very distinctiveness of DST is threatened by the growth of a range of DIY (do-it-yourself) media practices such as vlogging. It is, therefore, necessary to revisit DST and ask if there is still a place for it as a participatory media practice, what role it can play, and whether its role now might be different from its previous role. I examine DST with these questions in mind, and associate it with broader issues.

Digital storytelling has both digital and non-digital properties. It is digital in the sense that its central part is multimodal storytelling, combining images, sound and editing, or more plainly speaking, content production via digital means. However, DST is also based on non-digital properties such as a facilitator-participant interaction, oral storytelling techniques and people’s commitment to long hours of engagement. Bearing in mind the previously mentioned characteristics, DST has been adaptable to serve various purposes in practice.

Our methods of group process and story creation serve as a reflective practice, a professional development tool, a pedagogical strategy, and as a vehicle for education, community mobilization, and advocacy.<sup>4</sup>

Digital storytelling is useful for research into meaning-making processes underlying storytelling, activism, identity and creativity during uses of new media technologies in various social contexts. As John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam (2009b) have called attention, in *Story circle: Digital storytelling around the world*, to how DST is being increasingly adopted in both developed and developing countries and across public and private sectors, and can serve in research as ‘an emergent form, a new media practice, an activist/community movement and a textual system’ (p. 4). Meanwhile, with the increasing use of autoethnography and visual ethnography to create digital content, there is also the possibility that a DST workshop can stand alone as a research method for self-representation by various social groups.

As an object of research, DST is, first, a process of content production. As Hartley and McWilliam (2009a) have pointed out, ‘despite the term “digital” in digital storytelling, the emphasis is on the *story* and the *telling*’ (p. 3). Telling a story about oneself, the material that people produce in DST is not simply representation but

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.storycenter.org/about/>

self-representation, which according to Nancy Thumim (2012) ‘has a history in scholarship as long as the history of the idea of the self’ (p. 7) but ‘proliferates when intersecting with digital culture’ (p. 1).

As Thumim has emphasised, self-representation is inherently democratising since it challenges the idea that one should always be represented by others. However, the practice is never short of complicated social and cultural processes.

In instances of self-representation there must still (always) be choices about *which* aspects of self to represent and *how* to represent them, [...] Moreover, because self-representations must, by definition, be mediated, the challenge that is connoted by the claim that someone is ‘doing it for themselves’ does not turn out to be at all straightforward – self-representations, to borrow Perkin’s phrase, ‘do do political work’. (p. 8)

Thanks to technological advancements, it is easy to self-represent with the aid of a variety of apps that one can complete the learning process in seconds. Meanwhile, self-representation is facing a new set of complexities in its technicality and implications. To understand this situation, we must revisit the concept of digital technology.

With the rapidly growing use of digital technology by non-professionals around the world, scholarly interest has shifted from ‘the technological’, which falls under information and communication technologies (ICTs) to ‘the digital’, that is, the broader social, economic and cultural transformations, with the introduction of digital technology at their core. ‘The digital’ has become ‘the whole panoply of virtual simulacra, instantaneous communication, ubiquitous media and global connectivity that constitutes much of our contemporary experience’ (Gere, 2002, p. 11). As Warschauer has argued, ‘ICT does not exist as an external variable to be injected from the outside to bring about certain results. Rather, it is woven in a complex manner into social systems and processes’ (Warschauer, 2003, p. 8).

In the case of individuals, concerns with ‘the digital’ range from the acquisition of technological skills to the use of technology to establish and strengthen engagement with society. Social inclusion is increasingly discussed not only in relation to marginalised social groups such as refugees and people with disabilities, but also in relation to people with varying degrees of access to a range of social resources. In the area of media and communication, scholars tend to approach the issue of social inclusion in terms of ‘digital inclusion’. Wildermuth (2010) has stated that, ‘A

digitally included person, in this understanding, feels like a full member of the community or society and has the competence to influence with or without using the new technology' (pp. 272-273).

With the rise of 'the digital', self-representation is taking place through media uses on a daily basis. Self-representation has roots in literature (Gagnier, 1991), social activism (Yeo, 1998), psychology (Krystal, 1997), law (Kaufman, 1977) and other disciplines, and, when mediated through digital technologies, bears several distinct features. It synthesises writing and oral narration, requires presence in physical or online social space, and can include visual elements. Self-representation has been studied for migrants, particularly in the form of cultural practices ranging from life stories telling (Jacka, 1998), language acquisition (Miller, 2000), collective public display (Hintzen, 2001), to more recent video making (de Leeuw & Rydin, 2007) and photograph-based activities (Van Gorp, 2014).

Continuing changes in the social context for migrant self-representation require attention to further comprehend these phenomena. The first context is the 'delineated' feature of contemporary migrants (Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000). Migration has taken on a mass scale, multi-directions, and varies dramatically in time, purposes, channels, and lifestyles. Different types of migrants, such as educational migrants, economic migrants, cultural migrants and lifestyle migrants, tend to partially overlap with each other. The emergence of these new categories of migration poses a challenge to the established system that exerts control and surveillance on migrants. Instead of focussing on the influence of state policy, new categories foreground migrant subjectivity in dealing with tensions between disciplinary forces and personal motivation and goal.

Another important context to consider is the changing meanings of social inclusion and citizenship which are long-standing issues for migrants as a minority group in the social hierarchy. Both terms are increasingly multifaceted, as a new kind of social structure that 'is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies' (Castells, 2004, p. 3) is taking shape. The network society built upon this structure 'works on the basis of a binary logic of inclusion/exclusion, whose boundaries change over time, both with the changes in the network's programs and with the conditions of performance of these programs'

(p. 23). The socio-economic condition is no longer the only prominent factor to consider when positioning yourself socially, as identified in *Technology and Social Inclusion*:

There are many ways that the poor can have fuller participation and inclusion even if they lack an equal share of resources. At the same time, even the well-to-do may face problems of social exclusion because of political persecution or discrimination based on age, gender, sexual preference, or disability.  
(Warschauer, 2003, p. 9)

In Warschauer's discussion of social inclusion, the emphasis on participation enabled by equality in sharing resources is echoed by new understandings of citizenship. As Graham Murdock (2002) has argued that apart from 'basic material conditions', 'fuller citizenship also required access to relevant symbolic resources and the competences to use them effectively' (p. 11). The anthropological concept of cultural citizenship (Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Ong et al., 1996), among others, has brought citizenship beyond its legal definition into the diversified lived experience of everyday life, especially for ethnic minorities at the central stage of American racial politics. The Latino Cultural Studies Working Group believes that cultural citizenship refers to 'the right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense' (Rosaldo, 1994). As Rosaldo has explained, *culture* 'introduced vernacular ideas about first-class citizenship', so the interpretation of cultural citizenship could vary from person to person. It can be the basic claim to welfare but can also be the intangible claims to dignity and visibility. This understanding of citizenship emphasises that cultural citizenship is anti-hegemonic and envisions social change through social acceptance of cultural difference in both the private and public realms. Meanwhile, with a focus on Asian migrants in the United States of America, Aihwa Ong (1996) has stated that cultural citizenship is subjectification, 'in the Foucauldian sense of self-making and being made by power relations'. She has argued that cultural citizenship is not unilateral but a dual process that cannot escape from the inscription of state power. Although Rosaldo and Ong differ in their accounts of the construction of cultural citizenship, they both diverge from the state-centric view towards migrants that indoctrinates sameness. Based on Rosaldo and Ong, Lok Siu (2001) has further argued that diasporic cultural citizenship should not be treated as existing within the nation-state of residence, but as 'a localised process which is enmeshed in a global context'.

If we acknowledge these shifting terrains that underscore process instead of effect in thinking about digital technology and subjectivity, rather than adaptation and submission in thinking about migrants, we need to revisit self-representation. For migrants, self-representation is a recurrent and evolving practice to claim equal rights and opportunities, with an eye on new contextual forces. It is on these grounds that DST with its community activism background is conducted, observed and critiqued.

In the next section, persistent and emergent issues in the field of media, which can provide an academic context for this research, are discussed. These issues unfold through an introduction to the theoretic groundwork, as well as through challenges encountered and responses provided in the development of this thesis.

## 1.2 Background

### 1.2.1 Digital literacy and cultural citizenship

When it becomes convenient for everyone with digital devices at hand to make self-representations using words, images, voice recordings and videos about their everyday experience, the value of self-representation encounters a crisis. It is important to clarify that the opportunities for self-representation should not be taken for granted. According to my Australian-based case studies, with participants from various Asia-Pacific countries, people need to be informed, convinced, committed and even pushed throughout DST workshops, in order to become aware of and proactive towards the opportunity to self-represent.

In addition to individual awareness, scholars such as Wildermuth have identified that a digital divide is at stake: ‘besides imbalances in physical access to technology, the digital divide further includes imbalances in resources and skills’ (Wildermuth, 2010, p. 268). However, further clarification is required as to which resources and skills are needed and how to provide them to people. Buckingham (2007) has argued that a ‘new digital divide’ can be identified in the outcomes of school students’ experiences of digital technology. He has proposed that the method of providing necessary resources and skills is to significantly enhance the outcomes of school students’ experiences of digital technology. According to his observation, students in the United Kingdom engage with digital technology ‘in much more informal, active and

sometimes creative ways' outside school rather than in school's mandatory classes which centre 'narrowly' on skills training. Therefore, as with the amorphousness of the term, 'the digital', 'the digital divide' reflects more than problems in materialising an ideal setting for skills acquisition and use. This term is also concerned with something much broader: how to provide all people with access to technology to better their lives.

No less importance is now attached to the ability to draft emails, send text messages or write online posts than to the ability to read and handwrite letters. The omnipresent activity of creating and circulating content through electronic media which foregrounds creativity, efficiency and mastery of diverse content-related skills, according to John Hartley, adds up to a 'mode of literacy' (Hartley, 2010, p. 17): 'an autonomous means of communication in which "writing" is as widespread as "reading"' (ibid.). For the first time in history, with electronic platforms flourishing, non-specialists are able to take multiple agentive roles including audience, author and publisher.

In this thesis, I argue that digital literacy responds to the question of how digital technology can work for the improvement of people's life, and this is outlined in the following three points.

Firstly, digital literacy triggers experience-based world conceptualisation. Digital technologies such as the Internet and mobile devices expedite the formation of global mindsets and visions. It is evident that 'knowledge, culture, communication and identity' are all moving towards a 'global' paradigm (Hartley, 2010, pp. 17-19). Knowing how to absorb and exchange massive amounts of information and knowledge, means that people are no longer reliant on information from the authorities or experts for their understanding of the world. Instead, they celebrate and accumulate personal experiences of travelling to places, meeting people and joining in activities. Personal experiences have become the foundation for world knowledge. A number of scholars have found that 'we appear now to be moving to a sort of social knowledge based on personal convictions' (Van der Weel, 2011, pp. 201-202).

Secondly, digital literacy leads to diverse patterns of social engagement. Online communication has been found to be complementary to face-to-face interaction,

which remains the dominant form of human connection (Baym, 2010). As a consequence of this additional mode of interaction, people's approaches to learning about their local society and self-positioning within it has diversified. Despite scholarly endeavours to categorise people into communities and groups under identity banners, it may be hard to stabilise the meaning of these terms of collectivity. The Japanese researchers, Miyata, Boase, Wellman and Ikeda, have found that, 'communication through the Internet appears to be facilitating the turn away from the bounded, holistic communities of kin and neighbours and toward far-flung, multiple, and partial communities' (Miyata, Boase, Wellman, & Ikeda, 2006, p. 144). In addition to impacts on notions of communities, there are also changes in personal choices to (dis)engage with the local society or global connection. Some Asian immigrants to Western countries, for example, in spite of frequent media use, have been found to disengage and disconnect from the host society and to withdraw into ethnic enclaves and media spaces using their mother-tongue (Habu, 2000; Kim, 2011; Yoon, 2014a, 2014b).

Thirdly, digital literacy makes self-organisation one of the pathways to create media. For self-organising media practice, digital literacy is not mere know-how, but a collective means of cultural production and dissemination. Although self-organisation seems spontaneous due to shared interests or pursuits, it takes on a variety of structures, purposes and consequences. Fans resort to online platforms to create fan literature (Jenkins, 2006) while youth media initiators seek support from educational institutions (Rennie, 2011). Others try their best to do away with corporate and institutional interventions, such as DST practitioners' enthusiasm for activism in identity politics (Şimşek, 2012; Vivienne, 2013, 2016). Only a few self-organising practices are large-scale and last for years. The DST project *Capture Wales*, undertaken by Meadows and BBC Wales, for example, continued for about eight years. Most self-organising projects, however, are small-scale and one-off, like most of the workshops I carried out in fieldwork. (Some of these workshops had a short sequel). Nevertheless, this does not undermine the fact that self-organising media practice does sometimes create significantly enhanced awareness of issues that were previously rarely attended to.

Reflecting on the above points, this thesis argues that digital literacy is foundational for citizenship. Borders of nation states are blurring with increasing flows of people and cultural artefacts including media content. I use terms of migration, culture and citizenship, not as defined by nation states, but as adaptive, descriptive and of course diverse, putting migrants in the subjective position. My intention is to ‘bring out the materiality of the processes’ (Casas-Cortes et al., 2014, p. 30) underlying discourses surrounding migratory populations.

Citizenship is not fixed by government documents; it is instead ‘an attribute of populations’ (Hartley, 2012, p. 152), which ‘should be understood as a relational identity, inconstant, dynamic and evolving’ (p. 134). Digital literacy is inseparable from this view of citizenship as an evolving process. On the one hand, the introduction of digital technology has enabled citizens to be ‘self-informed’ rather than passively ‘informed’, and thus increasingly critical of professional knowledge, which authorities have recognised (Coleman, 2013, p. 383). On the other hand, the means of enacting citizenship has gone ‘textual’ (Jones, 2013, p. 399). Citizenship, therefore, becomes implicit and fragmented, as digital technology enables texts to be easily generated, accessed and changed in numerous ways. Citizenship is ‘embedded’ in people’s everyday digital practices of producing and circulating texts, just as youth citizenship is found to be embedded in quotidian semiotic practices (Reynolds & Chun, 2013). This new combination of being actively informed and textual, which is generated by digital technology, points to both the opportunity to exercise citizenship through digital literacy and the unavoidable fact that this positive implication of digital literacy is neither direct nor immediate. These issues with digital literacy are also of relevance for migrants in any society who usually call at least two geographic places with differing cultural traits ‘home’. Furthermore, these issues make it especially complicated when considering migrant citizenship in the cultural sense. Referred to as a foreigner and a stranger in the host society, migrants are one of the groups of people who are faced with ‘the Classic exclusion’ and ‘are most likely to engage in “citizenship of media”’ (Hartley, 2012, p. 143). Despite the complications that have been outlined, examining the use of media and the question of digital literacy is indispensable for an understanding of contemporary migrant cultural citizenship.

Digital technology provides migrants with opportunities to ‘have a voice’ in relation to their minority status at a macro level, and also to adjust their interpersonal communication across cultures with regard to their relationships with family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances and strangers. While the ‘voice’ issue has been addressed in relation to political participation (Couldry, 2008) and self-development (Tacchi, 2009) through DST, a growing number of studies have paid attention to how young and aspirational East-Asian digital users struggle to connect themselves with the foreign societies that they move into. Driven to migrate to the West for purposes including escape from family expectations, education, employment, and aspiration for an ideal lifestyle, young migrants from the global East encounter barriers to engaging with the local society due to their ethno-racial identity (Yoon, 2014a), poor language skills and articulation difficulties (Kim, 2011). These barriers to engagement, in many cases, lead to the withdrawal of migrants into ethnic enclaves and home-country media (ibid.). Recent studies addressing this issue may find concurrence in other recent work that has cast doubt on the libertarian vision of cosmopolitanism and democracy (Morozov, 2011; Zuckerman, 2013). Taking these two avenues of research together, is not necessarily pessimistic but, rather, admits that technological competence does not automatically create connection to others. As Zuckerman has argued, we are still facing a disconnected world. People instinctively tend to ‘flock together’ with those who are similar in cultural background, whether they are offline or online. The problems that migrants encounter in cross-cultural communication may be the strongest example of this disconnection.

To sum up, even though digital literacy may facilitate the exercise of cultural citizenship, migrant media users may still become socially disoriented and disconnected, enhancing the existing exclusionary mechanism of the destination society. Building on this argument, I argue that self-representation opportunities and their use in the digital age for the betterment of migrant life are useful, but to a limited extent. There remain issues to be identified and problems to be solved for different migrant cohorts in self-representing digitally.

## 1.2.2 The cross-border and domestic flows of Chinese media

Mediated by digital and non-digital affordances, migrant lived experiences are spanning geographic and ethnic divisions. As Sinclair and Cunningham (2000) have stated, while increasing populations are on the move, media flows have become a 'significant context' for understanding them.

Some Chinese media and diasporic Chinese media address the increasing flow of people and Chinese-language media content across the state borders. Sun (2005) has established the concept of a 'transnational mediasphere' in theorising the changing relationship between media and Chinese international migrants (p. 69). I argue that this connective perspective could break the shackles imposed by the geo-ethnic view towards migrant media users. From such a notion of cross-border media flow, the possibility and necessity arises to search for and focus upon common media experiences and practices for migrant groups on each side of state borders. This notion can help to delineate the agency of migrants in geographical mobility and the influence of events inside China, which is a 'rising cultural power' and a committed promotor of the Chinese language (Ding & Saunders, 2006).

Several media studies on Chinese international migrants have discussed the first-generation Chinese migrants' overseas consumption of Chinese-language media. A study (Lin & Song, 2006) on ethnic newspapers for Latino, Chinese and Korean migrants in the United States discovered that Chinese newspapers included the least number of geo-ethnic news stories, which are essential to community building, but the largest percentage of home-country news coverage. Moreover, the Chinese readers demonstrated lower neighbourhood engagement than Latino groups. Another study on Chinese migrants' consumption of China-produced television dramas in the United States revealed that although Chinese migrants form a cultural tie because of shared audience experience, this cultural tie neither provided opportunity for bonding and social integration, nor was sufficient to unite Chinese migrants in collective social action (Shi, 2005). These studies on older media, therefore, concluded that although overseas Chinese people engaged actively with Chinese-language media, they demonstrated passivity in community building or community activism.

The inactive relationship between media and collective action is challenged by new media studies on Chinese international migrants. Chinese technology firms such as the BAT (consisting of Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent) have drawn millions of Chinese expatriate users. Technology-enabled political and social engagement in Chinese issues has also gained momentum. For example, through the Internet, Chinese expatriates not only consume media content, but also create and use it to mobilise public opinion and action. As Guobin Yang (2009) has established, Chinese diasporas have a history of transnational activism in Chinese cyberspace. Since the student movement of 1989, Chinese expatriates have resorted to the Internet to influence political affairs in China, and elsewhere, where ethnic Chinese people are involved, such as Indonesia (p. 180). Moreover, cyberspace is playing an important supportive role in activist campaigns launched in migrants' country of residence. Recent studies on offline activist events by Chinese people living overseas have often included observations on their online representations. For example, in an investigation of Chinese demonstrations in foreign metropolises such as San Francisco against Tibetan separatism and the Western media reports of Tibet riots, researchers have tended to use both offline ethnography and online observation (H. Li, 2011; Nyíri, Zhang, & Varrall, 2010).

China's rapid development and deepening interaction with the rest of the world are accompanied by increasing flows of media content in many directions. To put these patterns of media flows in perspective, researchers have endeavoured to describe transnational and translocal interactions among Chinese-language media organisations and contents both in and out of China (Fung, 2008; Sun & Chio, 2012). Although a higher percentage of studies have focussed on the older media forms such as television and newspapers, examination of new media practices such as DST can be informed by them.

There is a growing list of studies on Internet users in China, and only a few of these studies focus on Chinese internal migrants. Sun (2009) has asserted that new media technologies, particularly the Internet, do provide a migrant worker group called Baomu (domestic workers) with symbolic resources to develop a perspective towards themselves that diverges from the established urban-centric interests (p. 20). However, Internet use in China has its limitations. Flourishing online communities

largely enhance the existing state-centric discourse as well as the elitist and nationalist tendencies, which make self-representation still the privilege of a minority of the population, as Haiqing Yu (2009, pp. 107-121) has observed. A more recent study has concluded that online self-expressions of urban youth are pervaded with a strong sense of pressure, frustration and boredom (Liu, 2011, p. 198).

As regards to different media organisations and forms of content in China, theoretical models have been called for, in order to illustrate links between global-, central- and local-level issues. Fung (2008) has proposed examining China's media industry in a global setting. Looking at the globalisation and localisation strategies utilised by transnational media corporations in China, he has argued that the correlations between China's engagement with the world and China's media industry development should be understood in the 'globalization-glocalization' model of cultural flow (p. 35). In relation to diverse forms of local media in China, Sun (2012) has referred to the inadequate attention researchers have paid to the nuances of central-local dynamics and tensions compared to the present focus on the national-level media (p. 13). She has argued that it is the myriad translocal connections, rather than a top-down hierarchical spatial order, that characterise the country today (p. 25).

I was intrigued to find out whether *If You Are The One* (*Fei Cheng Wu Rao* in Mandarin), a popular China-produced dating show, has been broadcast over Australia's Special Broadcasting Services television channel during primetime since 2013. I also wanted to know if the show had gained audiences representing diverse populations in Australia. When I stared at the bright yellow English subtitle for the show on TV, I wondered how Chinese migrants in Australia would respond differently to the show from those in China, if they watch it at all. Further, I wondered how the 'dating culture' in Australia might be characterised, and how Chinese migrants might fit into that culture. These comparative points and numerous other ideas outlined below expose gaps in our knowledge about Chinese migrants' relationship with media.

### 1.2.3 From diversity to inclusion: makership

Diversity and issues about inclusion are fascinating for researchers on migrants in multicultural societies. Although they seem to be obviously linked, there is actually

no straight line from one to the other. The correlation of diversity and inclusion is even more perplexing today when almost every individual is producing diversity in the sense that they jot down bits and pieces about their life experiences and share them over new forms of media, especially those afforded by new media technologies such as smartphones and tablet computers. For migrants, the proliferation of social networking calls into question what the social inclusion challenges are in the digital age and where the opportunity to make use of the digitally-mediated diversity to tackle these challenges lies.

One of the challenges is that while internet-based participation seems universal and democratising, it actually could be hierarchical and exclusive in the social dimension. As Jenkins has pointed out, '[i]t is true that all cultures are participatory, but power relations set limits on how we participate, who gets to participate, and what we get to participate in' (Banet-Weiser et al., 2014). I find 'makership' may address this challenge, along with its emerging relatives including the maker culture and makerspaces in cultural studies, education studies and library studies. David Gauntlett (2011) has suggested in *Making is connecting* that making is intrinsically connecting. He has emphasised that the introduction of media affects people's way of life, such as how they spend time (p. 10). He has focussed on online and offline creating and sharing facilitated by Web 2.0, in comparison with the passive viewing of television and online platforms. In search of how these activities may have increased social capital for individuals, he has indicated that this departure from the passive consumer role not only impacts on people's lifestyle, but shapes their living environment, based on their will.

Reading Gauntlett's work, I see combinations between online and offline interpersonal interactions through a range of websites and software such as Meetup.com (p. 112-113). Amid new developments in digital technology, it is hardly possible to take a totally libertarian approach towards any form of media use by any population, which was an approach promoted by many researchers in the early days of the Internet. Consumption and production, despite their inevitable association with commercial activities, constitute an indispensable aspect of migrant lives. Moreover, various models of media use provide migrants with more and more choice in participation, creation and privacy. Both the commercial aspect and the multiplying

user choices of digital technologies are noteworthy for the following study of migrant media.

## 1.2.4 One practice, two types of migrants

This thesis focusses on the practice of self-representation in the form of DST, a common media experience which I facilitated for two types of Chinese migrants including Chinese international migrants and Chinese internal migrants. The rationale behind my inclusion of both migrant types is twofold. First, DST can be carried out for both migrant groups. It is a small-scale workshop-based video-making activity and does not require complex technical infrastructure or personnel. Second and more importantly, digital literacy is capable of reaching wider migratory demographics. Digital technology is the ‘new language’ existing side by side with spoken and written languages. As digital literacy is simple to grasp and gaining traction in popular culture and among non-specialists, social phenomena originating from it relates to as many members of the population as formal literacy. Since more migrants than before are producing representations of their life, it is easier for researchers to access diverse representations of migrant life. Research relating to this endeavour is reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Among migratory Chinese people, there is one seriously underprivileged and under-researched category: rural migrant workers who make up the largest portion of rural-to-urban migrants or the floating population in China. Within the state borders, regional disparities in economic growth (Kenneth Keng, 2006) since the Reform and Opening Up in 1970s are still driving internal migration towards sprawling regional metropolises. This group of migrant workers have been found to be marginalised (Wong, Fu, Li, & Song, 2007) and ‘information have-less’ (Cartier, Castells, & Qiu, 2005). Social sciences research has reported severe issues for this group, such as the discrimination against migrant workers and their children in policy and everyday life, as well as the lack of a channel for social mobility for these people. Media researchers have been seeking to reveal migrant workers’ lives through their daily engagements with new media (C.-t. Cheng, 2012; Law, 2012; Qiu, 2014; Sun, 2014; Wallis, 2013). Sun (2014) has dedicated her monograph, *Subaltern China*, to this group of people. She has argued: ‘...an account of China’s rural migrant workers is not complete without ethnographic insights into a wide range of their activities...’ (p.

4). In the existing studies, researchers have discovered the potential of digital literacy as a new exploratory tool consisting of a series of autonomous social and political practices in the context of ongoing social changes in China.

Researchers in social sciences have sought to establish a few conceptual frameworks to understand correlations between different types of migrants. One of the earliest frameworks located migrants between their place of origin and place of immigration in a relatively stable ‘migration circuit’ (Findlay, Jowett, Li, & Skel-don, 1994). Today, with highly frequent mobility, a circuit can rarely be sustained by economic opportunities as before. A migrant always has the potential to leave any stop in the circuit and move to the next, because they are more likely to take political or aesthetical lifestyle preferences into account (Eng, 2006).

Researchers have also begun tentative efforts to make comparisons between migrants from the same place of origin since the late 1990s, in a bid to find out whether shared culture or identity remains. *Internal and international migration: Chinese perspectives* (Pieke & Mallee, 1999) has noted that both Chinese migrants living overseas and in urban China build their migrant identities through hometown associations such as *huiguan*<sup>5</sup> as well as ‘other markers such as occupational specialization’ (p. 341). Pieke and Mallee’s study also raises questions concerning migrants as a ‘group’. In the book, they argued that, ‘Migration, by bringing peoples from different groups together, in essence creates group tensions’ (ibid.). In another study, media researchers have compared digital use among Chinese migrants in three foreign cities, in order to discover whether digital technology assists in forming social cohesion between migrants with the same homeland culture (Denison & Johanson, 2012). They found that Chinese migrants belong to multiple communities, rather than a unified one, and it would be too simplistic to conclude a shared culture or cultural identity (p. 240).

Inspired by these previous studies, I adopt the practice of juxtaposing DST for Chinese international and internal migrants, in this research. Since DST has its origin and expansion largely in ‘digitally saturated’ areas (Lundby, 2009, p. 178), I am curious as to how Chinese internal migrants might practice it differently from their international counterparts in the West. In this sense, the Australia-based DST

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<sup>5</sup> It was the earliest Chinese name for Chinese migrants’ voluntary organisations.

workshops serve as a ‘testing ground’ that provides a baseline for the workshops in China. Therefore, this thesis follows the steps of previous DST researchers and practitioners, but expands the scope of DST by opening up a new path to understand the critical category of Chinese internal migrants and Chinese society at large.

### 1.3 Research question

I apply a qualitative approach to people’s cultural practices and production that are embedded in specific socio-cultural contexts. My fieldwork mainly includes two phases of data collection and data analysis with focusses on three stages of self-representation: entrance to the DST workshop, place-making content creation during the workshop and the handling of digital story in both online and offline social spaces.

Using a qualitative strategy of case studies, I describe two series of DST workshops for two Chinese migrant groups in the State of Western Australia (WA), Australia and the Province of Zhejiang, China, respectively. Supplementing fieldnotes of workshop-based DST with semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and focus groups, I collected firsthand materials from Chinese migrants from different ages, occupations, genders and previous migration experiences. Based in two countries, I acted as workshop facilitator, observer and researcher when I conducted the workshops. In addition, I also became creator and administrator of the Digital Storytellers in WA online group on Facebook<sup>6</sup>, a data repository outlining the timelines of the workshops I conducted, in order to develop the WA case study. In the thesis, I use the case studies to investigate participants’ motivations, concerns and reflexive thoughts relating to their actions of creating and sharing personal stories, as well as place-making discourses around arrival, stay, destination and place from the participants’ perspectives.

Digital storytelling has increasingly been employed as a research tool for topics including literacy, identity and education for a range of social groups (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009b; Lundby, 2008). Since the inventors of DST were independent filmmakers, it bears the features of self-reliance and skill acquisition. My research contributes to the development of DST by involving consultation with migrant group

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/digitalstorytellerswa/>

members from the onset of the research design. In practice, I adhere to the idea that a comparatively fixed model is needed for the sake of shortening the time necessary for the research and avoiding duplication, but I remain open-minded and flexible, too, in adjusting the model according to participants' preferences and feedback. In this way, the workshop becomes a contextualized microscope looking at how migrants imagine, construct and adjust their self-perception and positioning within a bottom-up participatory group. In view of new developments and issues of research methodology in visual and creative media practices, my DST approach may open further discussions on the potential methodological role which DST could fulfil in the future. A detailed explication of methodology used in this study is presented in chapter 3.

Based on the blueprint outlined above, this thesis considers the following research question:

*What kind of opportunities for having a voice will Chinese migrants, international and internal, find in self-representation through DST? And to what extent will they make use of the opportunities in respective destination societies?*

Four objectives are identified to find answers to this question:

1. To find out whether Chinese international and internal migrants author place-based personal stories that differ from the dominant migrant story in their respective destination country and province;
2. To reveal to what extent a participatory dynamic formed in the workshop process is conducive to releasing unreserved and insightful points of view in migrant participants' digital stories;
3. To compare digital stories and workshop processes in two locations to identify possibilities and challenges that DST workshop is commonly faced with in reaching audiences on the move;
4. To explore the usefulness of DST as both a participatory practice and research method for digital content creation and distribution.

## 1.4 Thesis Overview

*Chapter 2: Conceptualising DST as practice and method for digitally afforded self-representation* offers an overview of DST among technology-afforded participatory practices which are emerging in the digital era, and among the methods which have been used in media studies. I separate DST into a range of processes based on the theory of mediation embraced by an increasing number of researchers. While DST has been lauded for its activist potential, recent studies have revealed processes that might normalise the practice, and some processes are much less studied than other ones. With a cautious attitude, I bring together literature to show the tensions that could possibly arise around various processes and dimensions of DST. It is in this academic context that DST workshops are examined. Furthermore, I explore the methodological significance of DST as one of the participatory and creative media practices that are increasingly being used in media studies. By comparing DST with traditional qualitative methods of participant observations, interviews and focus groups, I point out gaps in existing methodology to address in research on the uses of new media technologies.

*Chapter 3: Methodology and methods* presents the methodological thinking and concrete uses of methods for this comparative study. Overall, the study builds a storytelling approach to Chinese international and internal migrants' self-representation, which incorporates narrative inquiry methodologies in considering story as construction. In this approach, I aim to reveal three kinds of narratives that emerge in the process of the DST workshops, namely, the first-person narrative from migrant participants, the researcher narrative based on the researcher's observation on bottom-up participation, and the technology user narrative based on the participants' approach to using technologies. In order to present the three narratives in two locations comparatively, I adapt the DST workshop to make it reproducible across countries and realistic for migrant participants. In the data collection, I further supplement the workshop with qualitative research methods including participant observations, interviews and focus groups. To deal with the collected videos, observation notes and verbal responses, I conduct textual and discourse analysis to describe the formation and amplification of migrant voices. This is followed by a comparative analysis between the three-narrative combinations in two locations, in a

bid to establish an unbiased view towards the democratisation potential of DST in the respective countries.

*Chapter 4: Narrating transnationality* presents the case study on DST based in the state of Western Australia, Australia. The WA-based workshops demonstrate diversity in participants' cultural backgrounds, occupations, ages and their reasons for settling overseas. Young Chinese participants, in particular, showed an obvious intention of socialising with people from other cultures in participation. While Chinese participants actively engaged with non-Chinese counterparts in oral storytelling activities, which I hosted interaction between participants, issues of self-confidence, language and cultural difference and racialisation of non-white participants emerged as factors causing the separation of Chinese participants in the unhosted stages involving individuated software uses. In relation to technology use, being immersed and ambitious in video creation, participants faced a loss of time in cross-cultural interaction. Some participants also withdrew from workshops because of privacy risks that arise from high identifiability in the use of visual media. In regard to digital stories, Chinese participants implicitly challenged the prevalent socio-economic assumptions on migration with leisure, autobiographical and anecdotal accounts of overseas experience. Implying disappointment, self-doubt and struggles, their stories question the notion that migrants can find a 'greener pasture' overseas. Young Chinese participants who make leisure stories face constraints in relation to their anticipated parent audience. Overall, the Chinese participants' participatory and creative vitality throughout the workshops do not result in a straightforward release of critical points of view on life overseas in their digital stories.

*Chapter 5: Remaking south* presents the second case study on DST based in the southern coastal province of Zhejiang, China, and also follows the storytelling approach. This was the first workshop-based DST project of its kind which was carried out in China and had internal migrants as participants. Differing from the counterparts in WA, workshops in Zhejiang consisted of a homogenous group of participants who were mainly interprovincial students working in media production disciplines. This group encountered a different set of issues in forming bottom-up participatory dynamics, which included the facilitator's poor supply of devices, the

participants' weak consciousness of being internal migrants in the receiving city, and the participants' low valuation of DST as skill training. In using technology, participants generally demonstrated craftsmanship and a better ability to mobilise audial and visual resources in developing stories. As the unexpected authors of Zhejiang, an economically more developed part of China, participants' digital stories established a repertoire of symbolic resources to produce new meanings of South China. Their digital stories served to decentre the persistent geo-advantage discourse that state policy has consistently enhanced. By presenting the experience of leaving their home provinces in the north and resettling in the south or travelling incessantly from city to city, or the imagination of the country's impoverished past, they refuted the entrenched notion of the wealthier southern coastal cities as a terminal for a better life. Specifically, they presented these experiences in terms of accessibility to the distinctive local culture, life quality and career development opportunities. It was noteworthy that several participants were reserved in expressing critical views on migration in their digital stories. I argue that workshops in Zhejiang showed a more conspicuous achievement in forming alternative migrant stories than those in WA. Interprovincial students' act of authoring internal mobility in contemporary China also, remarkably, constituted the alternative authorship formed in DST.

*Chapter 6: DST for digital inclusion amid technology advancement* further discusses the common practical and methodological issues that both case studies bring forward, in view of changing opportunities and challenges for social inclusion in the digital era. Based on policy agendas and research on removing the digital divide, I discuss an increasing emphasis on the processual quality of audience reach through digital technology. Adopting this perspective, DST did achieve a quality reach with Chinese international and internal migratory audiences. On the one hand, the facilitator assumed a neutral role of resource mobiliser to allow for the largest extent of free expression. On the other hand, the workshop received invisible support from three kinds of non-digital resources, an often-neglected area in which DST may be further improved. These resources included migrants' natural need for communicating over an expectation-reality gap, the embodied congregation that multiplied the workshop energy and led to a decentralised skills exchange, and highly individuated creativity which valued humanness and hence increased chances of interpersonal and intercultural understandings. Nonetheless, privacy concerns,

which the majority of participants showed in their heightened distrust of the Internet's ability to provide a safe and unmonitored environment, seriously reduced the chances for DST as a means to amplify individual voices in the public sphere.

In regard to methodological significance, practice-based DST demonstrated effectiveness in looking into Chinese migrants' self-representation to counter the official sociological approach to migrants. The success of reaching migrants using minimal digital and non-digital resources demonstrates new possibilities for DST and research using DST. Considering that the vast field of internal migration in China is insufficiently studied, I call for more research on Chinese internal migrants' uses of new media technologies in the future.

*Chapter 7: Conclusion* gives a summary of the thesis and continues to develop understandings of migrants' digitally afforded self-representation in relation to improvement in social inclusion. It also points out the shortcomings of the study and the directions for future research on the use of technology.

This introductory chapter outlines the key issues in media studies that are pertinent to this research. The next chapter offers a systematic summary of existing studies that focus on participatory media practices including DST.

## Chapter 2      Conceptualising digital storytelling as practice and method for digitally afforded self-representation

This chapter consists of a brief introduction to the territories that I am entering in this research, and an examination of DST through the lens of existing studies on uses of new media technologies.

While DST is a phenomenon (who is doing what), it is also a ‘textual system’ (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009a, p. 5) that brings our attention to fundamental processes in society and culture: “‘digital literacy’ and participation, storytelling formats, and content distribution’ (ibid.). Therefore, I ask the following questions: Which processes are displayed well in the DST phenomenon?; Is it possible that DST contributes to our knowledge not only as a phenomenon that causes hope and worry, but also as a research method with a new kind of researcher subjectivity that cannot be easily replicated in existing, conventional methods such as interviews? To find answers to these questions, I examine two aspects of DST: a new media practice featuring bottom-up participation and alternative authorship that is spreading in public service, commercial application and private life; and a practice-based research method that synthesises interview and participant observation with autoethnography and visual research, which are increasingly usefulness for research on digitally afforded activities.

### 2.1      A mediation view on digital storytelling

As previously described, DST is a mode of self-representation distinctive to the digital age. Self-representation, with its basic element of speaking up for oneself in a public space, is comprehended and used as a practice of democracy, as a means of making the voices of many individuals heard. Initially, DST was mainly discussed in political circles, but it now has a widespread take-up across a range of new media technologies and can be used to empower individuals in countering inequality and injustice in various aspects of society. As one of many opportunities for self-

representation, DST has contributed to igniting activist enthusiasm in identity politics in communities, institutions, businesses and a wide range of individuals.

Meanwhile, a cautious conceptualisation of self-representation that emphasises mediation is developing, suggesting that the practice might not be as empowering and enabling to individuals or effectively causal of social change as it appears. Researchers holding this attitude deny a linear media-effect logic. Instead, they believe DST is a phenomenon that reflects the situatedness and ambivalence of meaning-making processes. Nick Couldry (2008) has argued for the necessity of studying DST as a ‘broad social phenomenon’ rather than as a panacea (p. 41):

The point, of course, is not that by itself digital storytelling could be the catalyst of such major change, but rather that it is only in the context of change on that scale that the potential of digital storytelling as a social form can be fully grasped. (p. 58)

Despite the urgency to overcome ‘the crisis of voice’, Couldry has reminded researchers that DST is always mediated. Comparing mediation with another popular concept of mediatisation, he points out that mediation is more revealing of ‘the *heterogeneity* of the transformations to which media give rise across a complex and divided social space’ (Couldry, 2008, p. 42). Although he has agreed that DST may widen the distribution of symbolic resources, which is mainly in the hands of media institutions, he has warned that DST may become an ignored, isolated and inconsequential phenomenon due to the non-linear logic of mediation (p. 56). In his more recent studies, Couldry has used DST to identify democratic potentiality and limitations in long-term narrative exchange on shared digital infrastructure in educational institutional environments (Clark, Couldry, MacDonald, & Stephansen, 2014; Couldry, MacDonald, Fotopoulou, Clark, & Dickens, 2013).

Also using mediation as key to understanding self-representation, Knut Lundby (2008) has stated that DST ‘may appear as an individual exercise – telling “my story” – but is actually deeply rooted in the collaborative processes of the story circle of the production workshop, and maybe in template narratives in the overall culture’ (p. 6). In another article, Lundby (2009) has mapped DST into matrices of time/space, tools/competence, institutions/economy and cultural/hegemony to uncover aspects of power relations (p. 185). He believes that in combining the ‘mediational means’ of signs and tools, we may understand DST on a broader scale

as a social movement that consists of counter-hegemonic ‘alternative stories’ (p. 184).

Mediation is further developed into an analytical tool towards digitally afforded self-representation by Nancy Thumim (Thumim, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2012). In *Self-representation and digital culture*, Thumim has stated that self-representation in the digital age is unavoidably mediated.

Self-representation is taking place across all kinds of media and cultural spaces at a time when it is widely acknowledged that there can be no self without mediation. (Thumim, 2012, p. 51)

According to current scholarship, mediators between reality and the resulting representation range from technology, factors in circulation, production and editing of meanings, to any individual who plays an influential role at a certain stage or at all stages of meaning making (pp. 51-56). Further, as mediation ‘delineates a specific form of enquiry, which stresses both the multiple factors that shape meaning (construct it) and the open-ended nature of meaning making’ (p. 57), Thumim has argued that it is a bridge to bring about dialogues between fields of media, communication and cultural studies, which perceive meaning making in different ways. Specifically, in her scrutiny on the opportunities for self-representation provided by public institutions and corporations (including DST), which are always thought to be democratising or therapeutic, Thumim has theorised mediation as constituted by tensions over the meanings of ‘ordinary people’ and ‘community’ in the triangular relationship between institution/corporation, text and participant. Identifying three dimensions of mediation: institutional, cultural and textual, she has concluded that self-representation is ‘in fact a site of power struggle’ (p. 181).

Although rather pessimistic, Thumim’s use of mediation as an analytical lens has provided an alternative view to the often imbalanced attention paid to outcome versus process. With a mediation view in mind, we need to place not only digital story but also preparation, production and distribution of digital story under examination. As meaning is perceived to be constructed rather than fixed, we must also expand our focus to include uncertainties and subtleties that are no less important than major consequences and trends. Clark has argued in relation to research on digital story circles in formal education settings,

A digital story circle involves processes that are necessarily uncertain and ambivalent, [...]. The fragility of those processes should not be underestimated and is largely ignored by bolder rhetorics of digital empowerment and transformation. However, it is through following closely the fine-grained details of such ambivalent processes that the real potential of digitally enhanced narrative exchange for engaging young people in wider society can more realistically be grasped. (Clark et al., 2014)

A mediation view of DST is especially necessary for our scrutiny on DST for migrants. Migration is a vast and elusive field since it not only suggests temporal-spatial activities, but also evokes social, cultural, economic and ethical concerns, which are debated in relation to refugee admission in European countries, especially following the conflict in Syria (Fargues, 2014) or detention of asylum seekers in Australia (Clyne, 2005; Mogelson, 2013). Migration becomes even harder to grasp when it encounters ‘the geographically and temporally stretched electronic networks such as the internet’ (Lim, Bork-Hüffer, & Yeoh, 2016, p. 2148). As outlined in chapter 1, new social categories of migration are emerging in media studies and researchers have reached conflicting conclusions on whether migrants’ digitally afforded communication improves migrants’ inclusion in the society of residence. The current status of research on the topic suggests that what we need is not any rigid addition to existing typologies of migration for immigrant regulation, rather we are facing a serious lack of knowledge on migrant lived experience and migrants’ perspectives on migration. There is a thirst for new approaches to migrants’ perceptions of migration alongside the familiar, existing approaches such as belonging and cultural difference. While DST might be a way to supply the perceived lack of knowledge on this issue, a mediation view can help us remain rational and open-minded. It is only through identifying as many factors, shaping forces and power relations as we possibly can that we might catch up with the meaning of migration under the condition of constant, rapid change.

In an effort to use mediation as a bridge for different fields and to stay alert to potential mediators, I map out, below, aspects of migrant-oriented DST workshops for which pertinent studies have indicated how mediation might be constituted and how DST is connected with the broader research literature.

### 2.1.1 Bottom-up participation

Bottom-up participation is a crucial characteristic of DST because it embodies the democratising working of self-representation: individuals willingly speak to a wider

public. Participation in face-to-face DST workshops tends to be thought of as bottom-up for two reasons. First, like most grassroots-level activities, DST is not a task from the top down. People come to workshops because they are willing to. Second, participants take the initiative in learning to tell stories using digital means during the facilitated workshops. Since a workshop always takes the form of an expert transferring skills to participants, there is a pedagogical aspect of DST. However, unlike learning in a formal education setting, the expert-facilitator in DST is not supposed to instruct participants but to free participants from any hindrances to self-expression and self-representation in technology, thought and other respects. The participatory approach is believed to be fundamental to the realisation of DST empowerment for people including education receivers, migrants and marginalised youth (Benmayor, 2008; Y. Li, 2007; Paull, 2002; Robin, 2008; Sawhney, 2009). As a study on DST for young newly arrived Cambodian and African refugees and second-generation young migrants in Western Sydney has argued, DST can be a form of citizens' media. Unlike mainstream media, it facilitates the exercise of the civil right to communicate and the ownership of the means of communication (Salazar, 2010). Scholars have also noted the importance of handing over control in the use of new media technologies to nonprofessionals in order to dissipate the centralisation of professionalised and institutionalised media production. As Meadows (2003) has claimed, 'no longer must the public tolerate being "done" by media – that is, no longer must we tolerate media being done to us'. According to Thumim (2012), writing on self-representations in online space, it is important to answer both questions of how to inform people of self-representing opportunities and how to deliver control over self-representation (pp. 145-149).

Nevertheless, recent studies have revealed factors on macro, meso and micro levels that may cause tension around the notion of the purity of bottom-up participation in DST. On the macro level, scholars hold divergent opinions regarding the interaction between the expert and the non-professional, amateur and lay participants in a DST workshop. After leading CDS (later renamed as StoryCenter) for over two decades, Lambert (2009) has argued that the starting point for DST is the ability for self-expression, and that this ability for self-expression in digital media has become a central literacy for full social participation (p. 85). Alongside a range of artistic practices that arose from the community arts movement in the twentieth century,

DST has aimed to ‘celebrate[d] [the] creativity of [the] non-professional artist’ (p. 79). In the light of recent developments in DST, Lambert has criticised the enlarging ‘bubble’ (p. 81) in art and technology projects.

The expansion of the digital storytelling moniker into broadcast, into the greater field of educational technology, into practices as diverse as its use as a tool for evaluation and research, or for marketing purposes, has stretched the concept and values of our work to a thin, superficial veneer. (Lambert, 2009, p. 82)

Lambert’s view is based on his belief in a contemporary antagonism between expert and non-professional. He has asserted that people as consumers are losing agency and incentives for social connection in an increasing commercialised society (p. 84). This is why Lambert has disregarded the soaring quantity of DST activities, and focussed instead on whether workshops carried out are still keeping a ‘touch of subversiveness’ (p. 82) and challenging dominant culture and discourses.

While many share Lambert’s counter-culture position, there are also researchers who have sought to complement Lambert’s libertarian view with dynamics for change within the existing social structure. The dynamic which Hartley has discovered in his research is the opportunity for dialogues between expert and amateur that may benefit both commercial and cultural progress. What preconditions this opportunity, as he has argued, is the enhancement of consumer productivity and creativity in digital culture (Hartley, 2010, p. 16). Compared to Lambert’s focus on artistic creativity, Hartley has found that the lay population is able to create artistic, intellectual and economic values in creative ways at the same time, given ongoing social transformations brought about by creative industries. Digitally afforded, consumer-created content and social networking have made the borders between culture and economy, as well as public and private realms, more and more porous. Therefore, the uses of digital literacy promoted by Hartley deal not only with who speaks about social concerns, but are essentially tasked to give amateurs an equal footing in their communication with experts in all fields (p. 20). The use of dialogues, rather than confrontation, creates a space where amateurs acquire knowledge and skills in an autonomous, peer-to-peer and demand-driven manner, while their self-expression, which synthesises personal thoughts with existing knowledge of the world, may cause a review of old knowledge and the birth of new knowledge. Therefore, the pedagogical process in DST has the potential to disrupt

‘the closed expert system’ (p. 30), formal education and broadcast media for example, from within, by reforming its very foundation – the way of knowing.

Individuals have an unavoidable consumer role in society, which raises perplexing questions as to whether that is hopeful or should provoke opposition, whether consumers’ self-initiated increases in productivity and creativity are signs of cooption. Studies on DST are providing practical knowledge of possible issues that could arise from this consumer society dilemma.

On the meso level, while technological and human resources are indispensable in DST, the provision of them to participants is always troubled. As outlined in chapter 1, most DST projects are organised by public institutions rather than individuals. The rationale behind this is to guarantee participants access to necessary equipment and technical and other support. However, research has demonstrated that DST may encounter constraints from supportive institutions, and not only in relation to the practice’s content and scale. Looking into DST workshops in formal education, Lowenthal (2009) has found that although DST is popular among educators, ‘its place in the classroom is still unclear’ (p. 252). He has suggested that an educator may experience difficulties with regard to time, training, structure, and assessment, in organising DST for students. If rigidly followed, the technicalities of the CDS model can have a negative impact on the development of stories in DST. As Lowenthal has indicated, from an educator’s standpoint, ‘I often find that the further educators get from the CDS model, the weaker the digital stories become’ (p. 259). Thumim (2012) has studied the DST project, *Capture Wales*, undertaken by the BBC, the U.K. public service broadcaster. According to Thumim, despite the project team’s intention of continuing the engagement with people who are traditionally excluded from broadcast media production, ‘a conflict over whether or not self-representation matters’ (p. 101) within the institution remains a context that should not be overlooked. Eventually it was a disagreement over the DST’s use of the BBC’s public funding rather than its value for members of the society that caused discontinuation of the seven-year award-winning project. This example suggests that the increasing institutionalisation of DST is of concern, specifically in aligning DST with institutional purposes or using DST for the re-orientation and innovation of institutions.

On the micro level, with more researchers conducting and coordinating DST workshops in person, there are more and more discussions on the facilitator's multidimensional subjectivity in facilitator-participant relationships. Research findings have demonstrated that instead of being minimal and negligible, the intervention in the form of facilitation is significant but is unnecessarily perceived in a negative way. In exploring DST's potential for digital inclusion of elder women, researchers emphasised the facilitator's participant role in building a co-creative and co-learning environment.

It is important to note here that the teaching process for these digital skills are never didactical rather through creating a co-learning environment where the facilitators position themselves as amateur creative content producers just like the participants rather than positing as media experts, receiving the necessary help from the media professionals in the team only where necessary. (Şimşek & Erdener, 2012, pp. 4108-4109)

Şimşek and Erdener have also suggested that the facilitator's role needs to be continuously negotiated at different stages of a workshop. Another study on DST for the queer community has drawn attention to how the facilitator is part of the social mediation of digital stories, bringing advantages as well as hazards (Vivienne, 2013, p. 18). This research has highlighted the facilitator's duty of 'listening across difference, first to acknowledge the content and substance of stories' (p. 145). Echoing these studies on the facilitator's role as co-producer and listener, a researcher on DST for youth in risky neighbourhoods has pointed out that a facilitator's engagement with participants 'should not end with the stories' (Taub - Pervizpour, 2009). From these findings, we can see that the role of facilitator can be problematised, despite an intention of making an informal and non-competitive atmosphere in a workshop. One way or another, participants are not as autonomous as described in some studies. While information on the positioning of facilitators remains scarce, I argue that the role of the facilitator extends the space for discussion. On this level, we can get both informed on involved processes and do something about them. While the bar of participation goes so low in DST that anyone is able enough to join in, the bar for researcher to be a 'participant observer' is also lowered. In view of this, it is as important for a researcher to be experimental as it is for them to be critical, not only to add to knowledge on DST but to put the limits of participatory theories up for testing in any participatory form that we can think of.

The view that DST's bottom-up participation is not free from mediation goes hand-in-hand with an increasingly sober attitude towards the 'participatory turn' (Burger, 2015) that has occurred across disciplines. Through empirical research on new participatory practices in the fields of media, education, science and community development, scholars have suggested that we should not take grassroots or public participation at its face value but, rather, view it as a complicated process, or a 'mess' (Deuze, 2006a), posing case-specific local, practical and sometimes ethical challenges for the actors involved (Eversole, 2010; Felt & Fochler, 2008; Kivikuru, 2006; Petko, Egger, Cantieni, & Wespi, 2015). Some of the research studies have coincided in giving attention to the paradox faced by professionals in building dialogue with the wider public: the 'hybrid role of scientist/citizen' (Felt & Fochler, 2008, p. 17) or the 'dual embeddedness' (Eversole, 2010) in community and institution. Changes in the social responsibilities of professionals, and the public trust placed in those professionals, is of concern. The studies have demonstrated the paradox of the subjectivities of professionals beyond just being intermediaries. For example, community development professionals become translators between different social contexts (ibid.) and public relations professionals become 'cultural curators' (Tomblason & Wolf, 2017) in cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, these studies have not proposed the displacement of institutions' top-down governance but have acknowledged that institutions' provision of access to resources is an important affordance for bottom-up participation.

It has been a decade since *Convergence culture* was published and its author has indicated that it is necessary to rethink participatory culture in view of 'expanded communication capacity' (Couldry & Jenkins, 2014) and increasing findings on the risks involved in participation (H. Jenkins, 2014; Jenkins, 2016).

We are long past the point where we can get away with either fully celebratory or fully cynical accounts of the changes that have been set in motion by these shifts in who has access to the means of cultural production and circulation. [...]By the same token, it is no longer adequate to speak of these new configurations as if they were simply 'capitalism as usual', since each represents a dynamic site of struggle where things are being gained and lost on the ground, as players at all levels are advocating for their own interests. (Couldry & Jenkins, 2014)

In this discussion of DST, we need to note that self-equipped DST is becoming more and more practicable, due to the rapid spread of smartphone ownership and networks that put materials and apps for use close at hand. This provokes us into paying

attention to the ‘participation divide’ (Alston, Dias, & Phillips, 2015; Chen, 2013; Gainous, Marlowe, & Wagner, 2013; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008) that enriches our often access-centred ‘digital divide’ concept with investigations into the extent of participation that digital forms of networking afford.

For this study, it necessary to examine DST workshops as a social formation from their first appearance. The objects of scrutiny in this study are my interactions with participants, responses to the workshop from participants, the supporting institutions, as well as these actors’ positioning in the local society. Without a quest to examine power relations in the background, we can by no means gain a firm grasp of the extent of DST as participatory or isolated, prescribed or open-ended and consequential or inconsequential for the designated cohorts.

### 2.1.2 Alternative authorship

During DST, self-representation is produced as a self-authored digital story. Differing from storytelling in more established forms, such as documentary and autobiography, DST mediates the everyday experience of telling and listening to stories and is intended to enable non-professionals to have a voice in the ‘public sphere’ where ‘something approaching public opinion can be formed’ (Habermas, 2001, p. 73). Apart from being a participatory practice, DST also involves the creation of multimedia content, or put more literally, audial-visual modes of story. While bottom-up participation concerns the right to own the communicative means, content creation points to authorship, that is, who gets to author a story and how the act of authoring is conducted.

In order to clarify the understanding of the authorship of non-professionals such as DST participants in this study, content production is treated as practice rather than behaviour. As Hartley (2008) has argued in *“Read thy self”: Text, audience and method in cultural studies*, media audience, as an object of research in audience studies, is an ‘invisible fiction’ (p. 83), arbitrarily presumed and constructed as committed and quantifiable content consumers. Rather, reorienting from a fixed demography to the practice of reading can help us understand the textual dimension of audience in this ‘unprecedentedly textualizing period in history’ (p. 101). To be

explicit, it is hardly possible to understand society through the lens of media without noticing the constructed nature of media audience.

Socially oriented research needed to take both the textualization of everyday life and the practices of vernacular reading much more seriously, and to think in terms of 'reading' (a practice) rather than 'the audience' (a thing). What audiences *did* when they 'read' media texts was not frequently investigated. Empirical audience research usually began at a place quite far downstream of this, when people had already processed their reading practices into further textual performances, such as diary completion, filling in of questionnaires, participating in focus groups, etc. In short, the audience as 'reader' was seldom caught in the act. What was converted into 'knowledge' was the bit where people *produced* rather than 'consumed' text. (p. 87)

The convergence of consumption and production has amounted to user-led production, or 'produsage' (Bruns, 2008), and readers can be captured outputting knowledge, not only in reading, but also in production in a literal sense of self-made and self-published blogs, online news, videos and messages. Digital storytelling, as an informal and undogmatic pedagogy to enable production for all and adaptable for various groups and research objectives, is hence called a 'research-based practice' (Meadows, 2003) in which the practitioners 'live out those debates' in the field.

It is of interest to try to discern which debates on the user productivity of new media are being lived out by DST practitioners. The central issue is whether alternative stories are told in DST workshops, that is, stories that are different from the hegemonic story that we hear. Alternative story is not something we are unfamiliar with. It can be an untold story, a story behind a story or an ignored story that we encounter in relation to others and ourselves. A simple search of these terms on Google Scholar shows that 'the other story' has served as the soil which nurtures perspective and vision, no less well and even better than its competitor 'the story'. In this sense, telling an alternative story may sketch out a space which is inclusive to an unknown or unnoticed kind or side of truth and augments the voice of storyteller or protagonist. Even in the face of persistent issues in society, such as conflict and drug dealing, hearing more than one story might be the key to reduce intergroup antagonism (Adelman, Leidner, Ünal, Nahhas, & Shnabel, 2016) as well as expose the hegemonic discourse that is the very root cause of many misdeeds (Sandberg, 2016). As a practice to let the marginalised be heard, telling alternative stories is pivotal for DST in carving a space of inclusion where difference is respected and preserved.

Furthermore, the age-old practice of storytelling is a powerful tool in countering the dominant culture which we often take for granted. In *The Pedagogies of Cultural Studies*, the authors have stated that:

Storytellers using the tools of critical, participatory storytelling can weave narratives and critiques from both inside and outside of the academy to challenge the legitimising myths and ideologies of the dominant culture. (Martin & Hickey, 2016, pp. 155-156)

Meanwhile, as Kristin Langellier (2011) has argued, storytelling is also dangerous, since 'it is political, it is open to *legitimation and critique*'. Even when counterstorytelling is enacted, counterstories are not without obstacles in being heard in face of the filtering mechanisms of existing stories (Canning & Reinsborough, 2010, p. 17). In developing 'story-based strategy' for environmental activism, researchers have indicated the necessity of waging 'the battle of the story' (ibid.) towards obstacles that a new story meets in transmitting a social change message to audiences. This battle is explained as part of 'the larger struggle to determine whose stories are told, how they are framed, how widely these stories are heard, and how deeply they impact the dominant discourse' (ibid.).

The term 'alternative authorship' lends weight to both non-specialists' claims to authorship and the act of authoring alternative stories. Authorship first concerns who has the authority to tell a story. An increasing number of people who were previously excluded from authorship, are becoming authors. This is not only happening in amateur authorship in participatory practices, but is 'eroding' storytelling-related professions as well. In China, internet-based fan groups volunteer to produce fan-subbed foreign media products such as comics, games and movies in order to resist state control over cultural consumption (W. Zhang & Mao, 2013). In Egypt, a group of young female cartoonists have emerged for the first time to resist the male domination of political cartoons (Nasser, 2017). The emergence of these unconventional authors has further implications on the act of storytelling. In the following paragraphs the research literature on authoring alternative stories is reviewed, with particular regard to what can be counted as an alternative story and what can be found in alternative stories.

Due to the interactive nature of digital narrative, digital authorship, here referring to the act of authoring, is 'dispersed, collaborative, and unstable' (Friedlander, 2008, p.

179). The resultant stories have such diverse ramifications that they do not have to demonstrate a linear narrative sequence or a fixed number of authors' control of text, as shown in *Stories and Social Media* (Page, 2011, pp. 192-200). The avoidance of the mastery of literary canons in digital narrative is a further factor to be considered. While an institutional, centralised authorship is under attack, past norms of what constitutes a story that is worth listening to are contested. An example is that researchers have found it necessary to distinguish story from narrative. Donna Hancox (2016), for instance, has explained why she uses 'story' instead of 'narrative'. Narrative traditionally 'suggests a need for a linear and coherent order of events' (p. 205), while story is looser for inclusion of the digitally afforded representations built on fragmented rather than sequential experiences. She has also suggested that 'story' is better able to 'communicate larger issues in intimate ways' (ibid.). In this study, I also prefer 'story' because primacy is given not to story's linearity, coherence or plot, but to the situated act of telling and the resulting content for the sake of 'microanalytics of power' (Hancox, 2016, p. 216; Jenkins & Nico, 2013).

It is in the context of the issues of authorship discussed above that the representation of personal experience in everyday life has gained an increased value in the public sphere. According to Thumim (2012), 'central to attacks on the authority to narrate the nation was the disputation of the idea that the person and experiential had no place in public discourse' (p. 20). Thumim's argument has been echoed by Shari Stone-Mediatore (2003) who believes that we should not simply perceive 'experience-based narratives as mere ideological artefacts' because this may enhance 'disempowerment of people who have been excluded from official knowledge production'. Rooted in the autobiographical tradition, DST, through mediating life experiences, has potential,

to lift the experiences of the individual beyond the private and self-centred towards exemplary narratives which are not only integrated in the collective culture of the congregation, but are even contributing towards shaping their traditions for the future. (Kaare & Lundby, 2008, p. 120)

The proliferation of self-authored stories based on personal experience, which used to be viewed as uninformative and uninteresting by official and commercial storytellers, are the 'alternative stories' that this study focusses on.

A good story is no longer an elite-oriented work that can stand up to close reading, but something that ‘has a point and touches people emotionally’ (Knut Lundby, Mark C Lashley, & Brian Creech, 2017). On the one hand, it is crucial that a story can elicit critical reflection on the status quo. ‘Having a point’ is a personal choice of positioning that denotes a ‘self-informed’ (Coleman, 2013, p. 383) citizenship, rather than a quality that used to characterise expert-authored criticism and commentary. According to Livingstone (2004), ‘people (in digital culture) be positioned not merely as selective, receptive, and accepting but also as participating, critical; in short, not merely as consumers but also as citizens’. Personal as it is, an individual’s point should not be looked down upon since it also contributes arguments, views, values and knowledge. As Hartley (2010) has envisioned, consumer productivity is not limited to self-expression or leisure communication, rather we must acknowledge its impact on the formation of objective knowledge and argumentation. He has argued that ordinary people should be seen as agents in an open network and consumer-created content should be understood as emergent human knowledge (pp. 53-54).

On the other hand, a good story also sounds unique and has an emotional aspect. This has been demonstrated in various scholars’ endeavour to redefine creativity. Proposing the term, ‘vernacular creativity’, Jean Burgess (2006) has identified that what creativity in a ‘non-elite social context’ means is not ‘a pre-existing “pure” or authentic folk culture’, but the process of remixing symbolic resources that produce relevance and affective impact.

That is, creativity is the process by which available cultural resources (including both ‘material’ resources—content, and immaterial resources—genre conventions, shared knowledges) are recombined in novel ways, so that they are both recognizable because of their familiar elements, and create affective impact through the innovative process of this recombination.

According to her, DST is a good example of vernacular creativity because it gives priority to people’s voices, to ‘narrative accessibility, warmth and presence’, not narrative conventions or technologies.

In *Making is Connecting*, David Gauntlett (2011) has claimed that creativity needs reframing in view of the ongoing ‘rise of craft’ (pp. 60), specifically a resurgence of homemade handicrafts that were once squeezed out of our sight by manufactured goods. Interestingly, he has suggested that the Web that connects crafters is also a

homemade phenomenon (p. 61). According to him, we should reject the outcome-based ‘certified public genius’ (p. 75) notion of creativity and understand creativity as ‘everyday, emotion-oriented and process-based’ (p. 78). He has suggested that creativity is ‘something that is *felt*’ (p. 79) because of our humanness and common sense. Just as Gauntlett’s students felt the poor-quality fan-made videos were creative, this feeling was ‘a response of emotional engagement rather than mere appreciation of technological achievement’ (p. 72). Imperfections and ‘rawness’ (Simondson, 2009, p. 121) that frequently characterise digital stories, can be powerful in arousing resonance and empathy and thus do not diminish the creativity.

The assertion that what counts as a good story has changed, does not belittle professional storytelling. What I intend to emphasise instead is that, for the first time, a non-professional’s self-made experience-based personal story, which used to be untold, ignored and ‘alternative’, can be amplified and lauded. The general public appear to have an enlarging social space where their spontaneous reflections and affections are seen as valued contributions rather than unimpressive noise. This is rightfully why researchers have been looking at DST as a means of facilitating ‘voice’. They believe that in the underlying meaning-making processes in DST there is the answer to how such an inclusive social space can be carved out and sustained. I will unfold these processes in the next section.

### 2.1.3 Collaborative and visual reworking of authorship

As Jerome McGann (2016) has suggested in *Radiant textuality: Literary studies after the World Wide Web*, in treating text as a ‘physically shaped construction’ (p. 206), ‘deformance’ is inevitable in reading literary text to grasp its semantic meaning, making the text something like ‘a cracked mirror’ (ibid.), for instance, in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. In regard to participatory and creative media practices, a growing number of researchers are searching for and depicting likely moves of deformance in textual production. Collaboration and visuality, among other topics, have emerged as dynamic areas of reworking of meaning making in DST. Brattegeig has argued that, ‘A good digital story utilises the possibilities of the digital medium to tell its tale’ (Bratteteig, 2008, p. 281). The two processes of collaboration and visuality most frequently account for the possibilities offered by the digital medium.

Collaboration is the most prominent feature that distinguishes contemporary storytelling. The digital authorship of DST necessarily invokes collaboration, given the interactive vitality among the workshop group, facilitator, external supporters, viewers, as well as a variety of digital devices. However, effective collaboration is not an inherent gift in an individual, but is a competence that is central to digital literacy as well as citizenship. As Lundby (2009) has pointed out, the tools/competences matrix of DST ‘invites specific studies of media power’ (p. 186); collaboration serves as a window to see how media power extends to all aspects of life. Rather than simply being a skill or requirement, collaboration is an implicit and fundamental process and an overarching ability, as demonstrated in the case study of a youth DST project.

Confidence and competence begin to emerge in the articulation of voice and grow at deeper levels in the critical processes of self-listening, peer review and expert input from a facilitator, as part of a deliberate, facilitated, sequential process of participatory learning. (Podkalicka & Campbell, 2010)

Collaboration carries a productive sense of interactivity. In other words, it is the horizontal multidimensional interactions that cause and shape storytelling, as well as, involuntarily, result in its improvement. Ultimately, the collaborative engagement is intended to nurture ‘social competencies’, specifically ‘self-confidence and effective collaboration with others’ that are useful for life outside the community project. Apart from taking action for a uniform goal, collaboration also suggests a tacit agreement to respect each other’s differences. Through encountering different groups of people and entering different cultural and historical contexts, collaborators may learn about ‘new ways of knowing that value connectedness’ (Sonn, Quayle, Mackenzie, & Law, 2014).

Specifically, in programs for media literacy and voice amplification, the competence of collaboration is usually broken down, and seen as running through skillsets laid out by researchers, as shown in the following examples. On media education for children and youth, Jenkins (2009, p. 4) has listed a number of skills.

- 1) Play — the capacity to experiment with one’s surroundings as a form of problem-solving.
- 2) Performance — the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery.
- 3) Simulation — the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real-world processes.

- 4) Appropriation — the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content.
- 5) Multitasking — the ability to scan one’s environment and shift focus as needed to salient details.
- 6) Distributed Cognition — the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities.
- 7) Collective Intelligence — the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal.
- 8) Judgment — the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources.
- 9) Transmedia Navigation — the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities.
- 10) Networking — the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information.
- 11) Negotiation — the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.

As a DST practitioner, Hancox (2016, pp. 210-211) has provided another list which was developed by Sue Thomas and Thilo Beck in a bid to amplify the individual’s voice through improvised storytelling.

- 1) Mobbability: the ability to work in large groups, and to organise and collaborate with many people simultaneously.
- 2) Influency: knowing how to be persuasive in multiple social contexts and media spaces.
- 3) High Ping Quotient: responsiveness to other people’s requests for engagement.
- 4) Protovation: fearless innovation in rapid, iterative cycles.
- 5) Open Authorship: ease with creating content for immediate public consumption and modification.
- 6) Emergensight: the ability to prepare for and handle surprising results and complexity.
- 7) Multi-capitalism: fluency in working with different capitals (e.g., natural, intellectual, social, financial, virtual).
- 8) Longbroading: thinking in terms of higher-level systems, massively multiple cycles, and the very big picture.
- 9) Signal/Noise Management: filtering meaningful information, patterns, and commonalities from the massively multiple streams of data and advice.
- 10) Cooperation Radar: the ability to sense, almost intuitively, who would make the best collaborators on a particular task.

The two lists have some overlap. Here the efficiency of learning and individual’s innovative thinking are not included, rather, both lists tend to emphasise a proactive attitude towards garnering social resources (play, networking, high ping quotient, multi-capitalism), sensitivity and flexibility to cooperation (collective intelligence,

performance, mobbability, open authorship and cooperation radar) and a prepared mind for real-world complexity (simulation, multitasking, emergensight and signal/noise management). These skills are not aimed at mastering particular tools or gaining certain performance standards, as we might expect in relation to the word 'skill'. These skills are more concerned with the vision, attitude, mindset and perspective to embrace in order to cope with variation, impediment, disorder, scarcity and disturbance that are likely to arise in the real world. Individual-based competency is much less of a concern here. In other words, introducers of these skills do not envisage storytellers in an isolated and protective environment such as schools and official agencies but, rather, assume he or she to be a willing and able person for whom affordance lies in the activities of everyday life as much as in tools. While judgement and longbroadening are relatively reliant on personal competence, their objectives – evaluating information sources and thinking 'a very big picture' – still require connectedness or 'resourcefulness', which cannot be attained without other skills on the list such as collective intelligence and noise management.

Visuality, a narrative technique and symbolic use that is gaining momentum, is always seen as the future mode of representations. Visual images, especially personally-archived photographs, are a key component in DST as they are used as 'visual abstracts' and 'signposts' (Porto & Belmonte, 2014) to articulate and intensify ideas and emotions in video stories. Researchers have made the point that, like its verbal counterpart, the visual is also a construction. In *Visual Culture*, Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros (2012) have taken music video as an example to point out that visual media is not as straightforward, genuine or creative as it appears and is often manipulated (pp. 288-289). However, the efficacy and power of visuals in communicating is not undermined.

The power of the visual has been studied in relation to the representation of immigrants. Studying cartoons about boat immigrants, Domínguez, Pineda and Mateu have argued that visual production can be called 'visual epistemic actions' (Domínguez, Pineda, & Mateu, 2014). Since they 'create new metaphoric possibilities' (ibid.), visual images, they have claimed, are forceful in delivering messages that are critical, persuasive and easy to follow, no less than verbal forms. In a DST project, researchers have found that visuals can facilitate mutual articulation

between universal matters and local experience (Porto & Belmonte, 2014), which is crucial in cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, visuals can be ‘apparatuses that inspire social discourses’ (Mannik, 2013). In the case of refugees, photos are active and relational in nature (pp. 7-8). Photos not only ‘carry visual information and layers of social meaning’, but also have ‘political and global ramifications as well as individualized, social ramifications’ when being materialised, circulated and sorted.

Given the research findings on collaboration and visibility, it is clear that they both rework storytelling towards being a social practice, in which not only the act of storytelling, but also related acts such as interpersonal encounter, symbolic use and even the afterlife of digital stories (Dush, 2009) make meanings. Only with this process-based understanding of new media can we really reject technological determinism. To summarise, research-led DST is intended neither for technological innovation or technological experimentation. It is about ordinary people’s autonomous self-expression that can be possible due to a new reworking of meaning making.

More importantly, storytellers’ identities are also reworked. Hartley (2012) has claimed that relational identity that is ‘inconstant, dynamic and evolving’ (p. 134) can replace the supposedly universal and static citizenship to help us make sense of the proliferating digital practices.

Citizenship’s bottom-up, self-organized, self-representing practice of constructing, conducting and comprehending ‘associative relations among strangers’, leading to ‘relational identity’ for individuals, is discursive but not narrative. (p. 151)

While meaning making becomes relational, dialogic and dynamic, the authoring act itself is ‘the breeding ground for accomplished, persuasive, radically new experiences’ (Friedlander, 2008, p. 191). It further allows people to reimagine and reposition themselves amid encounters with different groups of people and cultural worlds. It is in this sense that self-representations such as photography, oral storytelling and DST are understood as places where new and personalised identities are built and fashioned (Hendry, 2005; Hull & Katz, 2006; Mannik, 2013; Sonn et al., 2014; Wexler, Eglinton, & Gubrium, 2014). This argument for new and

personalised identities is the reason for the long-vested hope in identity formation to reframe citizenship with a personal sense of agency.

Nonetheless, there are also studies that have argued that the autonomous self-expression enacted in DST is illusory. Some scholars have raised doubts regarding DST as a straightforward process into a participant's authorial voice. On the one hand, digitally afforded storytelling can be unreflective and narcissistic immersion rather than engagement (Friedlander, 2008, p. 191) and very much individualistic and non-dialogic, as shown in some blogging (Myers, 2010). Both sides of the argument in the research findings are indicative of the possible scenario that the use of new media fails to initiate a collaborative process or the collaboration fails to elicit a voice for the formation of a new discourse and identity.

On the other hand, researchers have argued that DST should not be assumed to give rise to the author's natural and original voice. Chitat Chan (2006) has suggested that young people do not naturally express themselves in participatory media practice. Instead, they shift between voices in service of particular occasions. Given that 'some voices have been legitimized and canonized, and some other voices have been subtly neglected and devalued', Chan reminds us of a potential oversight regarding the participant's negotiation and selection of voice prior to the concrete media engagement. According to Elizabeth Soep (2006), because young people always lack knowledge of the existing social structure and media systems, they are unlikely to be as sensitive to hegemonic discourses as adult researchers. She gives the example of reported speech heavily used by young people in original media creation to point out that the discourses they make can be 'double-voiced'. The story co-construction by not only readers but the decision-making authority can be vital in advancing the understanding of international migrants, according to a recent study on asylum seekers' storytelling (Smith-Khan, 2017).

To sum up, while the inherent collaborative process of digital authorship and the new visual trend open up possibilities of alternative stories, spaces, meanings and identities, the structural forces, enhanced by structural properties such as the involved pedagogy (Chan, 2006), tend to persist in influencing the authorship. This is especially the case in media practices with a participatory emphasis, in which everyday users engage with traditional practices of storytelling, elements from

popular culture and commonsensical ideas smoothly and delightedly. Therefore, we must be mindful of the implicit entanglements between the existing norms and traditions and the act of divergence and resistance, which ultimately determine how far a non-professional's agency can lead to autonomy over self-expression and self-representation.

## 2.1.4 Unpacking the rhetoric of sharing

Upon entrance into a public space such as the online world, the created digital story is supposed to be visible, that is, available for listening and viewing. This process of content exchange is described as sharing which is indicative of good intention, bonding and reciprocity and so on. By and large, sharing is the core aspect of why digital technology holds a place in our everyday life, the prerequisite for social media (John, 2013a). In this sense, the DST workshops in this study are basically a sharing practice. However, sharing is so widely used that the word is ambivalent. Several studies have treated sharing as a popular yet under-researched rhetoric (Aigrain, 2012; John, 2013a, 2013b; Kennedy, 2016; Lingel, 2017). The unpacking of sharing might help clarify the causal relation between sharing and visibility.

According to Nicholas John (2013a, 2013b), while sharing is not conceptually new, its meaning has changed over time. He has suggested that the notion of sharing brings together a range of practices, mainly in three interrelated 'spheres'.

Web 2.0, whose constitutive activity is sharing (links, photos, status updates, and so on); 'sharing economies' of production and consumption; and intimate interpersonal relationships, in which the therapeutic ethos includes a cultural requirement to share emotions. (John, 2013b)

As John has emphasised, contemporary sharing practices demonstrate transformations of the social logics of communication and distribution. Sharing in terms of communication is telling, an expression of care, 'speech with a relational embrace' (ibid.), the foundation for intimate relationship and a mode of social intensity (Kennedy, 2016). According to John, this logic of sharing has its root in the Christian sense of 'sharing with God' as promoted by the Oxford Group, as well as resonance with contemporary therapeutic culture. Meanwhile, there is a distributive sense of sharing. Sharing used to signify to divide or subtract, but now it often refers to multiplication, 'without entailing any kind of material sacrifice on the part of the sharer' (John, 2013a). In sum, sharing 'is associated with positive social ties', on the

basis of 'egalitarianism and mutuality, openness and trust' (John, 2013b). This understanding of sharing as positive and innocuous is in agreement with previous scholars' arguments that non-market sharing is valuable for society (Aigrain, 2012).

Therapeutic culture on demand is not exclusive to the West. The trend is also seen in the fast growing self-help industry in post-Mao China (Hendriks, 2016). As the Communist Party's monopoly over life advice begins to fade, there is a spiritual vacuum in China that has caused a sudden, marked increase in recourse to psychotherapy (p. 320). Other manifestations of this shift are the proliferation of life advice publications on Confucius philosophy, entrepreneurship, and interpersonal relations. Although the relationship between commercialised self-help and all kinds of sharing activities in China remains to be assessed, the rise of therapeutic discourse and Chinese people's desire to enrich understandings of personal life may explain the affective dimension of the vibrant peer-to-peer content sharing in contemporary China.

Nonetheless, John has also stated that sharing sometimes becomes a metaphor that is appropriated by people who call on everyone to share to cover up their commercial motivation. He has directed attention to how corporations use digital platforms to exploit user's 'free labor' (John, 2013a), while framing the selling of user-generated data as sharing.

Framing sharing as technologically situated, Jenny Kennedy (2016) argues that the communicative sense of sharing as gift-giving, exchange and disclosure is problematised by the scalability of distribution which 'derives from the digital nature of the process rather than social practices'. For example, file-sharing extends ownership of digital property and incurs questions about the legal and ethical boundaries of sharing. The enactment of the public exposure of personal emotions in sharing, though implicitly altering the distinction between the public and the private, still leaves users, companies and the government in a quandary over latent privacy risks.

The mere act of sharing does not necessarily follow the rule of reciprocity or guarantee the formation of social relations (Kennedy, 2016). Sharing is a field in which more qualitative inquiries need to be made. John (2013a) has encouraged

researchers to carry out ‘cross-cultural comparisons of the words into which sharing is translated’ in internationalized settings, in order to put his findings to the test in non-English environments. This study continues by considering what sharing means in the ‘tiny public’ (Fine & Harrington, 2004) of the small-scale DST workshop, and what sharing means in the Chinese cultural or cross-cultural environment. This study on DST for Chinese migrants allows a further observation. As a cultural practice that continues to thrive in the digital age, DST as sharing is not only examined as telling and hearing in oral storytelling and screening parts, but is also figured out in the details of sharer and receiver’s decision-making, manipulation and performance, as well as their cultural awareness.

## 2.1.5 The cross-cultural dimension

Strictly speaking, cross-cultural communication runs throughout content creation and distribution in DST and thus is never a separate dimension. However, it is necessary to address cross-cultural communication in a separate section as, first of all, it is possibly the element that is most powerful in revealing the communicative potentials of storytelling. The second reason is that migrants, as important actors of cross-cultural communication, are now featured with a sense of agency, as Sinclair and Cunningham have stated in their ‘migrancy as agency’ argument.

The term (migrancy) is certainly contestable as a way of grasping all forms of dispersed peoples, but there is value in retaining it in this expansive sense, as it captures the dynamics of cross-cultural and cross-language settlement in particular. (Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000)

The role of migrants in media and communication is of rising social significance. As Hartley (2012) has suggested, ‘strangers (immigrants and ethnic others)’ (p. 143), being part of ‘the very people who have most keenly felt excluded from classic citizenship’, ‘are most likely to engage in “citizenship of media”’.

Researchers have been enthusiastic in discovering how to release the transformative power of storytelling in cross-cultural communication. Recent cross-cultural storytelling projects are easy to find online through ad hoc websites or social media webpages. Examples, either based in Australia or attended by Australian expatriates, include *Australian digital stories in Turkey*<sup>1</sup> established by Burcu Şimşek, which

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<sup>1</sup> <http://cargocollective.com/dijitalhikayeler/Turkiye-deki-Avustralya-Dijital-Hikayeleri>

facilitates storytelling by Australians in Turkey, and *The Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project*<sup>2</sup> in Australia, functioning since 2007, which aims ‘to provide an opportunity for people to participate in cross-cultural shared activities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people whilst learning about Aboriginal culture’(‘About Wirlomin Project’, n.d.). As demonstrated in a research paper by Sonn et al., the oral history theatre project, *Chronicles*, taking place in Australia from 2010 to 2012, brought together Aboriginal and non-indigenous young people to decentre whiteness and ‘centre diverse lives’ in a social space where people tell stories that privilege the Aboriginal ways of knowing (Sonn et al., 2014) .

An ideal migrant identity would be rid of any racial tags, as opposed to assimilating one tag into the other. Ien Ang (2003) has written that her feminist consciousness was problematised by her Chineseness or Asianness when she realised she had to begin her self-presentation to other feminists in Australia with ‘I’m a feminist, but...’. To resolve the problem, she has argued for a feminism that does not,

absorb difference within a pre-given and predefined space but leaves rooms for ambivalence and ambiguity. [...] white/Western feminists too will have to detotalise their feminist identities and be compelled to say: ‘I’m a feminist, but...’ (p. 191)

Suvendrini Perera has similarly proposed the term ‘Unaustralians’, which ‘discursively counters the paranoid nationalist values that phrases such as “ordinary, decent Australians” invoked in their violence toward racialised bodies’ (Osuri & Banerjee, 2004).

If we consider the inhabitants of Australia to be multicultural, acknowledging the priority of Indigenous nations on this land, then our allegiances are multiple and diverse at the same time as they are aligned in the struggle against the kinds of racialisations that underpin the assertions of a white teleology. (ibid.)

Despite the increased cultural flows across regional and state borders, we should be cautious that the geographical fluidity of populations and media content does not necessarily cause ‘enhanced cultural mobility’(Yoon, 2014a), or simply put, cross-cultural understanding. Instead, transnationality might be the excuse for migratory individuals to avoid changing their peripheral status in the host society. In Yoon’s case study on young Korean working holidaymakers in Canada, for example, the racialisation goes both ways: the ‘white gaze’, and white people also racialised by

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<sup>2</sup> <http://wirlomin.com.au/>

ethnic minorities. He has found that the cause of this mutual racialisation is that young people ‘doubly articulated with the dominant racial order of whiteness...and the diasporic ethnic identity in Korean economy’. In view of this, we are still challenged by the emerging transnationality of migrants, which is equally likely to result in poor understandings between cultures rather than the contrary.

It is unfortunate that, except for studies on ethnic minorities in China, interregional communication accompanying the country’s massive domestic migration and soaring internet penetration are rarely explored. In spite of a variety of local traditions, localised cultural properties are often treated as a solid block called ‘the Chinese culture’, instead of problematising this term. Furthermore, acceptance of this vast generalising term means that compared with efforts to situate China in a global context, very little has been done to look at cross-local relations. The interregional communication and, specifically, how internal migrants make sense of the destination with their ‘cultural home’ will be unfolded in a case study in chapter 5.

## 2.2 Digital storytelling as research method

Digital storytelling is one of the research-led, participatory, and creative practices that are becoming common in qualitative research in the humanities. An increasing number of these practices seem to be self-evidently useful for research, and complementary to, or substitutes for traditional methods such as interviews. It is necessary to establish how these practices differ from traditional methods. Whether DST constitutes a method is not the question here but, rather, whether the tentative concept of the ‘DST method’ can reveal some gap or confusion in the methodology of media studies, is at issue.

First, it would be simplistic to equate DST to participant observation. Indeed, there are similarities between the two. Due to our need to know about myriad bottom-up media production activities in relation to various social, cultural and technological situations, DST is useful as a ‘specific media practice’ (Lundby, 2009, p. 186) that must be ‘understood from its location in relation to time and space, agency and structure’. Although it is often used in combination with interviews and focus groups (Couldry et al., 2013; Şimşek, 2012; Thumim, 2012; Vivienne, 2013), the emphasis for researchers in studying or studying through the practice of DST is to observe with

their own eyes, ears and heart. The rationale behind this method is similar to that of participant observation; that is, to value participants' perspectives and to be descriptive of contexts and processes in detail. However, as discussed in relation to the researcher's role in section 2.1.1 above, there is more to participant observation in DST.

The role of the cultural studies scholars in this regard translates as one of both critical interlocutor and active participant—the embedded scholar working in the wilds of community. (Martin & Hickey, 2016, pp. 155-156)

While participant observation was the primary method for this study, I did not carry it out as an objective bystander. Rather I was the person in charge, the initiator, the recruiter, the problem-solver, the co-creator, the protector, and the caterer. I was the face of the *DST for Chinese Migrants Workshop*. Just as the DST affected the attendees, it also influenced who I was when it took place. This meant that when I tried to value participants' perspectives, attitudes and acts, I needed to listen deeply to myself, ask how I felt and what I thought and believed in. This was not simply about the extent of engagement that DST requires from a researcher. The practice makes it ever more difficult for any researcher to be cool-minded. More often than not, we as practitioners must be enthusiastic and persevering so that a group of people (sometimes strangers) can be held together for some hours and stories can eventually surface. So, the issue that confronts a researcher is that it is barely possible to maintain a 'distance' from participants, which is an important sign of objectivity and hence validation in many disciplines. Hence, while we figure out a way to dive in as an onsite observer, there is also the problem of how to jump out. Given this struggle between researcher subjectivity and research objectivity, the notion of DST as simply participant observation in a methodological sense cannot stand.

Second, in contrast with interviews and focus groups, the use of DST shows that research can gather more than short, random, language-based responses to a particular issue. What we gather in DST are polished artworks that not only deliver information and message, but also reflect idiosyncrasy, artistic taste and craftsmanship. The advantage over focus groups and interviews, according to Gauntlett (2006), is that participants have a longer time to form, adjust and amend reflexive and thoughtful responses. Also, when we look at the outputs of digital

technology use, we should acknowledge that oral and written texts are increasingly relegated to just a mode of representation that is language-based. Their dominance is threatened by the rapid rise of aural, visual modes and more often than ever before, multimodality. Particularly in audience research, this trend towards the multimodal has been strongly supported by researchers such as David Gauntlett who favours visual methods in exploring identities. Gauntlett has made the point that people produce verbal and non-verbal metaphors in 'creative and visual methods' (Awan & Gauntlett, 2011; Gauntlett, 1996, 2007; Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006). These methods include creative practices such as photographing as well as creating collages, videos and Lego models. They enable a kind of expressiveness for research participants that can bypass language difference in multicultural settings. Therefore, in DST, participants produce texts that are much richer in regard to content, narrative, style, form, technology, and so on. The possibility for media producers to use visual and audio content also diminishes the impediment that language may pose.

Third, what DST cannot resolve, but may highlight, is the dilemma of how to balance the attention to production and product in textual analysis. This dilemma has also been noted by the practice's inventor, Joe Lambert:

Evaluating the work has always been problematic. The constructive and fluid nature of the work, the never-ending debate about process versus product, means that metrics that might serve the art critic, the media theorists, the educator, or social-service provider do not suffice. (Lambert, 2009, p. 87)

Although this is not the first time that the validity of textual analysis has been subject to debate in media studies (Thumim, 2009b), it is necessary to acknowledge that the analysis of digital stories in DST is lagging behind. If we insist in using only the social-cultural perspective on digital stories, we will always feel at a loss in the face of the innovative characteristics of self-made content, such as multimodality and as a result, reduce them to mere decorations.

Digital stories are not just concrete things that fulfil both the promise of organisers and the expectations of participants, but a repertoire of meanings that may circulate after DST. Whether digital stories can be adapted into a genre that fits with the organisational context determines the sustainability of DST (Dush, 2009, p. 268). It is necessary to seek to understand DST's long-term social consequences on the basis of its outputs (Couldry et al., 2013).

## 2.3 Conclusion

I began this chapter with an overview of arguments that researchers have made on different dimensions of DST practice, which has clarified which processes in the practice have drawn more attention. The discussion above reinforces a mediation view presented by Thumim, Lundby and Couldry. While DST is an exciting phenomenon that represents ongoing transformations, consideration of this phenomenon should not be uncritical. As more and more implicit normalising processes in new media are revealed, researchers have started to rethink previous claims. Through the mediation view, I have aimed to include as many revealed processes as possible, since DST is not socially isolated or transparent. I would argue that DST must be able to withstand the interference of various normalising processes in order to prove its potential to effect social change.

Research literature on bottom-up media and cultural practices has been gathered and discussed above. As Deuze (2006b) has argued, we should ‘focus more on the parameters that enable each and every one to contribute’, rather than holding the government, corporation and global journalism to account. However, I do not reject the support that corporations and authorities are interested in giving. Nor can I assume that researchers and facilitators like myself are able to work without public funding. It is not just power that is at stake here but, rather, research-led practice must have some realistic meaning. While the mediation view does remind us of the tensions around dimensions of DST, we do not need to fret and fume over every item. After all, the spirit of research-led practice is to dare to try out possibilities, not to imagine catastrophes behind closed doors.

The methodology of studies using DST also point to DST’s research-worthiness. So far the approaches taken to DST in the 2009 book *Story circle* alone, are much more complex than ‘naïve empiricism’ (Buckingham, 2009). Scholars have attempted to include the researcher’s role, the participants’ understandings of the practice, and the characteristics of participation when considering DST. But there is still considerable research that needs to be undertaken. While it is evident that the approaches to DST do not fully fit into the current methodological context, they remain insufficiently theorised. All practitioner-researchers need to keep asking how a ‘specific media

practice' such as DST is useful for media studies. These specificities ultimately answer whether DST is a valid method.

In this chapter, I brought together a range of focal points which have arisen in existing DST studies and may arise further in this study. In the next chapter, I unfold the research methodology for this study. The selection of the methodology was based on how the data for focal points could be best collected and analysed, and on the specific contexts in Australia and China.

## Chapter 3 Methodology and methods

As explained in the previous chapters, this study investigates how migrants can acquire and use digital literacy to find or unleash their critical and creative voice. Unlike studies on the causality between digital activities and the acquisition of information, skills and abilities, this study complicates any causality with digital users' subjective meaning making of digital activities. It thus emphasises the barriers to digital literacy that are invisible and amorphous such as power, culture, attitude, preference, awareness. For example, even when a task that participant volunteers are asked to perform is efficiently completed, the voice can still be at crisis if a participant feels hesitant, frightened or uninterested. Therefore, we cannot answer how to set the voice free if we neglect the nuances and subtleties in what people say and do during digital technology use.

Based in cultural studies, this study used a qualitative approach to research that valued participants' personal perspectives and experiential knowledge. According to scholars who have compared the main approaches used in media research, the quantitative approach excels at dealing with 'the question of access' (Livingstone et al., 2008, p. 121) while the qualitative approach 'raises the key issue of critical understanding' (ibid.). Comparatively, qualitative research has the following advantages and disadvantages:

Qualitative methods sacrifice the advantages of surveys in terms of the diversity and representativeness of the population surveyed; they gain in the ability to pursue issues in greater depth, to contextualize findings, to capture ambivalences and uncertainties, and to crosscheck claims against observational data. (p. 119)

In the light of these advantages and disadvantages, I attempted to find the methodologies that would work to the advantage of this research. In the following sections, I explain in detail the methodologies that lay the foundation for my DST workshops, those employed in my adaptations of the BBC-model DST and the uses of auxiliary methods to gather data in fieldwork.

### 3.1 A storytelling approach

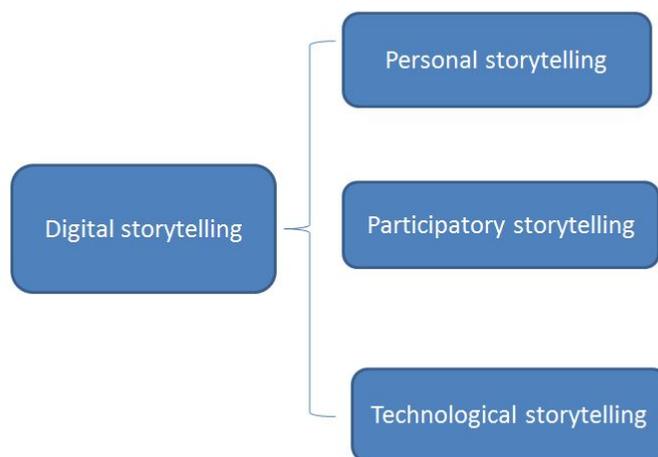
Since storytelling serves as the primary object and method (see chapter 2) for this study, my qualitative approach to Chinese migrants' self-representation was more precisely a storytelling approach. So far, more than one discipline has used storytelling to gather firsthand data from people and develop understandings of the world. Amid different developments of storytelling methods, narrative methodologies are emerging and growing. As D. Jean Clandinin (2006) has pointed out, what is new is not storytelling, but the 'intensified talk about our stories, their function in our lives, and their place in composing our collective affairs' (p. 44).

Among various narrative methodologies, I incorporated the methodologies of narrative inquiry in education research into those of DST in order to make the best use of storytelling to achieve in-depth understandings of migrants' lived experiences, engagements with the destination society and ultimately their digital literacy. The reason was that narrative inquiry coincides with DST in exposing and filling in methodological gaps, especially with regard to the role of researcher and the formation of participants' responses (see 2.2 DST as research method above).

As scholars have stated, narrative inquiry requires understandings of both 'what is meant by narrative' (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009, p. 10) and 'what it means to be a narrative inquirer' (ibid.). On the one hand, the narrative inquirer is tasked to let ordinary people tell any stories they prefer. Even the most banal story deserves respect and analytic attention. It is pivotal to understand a story based on who tells it, whom it is told to, the motivation behind it and its (dis)articulation of broader social, cultural or historical narratives. On the other hand, narrative is a collaborative work during which a researcher is deeply involved and lives through the process alongside the participants. As I argued in the previous chapter on DST, the narrative inquirer believes their research presents 'a move away from an objective conception of the researcher-researched relationship' (p. 12). The dual synchronous processes of 'telling' and 'living' stories by participants and researcher, as noted by Clandinin (p. 11), resemble what happens in DST. While DST researchers are faced with the 'process vs. product' dilemma (p. 46 of chapter 2), the inclusion of both process and product into consideration also serves to underpin researchers' confidence that data

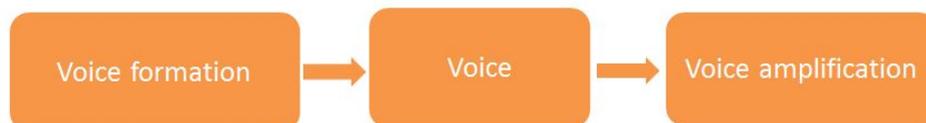
from this approach are impossible for any other approach and will lead to more rigorous conceptualisation of narrative.

Based on these commonalities between DST and narrative inquiry, when I approached the topic of voice and democratisation in migrants' self-representations, I aimed to collect and analyse three types of narrative in which different actors in DST workshops looked at the activity with different subjectivities and from different perspectives. These three types of narrative could reveal the construction of story from three angles: personal storytelling, participatory storytelling and technological storytelling, as in figure 3-1.



**Figure 3-1 DST examined from three angles**

With this comprehensive picture, I traced the formation and amplification journey of voice as shown below in figure 3-2.



**Figure 3-2 Journey of voice in DST**

### 3.1.1 The first-person migrant narrative

The principle of valuing first-person migrant narrative was vital when I attempted to ‘think out of the box’. At the beginning of my PhD, I was driven by the suspicion that migrants may not be equally endowed with the right to communicate and narrate. The digital opportunities for self-representation seem to be increasing exponentially and reaching people who it seemed impossible, previously, to reach. However, it is not simple to remain neutral in the face of ‘universal digitalisation’ since so many people view it as a pervasive, positive and unstoppable trend. I decided not to be distracted by the dazzling functions, designs and revenue statistics of various popular websites, networking platforms, mobile apps and digital artworks. I aimed to take a critical approach towards various policy agendas and the promotion of digital communication. In this context, I found that adhering to participants’ first-person narratives was the strength of this study. It is only through people’s own knowledge, attitudes and points of view that my insights could escape the constraints of prevalent assumptions and biases. Therefore, it was only through people’s own words that the social significance of the self’s central position and augmentation in new media, often understood in terms of quantified scale, could be cast into doubt.

Another reason for my selection of this principle of first-person narratives for the research was that there are so few migration stories from the migrant perspective that are told and heard. While digital stories from participants are the ‘lifelihood of the project’ (Meadows & Kidd, 2009), migrant stories need to be the foundation for any social intention for intercultural understanding and cultural diversity. Whether in a country experiencing significant immigration, such as Australia, or a country seeing massive internal flows of population, such as China, there are disproportionately few migrants’ self-made stories that are published or invested with attention. This is why stereotype stories, assimilation stories, racist stories and xenophobic stories that work against equality and diversity still have a fair share of the market and even sometimes make it to the mainstream. In this sense, while we need more professional storytellers of migration such as novelists, film directors and comedians, we also need ordinary migrants just like my DST participants to use any available form of media to author their versions of international and internal travels, leaving the homeplace, arrival and resettlement. With this mission in mind, I did not aim at

‘extracting’ stories from migrants, but tried to find ways that enabled migrant individuals to produce and disseminate their stories, and more importantly, to ensure that storytelling was comfortable and safe for them.

As outlined above, in order to evade established points of view and to increase the store of stories told by migrants who are often less heard from, I did not try to prove any idea in my mind but started with a blank sheet of paper. As Robert Atkinson (2007) has commented on the method of the life story interview:

The subjective, first-person, atheoretical life story text can also be seen as pretheoretical—a narrative gathered initially as much for the service provided to the storyteller in guiding his or her process as for its potential research use in a variety of ways. (p. 237)

Therefore, the question I kept asking participants and myself during the fieldwork was: how can I make DST something migrants are willing to do, and possibly enjoy doing?

### 3.1.2 The researcher narrative

Story is not a mirror of the lived experience but a construction. Each lived experience can be told as a thousand stories but we often tell just one. Why? To answer this, we need to see story as a relational being, a locus where a range of elements come to play a role and react to each other. Hence, I was not driven to discuss the authenticity of a story; there is no authenticity or truth in any absolute sense. What is possible to find is only ‘authenticators’ (Warren & Jackson, 2010, p. 10); that is, the ways in which a story is authenticated by certain actors. This was the essential difference between the storytelling approach for this study and ethnographic approaches. As Kathleen Marie Gallagher (2011) has argued, a story should be positioned ‘as a place to begin inquiry, not a place on which to settle meanings’.

When I noted down how participants made stories about their lives, I needed to be aware that I was composing a story about the fieldwork and this research at the same time. While participants’ stories are deemed to be constructed, so too is the researcher’s story. According to Clandinin (2006), each narrative research is carried out in a specific space where interactions between people, continuity from past to the present to the future, as well as various situations take place (p. 47). In the researcher’s story, I saw the participants’ stories as products by certain people and

organisations in certain temporal-spatial circumstances. Different extents of coordination may have occurred between various elements of the researcher's story, as well as different extents of friction. Before connecting and comparing participants' stories with the existent dominant story, the researcher story provided detailed description and cogent observation on the construction of the participants' stories.

The researcher story also required me to be candid about my role and how my actions altered the course of the bottom-up activity, because researchers 'too live on the landscape and are complicit in the world they study' (ibid.). The benefit of exercising this candidness was twofold. First, I was able to produce a 'recipe book' that future practitioners and researchers might use as a reference in organising DST projects that are transnational, or comparative, or migrant-oriented, or Chinese-specific. Second, together with other researchers using participatory practices, I further pushed the boundaries of the researcher's role and this form of fieldwork in studying bottom-up participation. In the face of the extreme gap between storytelling and listening, I argue that it is more urgent to think what more a researcher can do to address the issue, rather than what a researcher is supposed to do.

### 3.1.3 The technology user narrative

Technology is a distinct feature of the current explosion of interest in story. It also distinguishes emerging storytelling types, such as mobile messaging and online chatting, from other modes that have a longer history, such as speaking and writing stories. But technology is more than a fancy tool. The spreading and upgrading of technological affordances not only make everyone's personal stories easier to share with a wider public, but have also changed the individual's state in storytelling. For example, some technologies, such as Adobe Premiere and Photoshop, require long hours of learning before use, and some require individuals to concentrate on details and hence cause isolation. Some other forms of storytelling technology may leave users bored, confused, even frustrated. The question I wanted to address was: does the state of technology use inspire interpersonal communication, creative and affective expression and critical thinking, which we often believe to be pivotal for cultural diversity. As I must value user experience and understanding to avoid

technology determinism, a technology user story from DST participants could not be absent from this study.

The gathering of these three narratives outlined above was achieved through qualitative methods, which are introduced in the following sections.

## 3.2 Adapting digital storytelling workshop

The primary goal of collecting first-person narrative on migration determined that the fieldwork for this research would centre on the activity of storytelling. In the following paragraphs I expand on why I adopted DST workshops and how I adapted DST workshops to engage Chinese international and internal migrants in Australia and China.

DST has been used as an interventional tool to explore the democratisation potential of emerging narrative forms such as short video. As elaborated in chapter 2, as a practice DST is unlike narrative production in the traditional sense, while as a research method DST is not fully consistent with traditional qualitative methods. Comparatively, the strength of DST in studying self-representing narrative lies in DST's capability of exposing what essentially distinguishes digitally afforded narratives: formation of (multi)authorship, collaborative production, and a repertoire of visual and audial materials, and choices of dissemination. Hence, during my DST-centred fieldwork, I adapted the precedent model of DST in order to give full play to the strength of the practice.

DST has a resilient design that is adaptive to different environments and target groups. In spite of a number of new developments, the design of DST has remained largely unchanged in recent projects, including briefing, story-circle exercises (or ice-breakers), making and editing images, voiceovers and videos, as well as playing all digital stories to the whole group ('detales.net DS Process', n.d.; T. Jenkins, 2014; 'Kathy Schrock's Guide to Everything', n.d.; Meadows). The adaptation for this study, like those for previous ones, left the main contents unchanged, while only time length, resources and channel of dissemination were considered for adjustments.

### 3.2.1 Compression of BBC model

I followed Meadows' model of DST workshop in the fieldwork planning stage. I refer to it as the BBC model since it was successfully applied in the BBC Wales project *Capture Wales*<sup>3</sup> from 2001 to 2008. According to this model, the workshop typically lasts for five days, consisting of clear-cut steps including story circle, script construction, image capture, video editing (Meadows, 2003). Some steps adhere to strict rules, such as 250 words for a script and a dozen pictures for video creation (Meadows & Kidd, 2009, p. 99). For a fledgling DST facilitator and organiser such as myself, this clear and strict step-by-step design made time planning and management, as well as duplication for comparative analysis, an easier process. It also helped me to articulate what DST workshop is when potential participants became curious about why video making would take so long.

This model special is also special because of its aim to produce broadcast quality videos. When I showed my two-minute digital story *Journey to Perth*<sup>4</sup> to people, its polish and poetic expression quickly attracted individuals who wanted a quality video from a story they were keen to tell. The high quality thus effectively distinguished a digital story from homemade or smartphone-made videos and became a selling point of the workshop.

However, adaptation was unavoidable. The BBC model was invented for a DST project which had funding, personnel and equipment support from the BBC Corporation, a powerful media organisation. As many as 12 media experts with diverse skills from a range of organisations were involved in the *Capture Wales* project (p. 101). For example, Meadows' project had a playwright from the BBC, with years of experience working with communities, to host the oral storytelling session. The leader Meadows himself was a professional photographer and documentarist. The crew also had a van with a computer lab and voice recording equipment to travel to locations nearer the participants (ibid.). The size of personnel and the mobile lab were unimaginable for a second-year PhD student and foreign Perth resident. Because I had restricted access to equipment and knew only a few colleagues in the faculty, I was mostly on my own in facilitating each workshop and

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/galleries/pages/capturewales.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> <https://youtu.be/wZSwDyCW5SA>.

had to have people come to the campus to attend the activity. My limited energy, funds, as well as the inconveniences caused to participants such as travel (some participants had to walk or take public transport), parking (fees were charged), and finding the venue (the campus is large and confusing), forced me to compress the design and provide catering during the workshop and sometimes offer post-workshop assistance to participants.

Fortunately, the people who were most willing to join me were predominantly young people who had university study experience, and some held a doctoral degree. This made the quickening of the workshop pace practicable since most of them were familiar with computer use, owned enough digitalised photos and were fast at typing and learning to use new software. As a result, I compressed the workshop to two afternoons, usually in the same week. In the two-afternoon timeslots, participants in a workshop completed tasks as shown in table 3-1 below. After the first afternoon, if a participant had left too many things to do, I would contribute some work such as voiceover editing and music mixing so that the participant could complete a digital story in the second afternoon.

**Table 3-1 Contents of each workshop session**

Session	Step
First afternoon	Introductory Presentation Consent and Questionnaire Story circle (oral storytelling warm-up) Scriptwriting Voiceover recording and editing Background music picking and mixing
Second afternoon	Image picking and editing Video creating and editing In-group screening of all digital stories

### 3.2.2 Software and device

The technologies that I chose for participants followed my ‘train-the-trainer workshop’ facilitated by Dr Christina Spurgeon who flew to Perth from Queensland University of Technology in February 2014. As soon as I gained ethical clearance for my research in November 2014 and then access to the Mac Lab as well as the audio

recording room inside the building of the School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts, I confirmed that the software that I was trained to use for DST was installed in the lab.

**Table 3-2 Software and device involved in each step of the workshop**

Step	Software and device
Scriptwriting	Microsoft Word
Voiceover recording	Audio recording room
Voiceover editing	Audacity (free software)
Background music picking	Jamendo.com (free music website with each music tagged with Creative Commons license)
Background music mixing	Audacity
Image editing	Adobe Photoshop
Video creating and editing	iMovie or Adobe Premiere

As shown in table 3-2, I recommended that participants used the software and device which Dr Spurgeon had recommended to me. Apart from the image and video editing software, which needed guidance from a facilitator, I adopted software that was commonly used, such as Microsoft Word, or free-downloadable and small in size, such as Audacity for sound editing, or built-in for the Mac system such as iMovie. Participants could then stick to most choices of software if they wished to continue working with it outside the workshop.

### 3.2.3 Attention to copyright

As a lesson learned from previous projects such as DST for Turkish women and Australians in Turkey facilitated by Burcu Şimşek, I strongly recommended that each participant take note of the copyright issue when using other people's artwork and disseminating their own artwork. I introduced to participants how to recognise and use the free Creative Commons<sup>5</sup> license tags (CC license) in digital artwork, as shown in figure 3-3 below. After all digital stories were completed in a workshop, every participant was informed that the in-group screening would be the only chance

<sup>5</sup> <http://creativecommons.org.au/learn/licences/>

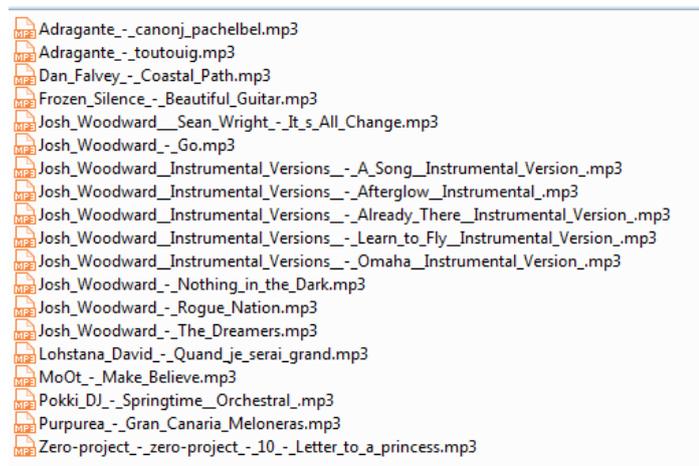
to see other participants' stories. This implied that I would not allow anyone to copy digital stories other than their own from me, except with the author's consent.



**Figure 3-3 The copyright issue slide and its Chinese version in my introductory presentation for each workshop in Australia and China**

Following this intention to heighten the copyright awareness of participants, I recommended a free downloading but CC-inscribed music website Jamendo.com for participants to choose background music. In workshops I conducted later, to make participants' music search process less directionless, I gave each participant a flash drive in which I collected popular music from Jamendo.com (see figure 3-4). These music pieces are protected under the CC-BY attribution license (see figure 3-5) and hence have the loosest user restriction. The user is required to only 'give appropriate

credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made',<sup>6</sup> while being free to adapt, remix and build upon the music.



**Figure 3-4 Music pool in flash drive**



**Figure 3-5 Creative Commons BY license for attribution**

In the last two images of the video, all participants needed to give necessary attribution to music authors as required by the music's inscribed CC license and then attach a CC license page (figure 3-6) to protect their own digital story. Since participants' digital stories often showed family members and their own identifiable images, I chose the strictest BY-NC-ND attribution-non-commercial-non-derivatives license for their stories to protect their creativity and privacy as far as the CC system can reach. This license requires any user to give credit, as well as not to use the work for commercial purposes or modify the work by remixing, transforming or building upon it.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/au/>



**Figure 3-6 CC license page at the end of each digital story made in Australia and China**

### 3.2.4 Open-ended dissemination

It is important to look at the ‘intentionality’ (Highfield & Leaver, 2014) of sharing, not just the consequence of publicity. In this vein, I emphasise individual’s decision on content distribution. As the migrant participants usually had cultural backgrounds that differed from the culture they lived in, ‘sharing’ was a crucial moment to observe how they perceived their connection with the culture in the destination society. With the development of the Internet, more and more stories are uploaded and viewed on a certain public online space. Considering that digital devices and video-sharing channels available for ordinary people every day is multiplying, it is worth asking how people prefer their personal stories to be shared today and why. Therefore, I not only had the workshop screening, but also paid attention to what migrants, who are always seen as people of two ‘homes’, did with their stories after the workshop. To this end, I did not set up a venue for displaying the stories online but kept sharing as individual-will based. Instead of giving any advice about how to share stories after the workshop, I made it an open question for participants. This open-ended post-workshop dissemination presented a difference from previous studies which designated online platforms, usually a webpage,<sup>8</sup> to publish the resulting stories.

The observation of sharing was conducted in two ways. First, I screened all digital stories from participants at the end of each workshop and asked how they felt about

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<sup>8</sup> Examples are *Capture Wales* by BBC Wales <http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/galleries/pages/capturewales.shtml>, projects by Dr Burcu Şimşek <http://www.digitalstoryhub.org/>, digital stories from coursework at Queensland University of Technology <http://digitalstorytelling.ci.qut.edu.au/index.php/stories>, Queensland stories from the Queensland State Library project <https://vimeo.com/channels/slqcollections>.

screening. Second, to leave ample time for post-workshop sharing to take place, I asked participants at least two weeks after workshop if they had shared the story with people outside the workshop. Participants had the freedom to turn down the screening of her or his story at any point and she or he was the sole decision-maker for post-workshop sharing. This meant I did not advise participants on whether, or by what means, to share digital stories with anyone outside the workshop.

### 3.3 Designing comparative case studies

#### 3.3.1 Locations and participants

From January 2015, I spent a year carrying out the DST-centred fieldwork in Australia and China. Until October 2015, when I conducted the last workshop, I collected a total of 58 digital stories from 56 participants (including non-Chinese participants) in the respective countries they lived in (see table 3-3). Compared with previous qualitative studies using DST, the number of digital stories I collected is substantial.

**Table 3-3 Overall digital storytelling workshop statistics**

	<b>Australia</b>	<b>China</b>
<b>Location</b>	Perth, Western Australia state	Hangzhou and Jiaying, Zhejiang province
<b>Number of workshops</b>	6	4
<b>Number of participants</b>	28 (14 of Chinese nationality)	28 (including a Singaporean-Chinese participant)
<b>Number of digital stories</b>	30	28

While I was not so concerned whether participants are diverse enough to represent migrant populations, I was still challenged with practical issues regarding the recruitment. One of them was the location of the workshop. Since a workshop usually takes longer than one or two hours, it demands much more time and energy commitments from each participant than commonly used methods such as interview and focus group. After a pilot workshop in Perth with five participants, how to

persuade people to attend the workshop and keep them until the end proved to be the most urgent but thorniest problems to tackle.

With this knowledge in mind, I gave priority to locations where minor issues of venue, computer and personnel support were easier to resolve, so that I could concentrate my time on recruiting and facilitating participants. A university was an ideal venue for the workshop to take place and to offer support. I targeted Curtin University in WA, Australia where I was studying as a PhD student and its partner university in the area of media studies, Zhejiang University of Media and Communications (referred to as ZUMC in the rest of thesis) in Zhejiang, China.

This choice of venues was also made because both universities were based in migrant-populated cities and provinces in the two countries. Western Australia has been a popular destination for international migration in Australia, while Zhejiang has been populated with interprovincial migrants in China. At the time that I carried out the workshops in 2015, according to a report from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), WA, with a population of 2.59 million in March 2015 (ABS, 2015a), was one of the most active states regarding international migration activities. It ranked the fourth among Australia's eight states and territories in arrivals and departures of net overseas migration (ABS, 2015c). Meanwhile, China's eastern coastal province of Zhejiang had attracted an influx of labour, students and other types of migrants from other provinces in China due to its long-held leading position in economic development since the country's economic reform, officially referred to as Reform and Opening Up, in 1978. According to a research report released by Zhejiang Provincial Bureau of Statistics, in China's once-a-decade demographic census in 2010, the province had an overall population of 54.43 million and 11.82 million of them, or 21.72%, were interprovincial migrants (Hangzhou City Bureau of Statistics, 2012, p. 4).

While the locations were decided for the convenience of obtaining organisational support and getting close to local migrants, I was yet to find out who I could expect as participants in order to collect stories of migration in a computer lab environment. In other words, apart from being willing to contribute to the research, the individuals needed to be people who were international or internal migrants. Hence, I began by

probing the definitions of migration in international and domestic contexts with international and national policy documents.

The Australian government defines an international migrant as ‘any person who changes his or her country of usual residence’ (ABS, 2015b). And, ‘a person is regarded as a usual resident if they have been (or expect to be) residing in Australia for a period of 12 months or more over a 16-month period’ (ibid.). This definition of migrant based on the change of country of residence is in line with the United Nations document released in 1998, the Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration (UNSD, 1998, p. 9). It is worth noting that according to the Australian authority, to determine whether a person is an international migrant or not disregards ‘nationality, citizenship or legal status’ (ABS, 2015b). Specifically, an international migrant in Australia does not have to live in the destination country continuously to make it the country of usual residence. While this means temporary absence from the country does not necessarily affect a person’s officially being an international migrant, this also allows for the chance that a person becomes a usual resident in two or more countries at the same time.

This looseness and ambivalence in defining international migrant was not a simple matter for the UN. It took the international organisation quite an effort to go this far. The UN arrived at the current definition through a series of deliberations and revisions since 1922 in the face of inconsistent and ineffective collection of international migration data (Nations, 1998, pp. 4-5). Previously, the organisation had used the strictly demarcated terminologies of ‘long-term immigrant’ and ‘long-term emigrant’ since a revision in 1976. The terminologies were criticised in the 1998 Recommendations as ‘difficult to grasp’ and resulting in ‘poor implementation’ (p. 9). The key reason for the constant adjustments of definition was that the nature of international migration had been undergoing changes since the 1980s (p. 2). As the number of migrants soared and the type of migrants continued to increase, more and more nation states had to issue diversified residence permissions according to individual’s length of stay, purpose, task, and so on. In contrast, the resident/non-resident and long-term immigrant/emigrant binaries caused under-reporting and other management difficulties for governments in dealing with the expanding crowd of variously tasked migrants.

In fact, most countries' migration policies are far less all-embracing than the UN definition appears to be, and the difficult level of becoming a usual resident of a country does depend on 'nationality, citizenship or legal status'. However, the fact that state governments have to acknowledge the diversity of migration and loosen the restriction on the permanency and continuity of residence was both relieving and inspirational for me. It became unnecessary to overstress the official status of Australian citizenship or permanent residence in recruiting participants, as long as a person had spent or was expected to spend a year's time in Australia. Many professionals, students and their family members, thus, well deserved the title of international migrant. In this way, I could leave my project open and inclusive to a diverse crowd of participants and fully concentrate on gathering their stories of international migration experiences.

Interestingly, similar to the UN, the Chinese government also has continued making adjustments to its criteria for internal migration. In policy documents and scholarly works, China's internal migration is usually discussed in reference to two types of internal migrants, namely, permanent migrants (*qianyi*) and the floating population (*liudong renkou*) (Goodkind & West, 2002; Liang, Li, & Ma, 2014). Shortly after the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the country established the household registration system (*hukou*) in the 1950s in order to control the flow of population from the rural countryside to urban cities. The *hukou* system clearly states a person's place of household registration and thus associates the person to full access to local employment and education resources and social welfare. In *hukou*, unless the person transfers the household registration to a new location, a person is not considered a permanent migrant resident and thus has only limited access to resources and welfare (Goodkind & West, 2002). In contrast with permanent migrants, the floating population covers a larger number of internal migrants and is less privileged since it 'encompasses all those residing away from the location of their official *hukou*' (ibid.). Apart from people who leave their place of *hukou* only temporarily, there are also people who live in a new location in the long term but find it too difficult to transfer their household registration. As there is no official explanation of the term, I borrowed a definition from the latest research on China's demographic census: floating population consists of 'migrants residing in a location

that is different from their place of household registration, or *hukou*, for at least six months' (Liang et al., 2014).

The floating population has been rarely studied as a whole, probably due to its expansiveness. As a matter of fact, 'the term is often tailored and defined more precisely depending on the interests of the observer' (Goodkind & West, 2002). So far, media researchers have found interest in the most disadvantaged subgroup of floating population: rural-urban migrant workers (Cartier et al., 2005; Sun, 2014) and their children, that is, 'migrant children' (N. Li, 2011; Yan, 2012) who often accompanied their parents to live in the city. Aside from workers, the floating population also includes professionals, students and relatives who come from a different province, another city in the same province or the countryside. With the Zhejiang-based participants for my workshop, while I was interested in migrant workers, I also tried to reach the migrant types that had rarely received attention.

The following paragraphs contain a short account of the WA-based and Zhejiang-based workshops with some basic statistics. Although numbers are unable to expose details of the workshop process, they can display a rough picture of how each workshop was composed and carried out in each location. I was also driven by the fact that each workshop had gone through adjustments and turned out to be unexpected in one way or another. A record of these 'erratic' statistics points to our lack of knowledge on new technology use by Chinese migrant groups. More 'erratic' occurrences await discovery, as this study was far from exhausting issues around the topic, even though the fieldwork was completed successfully (having data ready for analysis). Thus, DST for Chinese migrants requires further fieldwork and research.

## **Workshops based in Western Australia**

In the six workshops held in WA, 14 people of Chinese nationality and 14 of other nationalities completed at least one digital story each. Most Chinese community members I contacted preferred to attend the workshop activity with non-Chinese participants. This caused the workshop to be multicultural from the very beginning. Because of this multicultural composition, all workshops had to be carried out in the English language.

Since each workshop turned out to be multicultural, I had to emphasise in the presentation that although my thesis targeted Chinese migrants, its scope was wider than Chineseness. This meant participant from non-Chinese cultures, including local Australians without international migration experiences, would be given equal attention during workshops and in the ensuing data analysis.



**Figure 3-7 Photo of multicultural workshop in WA**

I used a snowballing technique to recruit participants. Participants were mainly undergraduate students, PhD students and visiting scholars at Curtin University, and had stayed in Australia for a duration of less than five years. Participants also included professionals from different industries, as well as family members of unknown employment status. I approached and confirmed the recruitment of them via face-to-face conversations, SMS, email and social media such as Facebook and WeChat. I further sustained their attention to the workshop and motivated the communication between them by setting up an invitation-only group *Digital Storytelling in WA* on Facebook. While I posted event reminders, workshop summaries and workshop photos to form a continuing timeline for my WA-based fieldwork, participants made very few interactions on the group page.

Although all workshops were small-scale, the numbers of participants were uneven. The pilot workshop with the theme of *Challenge*, which I included in the ethics application for the study, in order to make it part of the data collection, had five participants. It was followed by three *Stay* workshops for four to ten participants each time. Unexpectedly, two participants from previous workshops asked for extra one-on-one workshops to make stories on self-selected topics.

**Table 3-4 Scales of Western Australian workshops**

Type of workshop		No. of workshops	No. of participants per workshop	No. of participants per type of workshop
Planned	Pilot	1	5	5
	Formal	3	4 – 10	23
Unplanned		2	1	2
Total		6	N/A	28 <sup>9</sup>

**Table 3-5 Summaries of Western Australian workshop participants**

Order of Planned Workshop	Nationality		Gender		Age			Occupation		Duration of Living in WA			Motivation for Living in WA		
	China	Other	Female	Male	<30	<40	<50	Student	Other	<6 M	<5 Y	>5 Y	Study	Work	Family
1	2	3	3	2	0	3	0	2	3	2	1	1	2	2	0
2	6	4	7	3	5	4	0	8	2	4	6	0	8	1	1
3	4	5	3	6	4	0	4	7	2	1	5	3	6	1	2
4	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	3	1	1	2	1	4	0	0
<b>Total</b>	14	14	15	13	11	9	4	20	8	8	14	5	20	4	3

Workshops in WA were carried out in a Mac lab on Curtin’s Bentley campus. The lab had around 20 Macintosh-system computers and a radio recording studio, which usually only media school students had access to. I did not have an assistant to co-facilitate the workshop as most of my colleagues had only limited spare time to help me. However, temporary help from colleagues relieved me from stress in almost every workshop session.

While each workshop was compressed to two afternoons, each unplanned additional workshop took a longer time of usually four afternoons. The extension of time was due to the participants’ attempts at adjusting and retouching the videos.

<sup>9</sup> As mentioned above, the two participants in the unplanned workshops both attended previous workshops and therefore are not added into the total number of participants to avoid repetition.

I informed participants with the research question of my study, the development of DST, the schedule for the workshop, as well as a theme around migration during an introductory presentation. At the end of the presentation, the audience were given the participant information sheet and the consent form to read and sign voluntarily. All planned workshops were broadly themed around a word that people with migration experience might relate to. For the pilot workshop the theme was set as *challenge* and was changed to a more ambiguous and neutral word *stay* for all the following workshops. In order to remove as many obstructions to creative self-expression as possible, I did not limit *stay* to any location or any period of time. I emphasised in the presentation that the theme could be understood in any way the participants preferred. When I was asked what if they could not relate to ‘stay’, I answered they could disregard it and look for another one. Most stories told in WA set either Perth or the homeplace as the location. There were also stories about places that participants had travelled to briefly.

**Table 3-6 Themes and durations of Western Australian workshops**

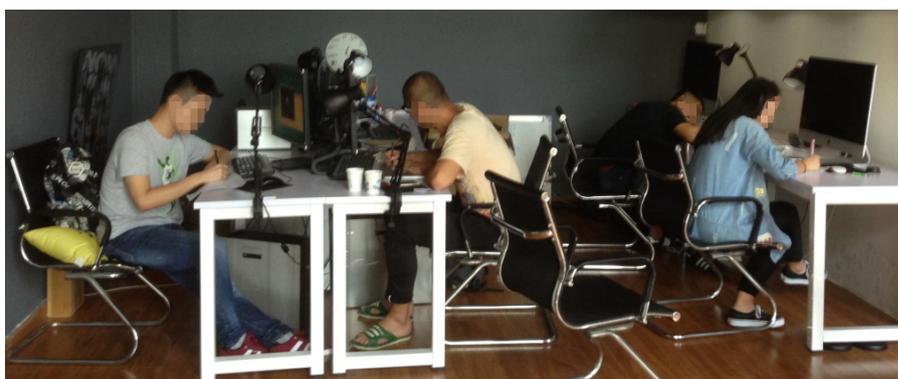
Type of workshops		Theme	Duration
Planned	Pilot	<i>Challenge</i>	3 days
	Formal	<i>Stay</i>	2 half days
Unplanned		Self-determined	2 – 4 half days

Once the consent was given, participant received a short questionnaire to fill out details regarding their personal history of migration and workshop preferences. Then in the story-circle stage, I called upon everyone to sit down in a circle to play three to six oral storytelling games with simple properties, in order to break the ice and get them warmed up for storytelling via technology. The games were picked after several experiments with friends prior to the fieldwork. The ensuing stages unfolded as displayed in table 3-1.

Participants were advised to attend as many stages as they could for the sake of timely completion and artistic value to their satisfaction. However, some stages saw absence of participants since they had other commitments. This occurred especially during the screening stage, sometimes also because participants preferred to keep the completed story confidential.

## Workshops based in Zhejiang

In the four workshops held in Zhejiang, 27 interprovincial undergraduate students and an international undergraduate student at ZUMC participated. All workshops were carried out in Mandarin as extracurricular activities. Participants were from over ten Chinese provinces, as well as Singapore.



**Figure 3-8 Photo of a Zhejiang workshop**

The choice of out-of-province university students, a subgroup of China's floating population, to be my internal migrant participants was made due to practical considerations and my personal interest. Practically speaking, they were the most accessible internal migrant group able to devote long hours to workshop activity. As specifically tasked internal migrants living in Chinese cities, the group had a substantial number and were prospective new residents of the local society. However, their understandings of migration, as well as hopes and struggles because of migration, had been seriously neglected in policy and research alike.

Workshops at ZUMC were carried out in both the Xiasha campus in Hangzhou and the Tongxiang campus in Jiaxing. Hangzhou and Jiaxing were adjacent cities with an hour's bus ride between them. I received support from individual lecturers from the Hangzhou-based School of Television and Arts and the School of Filmmaking, both in Hangzhou, as well as from the Jiaxing-based School of Cultural Creativity. Some participants were new acquaintances while others were my long-term friends. As previously mentioned, I attended a 'train-the-trainer' DST workshop in Perth facilitated with Dr Christina Spurgeon from QUT. In addition to myself, six young lecturers from ZUMC on a short-term visit to Curtin also participated in the workshop. Two of them, when informed that ZUMC became my host university

during fieldwork, helped me with the workshop recruitment and facilitation on the two campuses.

Unlike the snowballing technique I used in WA, more effort was required for recruitment in Zhejiang, mainly because I was new to the province, expected to stay for just three months and knew only a few university staff members. To let more interprovincial students know that I was in need of them, I gave guest lectures to introduce DST and my study. At the request of a lecturer, I was invited to talk about the differences between talk-show programs on television in the US and China. However, I did not gain much feedback from the audience. It turned out that lecturers at ZUMC were even stronger introducers of my study due to their bond with students and student organisation leaders. All participants recruited had stayed in Zhejiang for less than three years. I knew of their interest and confirmed their attendance via SMS, email and the instant messaging application WeChat.

The workshops in Zhejiang varied in scale dramatically. The first three workshops had a small scale of three or four participants. However, the last workshop, which occupied the voluntary self-study time in the evening, took the class form with the aid of a lecturer. It served as an informal video production practice session for the filmmaking school freshmen and women.

**Table 3-7 Scales of Zhejiang workshops**

Type of workshop	No. of workshops	No. of participants per workshop	No. of participants per type of workshop
Small-scale	3	3	10
		4	
		3	
Class form	1	18	18
Total	4	28	28

**Table 3-8 Summaries of Zhejiang workshop participants**

Order of Workshop	Number of Previously-lived Country/Chinese Province	Gender		Age	Occupation	Duration of Living in Zhejiang			Motivation for Living in Zhejiang	
		F	M			<6 M	<3 Y	>3 Y	Study	Family
1	3	2	1	18 – 20	Undergrad Student	0	3	0	3	0
2	3	1	3			0	4	0	4	0
3	3	3	0			0	2	1	3	0
4	10 + 1 International Student	14	4			14	0	3	16	1
<b>Total</b>	17 Chinese Provinces and Countries	20	8	N/A	N/A	14	9	4	26	1

Being neither a staff member nor a student at ZUMC, I had very limited access to the university resources. Only participants in Jiaxing were provided with desktops in an advertisement production studio of the Cultural Creativity School. Participants in Hangzhou either provided their own laptops or borrowed my personal laptop. I used their classroom and a lecturer’s office as venues. Therefore, there were different software and devices used in voiceover recording and video production. Most participants recorded their voiceover using a mobile recording app of their choice. For the first workshop, a student working at the radio station lent the radio studio to my participants for an hour to record their voiceovers. As to the video-making software, some chose Adobe Premiere and iMovie as I recommended, and some chose Final Cut because of individual preference. As time was too limited to train new facilitators, I was the only facilitator for all workshop sessions at ZUMC.

**Table 3-9 Themes and durations of Zhejiang workshops**

Type of workshop	Theme	Duration per workshop
Small-scale	<i>停留 (Stay)</i>	2 – 3 half days
Class form		2 hours × 3 days

To compare with the WA project, I tried to transplant the same compressed model developed in WA to Zhejiang. For example, I set the Chinese equivalent of *stay*, 停留 (*tingliu*) as the theme for Zhejiang workshops. I followed the two-afternoon model I had invented and implemented in WA. I stretched it to three half days in some workshops due to an overly large number of participants (> 15 persons) or due to participants’ lack of technology literacy required for video production. I also

changed the word count limit from 250 in English to 450 Chinese characters for Chinese-language script so that each video is still between one to two minutes' long. All participants were given the same pool of free-licence music from Jamendo.com through an online sharing cloud website, pan.baidu.com. In the class-form workshop for a class of more than 20 students, participation and screening of videos were all strictly on a voluntary basis. As a result of limited time, all class members introduced themselves during the icebreaker but only four volunteered to play the game of oral storytelling to a given picture. Two asked for face-to-face facilitation and the rest produced video either at the dormitory or during the self-study time. On the evening of the story exhibition, 18 students submitted final-cut videos to me for screening via flash drives and emails. Two of them copied the videos to me but refused to have them mentioned or screened before the class. The rest of the workshop content, like the stages tasks as well as consent giving and questionnaire, were kept as similar to the workshop in WA as possible.

### 3.3.2 Additional data collection

I learned from previous studies on DST (Şimşek, 2012; Thumim, 2009a; Vivienne, 2013) that DST workshop can be augmented with auxiliary methods to produce richer data around the practice and the resultant output. The package of auxiliary methods has not varied much, and has usually been made up of participant observation, interviews and (or) focus groups. Below I explain how these methods contributed valuable data in line with the methodology.

#### Participant observation

While DST workshop was used to stimulate the formation of migrants' first-person narratives, participant observation served to arouse researcher narrative. When I asked a speaker in a seminar<sup>10</sup> about the usefulness of participant observation, he answered that the method is powerful in changing researcher's perception of a phenomenon, as the researcher can gain a subtle and engaged understanding. The extent of the change, he added, varies based on the researcher's distance from the object, as well as what happens before, in the middle of, and after the observation, in the researcher's eyes.

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<sup>10</sup> Varieties of Methods (ii) seminar on 3 May, 2017 at Curtin University, check the details at <https://humanities.curtin.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/05/Varieties-of-Methods-ii.pdf>.

This method posed an opportunity to scrutinise and question the bottom-up participatory idea behind most uses of DST. Therefore, I gave most attention to two aspects of workshop in using it. One was an invitation of target group members. I kept notes in the workshop journal about what I found out in the consultation with prospective participants before each workshop as well as who eventually turned up at workshop and who did not. These were valuable findings because unlike groups with an obvious disadvantaged status, Chinese migrants in Australia and China often do not have a uniform point of political or cultural claim or contention. This makes invitation a necessary and interesting stage to observe. The other well-observed aspect was interaction in the workshop. Through participants' interactions with each other and with me, I looked for what kind of group member did participants act as. For example, did they act like an insider or outsider? Did they care about what stories others were telling? Although technology use was the main content of DST, observing interaction helped discover how participants translated everyday socialisation differently in technology-afforded storytelling scenarios. Both the dynamics and obstacles were equally important in adding to knowledge of the participatory characteristic of DST. Moreover, the researcher-participant interaction served to inform the shaping of the researcher's role.

Differing from many other studies, this study required the researcher to use the method in the form of 'observing by doing'. There was a duality in DST's function in research. Practically speaking, DST was an effective instrument for data collection as it adopts a duplicable workshop design and requires only simple technology infrastructure and literacy. The responsibilities of researcher and participants were clearly demarcated in this regard. However, in the process, DST was informal and improvisational, meaning that, as in artistic creation, it was very ambitious to set a uniform pace for all participants to follow. To cope with this, I had to be more than an instructor or notetaking bystander. While I was duly in charge of why, who and how to participate in DST, I also had to give timely technology aid and artistic advice, drag participants from obsession with a certain step and still be available all the time. Hence, I had the rare opportunity of all-round involvement in the participants' storytelling. The data generated from DST was thicker not just because of the continual observation on the spot, but due to the full growth of bond and trust between participants and myself. This strong tie, as shown in participants' request for

extra workshops, made it more possible to conduct follow-up data gathering and to extend the life of the project.

## Interviews and focus groups

Interviews and focus group served to expose as much as possible what the narrative was intended for and how the experience of narrative making felt. In other words, through the two qualitative methods, I tried to find out the motivation and purpose behind each story as well as the technology user narrative that emerged in the process of storytelling.

After each workshop, semi-structured interviews with participants were conducted on the participants' perception of DST and migration experience. For participants in WA, I arranged interviews to be one-on-one and at least two weeks after the workshop so that there were chances that participants had shared videos outside the workshop. For participants in Zhejiang, I conducted most interviews in-group to gather their perception of the workshop because it was very hard to keep participants from leaving once the workshop ended. Considering the positive attitude towards internal migration issues, I supplemented interviews with mini focus groups to ask more questions on internal migration as well as encourage discussion on participants' concerns in relation to it. For participants whose stories received more attention in data analysis, I conducted follow-up interviews via email if they were no longer available to meet in person, in order to ask more specific and in-depth questions.

### 3.3.3 Data analysis

I used textual and discourse analysis to search for the first-person narrative, the researcher narrative and the technology user narrative from the collected video, observation and verbal data. This was done in the hope that by constructing and combining the three narratives, I would be able to recognise the opportunities for migrant social inclusion that should be made more use of, as well as the challenges that should be resolved.

Most of the 58 resultant digital stories, as the theme *stay* suggested, were place-based stories. This was evident in the story titles (table 3-10, in the sequence of production).

**Table 3-10 Titles of collected digital stories**

Story titles from WA workshops	Translated story titles from Zhejiang workshops
<i>My Life in Australia</i>	<i>Homesick in a strange land</i>
<i>My Bicycle Life in Perth</i>	<i>My one year in Hangzhou city</i>
<i>Challenge</i>	<i>Stay</i>
<i>Beauty</i>	<i>Xiuyuan's story</i>
<i>Me and the Sunset</i>	<i>Come all this way</i>
<i>Australia: Another Place to Stay</i>	<i>Northern girl in the south</i>
<i>My University, My Time, My Precious</i>	<i>Another city</i>
<i>My New Beginning</i>	<i>Cities I walked into</i>
<i>Memories in Perth</i>	<i>Stay</i>
<i>Travelling of Tibet<sup>11</sup></i>	<i>Memory</i>
<i>1st Year in Perth</i>	<i>Stay</i>
<i>Memory in DUFE</i>	<i>Stay</i>
<i>The Reason for Staying and Fighting</i>	<i>Biubiu</i>
<i>My Journey</i>	<i>My digital storytelling</i>
<i>One of My Memory</i>	<i>Five colours</i>
<i>Beach Person I am</i>	<i>Stay</i>
<i>Hot Young Blood</i>	<i>Stay</i>
<i>Days 1200</i>	<i>Stay</i>
<i>Journey</i>	<i>Stay</i>
<i>Hello Perth</i>	<i>A story about Louhe city</i>
<i>An Amazing Journey</i>	<i>Four seasons</i>
<i>Stay as a Guest</i>	<i>In the distance</i>
<i>The Perfect Hands</i>	<i>City traveller</i>
<i>My Journey to Perth</i>	<i>What happens in the future will all be gifts</i>
<i>Australian Life: Look Ever Forward</i>	<i>The faraway before my eyes</i>
<i>Exploring Perth Australia</i>	<i>Rainy night</i>
<i>What does life mean to me?</i>	<i>Stay</i>
<i>A Place with Love</i>	<i>Stay</i>
<i>Voice of CIE</i>	
<i>Memory of Ibu Sumarni Sri Hartono</i>	

With an interest in cultural geography, I tried to reveal through the stories the ‘complex social construct of spatial meaning’ (Rodman, 1992). To this end, I looked

<sup>11</sup> There were grammatical errors in Chinese participants’ use of English in creating digital stories in WA. I leave them unchanged in the thesis.

for the prevalent discourse or the hegemonic story on migration that participants tried to respond or speak to via their personal stories and the participatory storytelling activity. The consistency or inconsistency between the mainstream and the personal was treated as a crucial locus to find out the fate of the migrant voice in DST: was it in any way inspired, found, elaborated and amplified, or was it evaded, neglected, suppressed and diminished?

I believed comparison between case studies could help establish an unbiased view on the democratisation potential of DST in two countries. Thus, to better address the research question, a comparative analysis on findings from the two locations was conducted. The three types of narratives contributed three comparative points to trace the ‘footprint of voice’. Specifically, they are: whether stories were told differently from the hegemonic story, whether bottom-up participation was achieved, and whether stories were eventually amplified in dissemination. I also tried to locate DST as for or against the current trends in everyday technology-afforded storytelling in the respective countries.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Spending almost a year’s time organising and conducting DST workshops was a rewarding experience. It trained me as a facilitator and a researcher, a ‘passionate observer’ and a ‘cool-minded participant’, at the same time. It also educated me. Despite commercial promotions on the easiness of using technology, people do not see technology-afforded storytelling as a click away. Instead, they deal with it with a great deal of care and attention.

The research design was not without shortcomings. One shortcoming was due to my lack of experience. I did not brief participants about the importance of going through all steps in the completion of the digital story. About half of the participants in the two largest workshops in WA left before the screening of the digital stories. I later revised my briefing presentation and the absence rate during screening lowered significantly. Another shortcoming was that most participants were university students with very unitary experience in the destination society. Although the size of sample obtained for this research was larger than in previous studies, the limited diversity of migration experience meant the inclusion issues for the target group was

far from being exhausted. These shortcomings pointed to more work to be done with an improved facilitation expertise and a higher diversity of migrant participants.

In the next three chapters, I follow the storytelling approach in revealing findings from the DST workshops with migrants in WA and Zhejiang.

## Chapter 4 Narrating transnationality

This is a chapter on the findings from the first case study on the six DST workshops I carried out for Chinese international migrants in the city of Perth in the state of Western Australia, Australia. While living overseas, international migrants are not far from home in the sense that the home country always takes part in constructing the self. With a transnational reach by popular messaging, blogging and news apps on mobile device, a migrant's home country starts to enjoy a heightened co-presence in a 'transnational mediasphere' (Sun, 2005, p. 69) where migrants' increasing communicative encounters take place. Given this trend, this chapter addresses the question of what happens when migrant transnationality encounters technology-afforded storytelling.

In this case study, I demonstrate how Chinese international migrants formed participatory dynamics in multicultural DST workshop and how their stories diverged from the prevalent socio-economic view on overseas migration. However, these dynamics did not necessarily lead to unreserved, critical and creative storytelling through digital technology. The findings show that obstacles and risks for personal, participatory and visual storytelling persisted in DST and sometimes hindered migrant participants from achieving unconstrained self-expression and self-representation.

### 4.1 Digital storytelling participation as socialisation

Digital storytelling was invented as a face-to-face group practice as part of the community arts movement. Since the inventor of DST took a 'participant-centred perspective of progressive education and community cultural development' (Lambert, 2009, p. 86), the group base underlying the workshop form was intended to enhance the bonding within a community and to develop a dynamic group learning environment, as in a classroom. Due to the group basis of the activity, the building of relationships between participants is an inevitable process in DST.

The Chinese international migrants in WA found the face-to-face group to be the most appealing aspect of DST workshop, rather than the use of new media technologies or the filmmaking. Participants I targeted during workshop recruitment were drawn to the opportunity for socialisation, especially with strangers from a culture other than Chinese. This interest in socialisation caused the workshop to be made up of people of different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, in subsequent participation, participants' storytelling and understanding of DST were heavily influenced by the process, extent and outcome of socialisation in the workshop. In the following section, the workshop development is outlined in order to expand on the prominent factor of socialisation in the Chinese international migrants' DST participation.

#### 4.1.1 Recruitment challenges

It was unexpectedly difficult to gather and keep a group of Chinese international migrants in a DST workshop. I went through a period in which few people showed any interest in the research activity. When I became better in touch with target participants, I encountered important social, cultural, ethno-racial and practical issues that I should have considered from the outset.

First of all, Chinese international migrants demonstrated a lack of motivation in relation to community cohesion and community activism. Unlike female or queer participants in self-voicing activities, who are driven by comparatively clear contestations and claims to make to the wider public (Şimşek, 2012; Vivienne, 2016), Chinese international migrants indicate such a diversity in social positioning and cultural identification that any assumption of a singular all-encompassing community for them is always in doubt, regardless of the destination country. The word 'Chinese' is ramified culturally and dispersed geographically. I only recruited first-generation migrants who were originally from the People's Republic of China, however, Singaporean, Malaysian and Indonesian migrants to WA who are not from China but who self-identify as Chinese in cultural background may also be referred to as Chinese migrants. However, their understanding and practice of Chinese culture varied dramatically from mainlanders. The imprecision of viewing Chinese migrants as a single community has been acknowledged in previous research on media practices in Chinese ethnic communities. For example, Chinese ethnic newspapers in

Los Angeles, compared with Korean and Latino counterparts, included fewer stories on the local Chinese population that would have been essential for community cohesion and group identity (Lin & Song, 2006). The ‘lack of critical mass for any one “community”’ (Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000, p. 27) was often a central theme for Chinese and other Asian diasporic media. Hence, it can be difficult to mobilise this group with a unitary activist goal.

Another difficulty in the way of the recruitment strategy of gathering cohorts to address common concerns was that the Chinese migrants accessible to me in WA shared a relative ‘elitist social positioning’ (Shi, 2005). This was similar to the Chinese migrant media consumers that Shi interviewed in Iowa, United States of America. Most Chinese migrants I contacted in WA were free of noticeable social disadvantage or financial stress. They might be international undergraduate students whose parents afforded expensive tuition fees, or PhD students fully sponsored either by an Australian university or the China Scholarship Council, or visiting scholars who received living allowances from their home institution or the Chinese government, or full-time company employees who were paid regularly on contract. According to my private communications with them, they had not encountered any serious racial tensions. As Shi’s study demonstrated, Chinese migrants’ pessimism concerning media mobilisation was partly due to the absence of ‘any tangible imminent issue that threatens their collective interests’ (ibid.). In view of the plurality of Chinese migrant communities and the lack of urgent situations, I had to give up the expectation of having target participants come to me. Rather, I had to collect more knowledge about potential participants, individual by individual, so that I could tailor DST workshop to their preference and finally have them attend.

Second, the time-consuming workshop was unrealistic for migrants who often underwent ‘downward social mobility’ (Lim, Bork-Hüffer, & Yeoh, 2016) during international relocation and faced more difficulties than the average local resident. As previously mentioned, DST is labour intensive in the sense that it takes at least several hours to complete. The latest DST workshop held in ACMI lasted for two days (figure 4-1). In the ‘train-the-trainer workshop’ I attended with six lecturers from media-focussed ZUMC (two taught media production courses), most of us were unable to finish until the end of the third day.



**Figure 4-1 Notice for a two-day DST workshop in 2016 on the ACMI website**

The time-consuming issue was especially problematic for older female participants who had limited time to spare. On hearing that there would be a roomful of people in the workshop, their first reaction was always resistant, based on their response that they would not have time for such a ‘social event’.

When I asked Shan, a middle-aged associate professor from China on a year-long visit to a university in WA, whether she joined the activities of Chinese organisations, she answered that she was not interested because of family responsibilities. During her visit, she lived with her child in a rented room while her husband stayed in China. Thus, besides shuttling between university and home, she had to cook three meals, escort the child to school in the morning and pick him up in the afternoon. Fortunately, she bought a car shortly after arrival in Perth to make transport much easier in that sprawling city. For the workshop in the afternoons, she had to make extra trips to the university and ask a friend to help pick up the child from school. In the interview, she understood her participation as helping a younger researcher and a compatriot.

Shan: I went to the workshop to help you. [...] I’m too busy to meet people at Chinese migrant organisations; I have to take care of my baby.<sup>12</sup>

Wati, like Shan, also worked previously as a university teacher in her home country of Indonesia. Three years ago, she came to WA alone to begin her PhD study, leaving her child and husband in Indonesian. She believed that time pressures for migrants were caused by difficulties in study and work.

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<sup>12</sup> Most interviews with Chinese participants in WA were conducted in Chinese. The English transcripts I discuss in the thesis are my own translations.

Wati: Because here people have to survive. If you are a student, you have to study very hard in order to be able to complete your study on time. If then, for example, you work, then you need to work very hard in Australia. [...] Some people even have to study during weekends.

Wati mentioned the inconvenience of transport in explaining why she had avoided the social events of a popular Indonesian organisation. Wati lived in a rented room close to the campus, but she did not own a car. So, she had to walk for around half an hour to reach the building she worked in and took a bus to most other places. To attend the workshop, she gave up two afternoons from her thesis writing. She emphasised that, in her view, the workshop was different from a social event because of its academic value.

Wati: This workshop is different. Because this is part of research and frankly speaking, because I can benefit from the workshop, so I enjoyed the workshop. Benefit here is not in terms of money. [...] I think it is still in the academic context, that's why I consider your workshop as part of academic activities, not social activities.

Both previously university teachers in their home countries, Shan and Wati lived as temporary residents in Australia on meagre allowances from their home governments and faced work hour restrictions if they wanted to take an extra job. Their socialisation was further limited by their family responsibilities and difficulties in studying and working. Because they had not built as large a social network in Perth, as at home, they had to cope with humble living conditions and fulfil work and family duties with minimal external help. Out of sympathy and curiosity, they made greater efforts than other participants to accept my workshop invitation.

Therefore, the duration of the workshop sounded daunting for these participants. Even when I compressed the workshop into two afternoons, many people I approached were still taken aback by my request for them to contribute more than one or two hours. While people such as Shan and Wati eventually became participants, it was evident that following the BBC model, even the compressed version, could pose challenges to migrants with family responsibilities, work difficulties or transport inconveniences. This further lowered the chance of having older participants who were less likely be drawn to new technology use than younger participants. Compared with telling stories from the heart, my blind persistence on making high-quality videos caused more loss than gain.

Third, an all-Chinese workshop did not meet the communicative needs of my target participants. While older participants refrained from social events, younger participants showed an interest in the social networking opportunity that the group base might bring. These participants were in their 20s and 30s, and were either students or employees. Getting together with people, getting to know more people and making new friends were the most frequent motivations for participation given in interview responses, while only two participants mentioned the attempt to learn the know-how of video making. Two male participants in their 30s, Feng, a visiting scholar from a Chinese university, and Hao, an employee in a WA-based mining corporation, considered the expectancy of socialisation to be an important condition for participation throughout the workshop.

Feng: For me, learning to use software was secondary, software is updating all the time. Communicating with people is probably more interesting and what I paid more attention to.

Hao: Most people would feel better working on a digital story with other people. There's a difference between eating alone and eating with people, because eating with people causes an exchange of information, mutual learning and mutual influence. The attractive point of this activity is getting people together.

Accompanying this motivation, there was a strong expectation of reaching out of the relatively isolated social circles of compatriots. Instead of bonding, on foreign soil, with people from home, it was the cross-cultural communication that participants were longing for. This was evident in the young Chinese participants' almost unanimous preference for a workshop with multicultural composition. I presented the participants with a short survey on personal details and workshop preference asking if they preferred a workshop 'with participants originally from different countries, English speaking', or 'with most participants from Australia, English speaking', or 'with all participants from your home country, home language speaking' or 'with participants from another country (not Australia), their home language speaking'. Despite being informed that the workshop was intended for Chinese migrants only, with few exceptions, all of the Chinese participants ticked 'with participants originally from different countries, English speaking'.

Chinese participants, themselves, were not surprised by this result. In everyday life, study and work, they engaged mainly with Chinese classmates, roommates, colleagues, friends and acquaintances. Meanwhile, they communicated with family

and friends at home via messaging apps such as WeChat and QQ, at least on a weekly basis, sometimes several times a day. Although for the newly arrived, mutual help from local Chinese acquaintances and technological platforms to communicate across borders lowered the cost and brought conveniences in settling in, young Chinese migrants were conscious of their disconnection from other local groups and, possibly, their invisibility in the local society. An anxiety that they could not achieve the expected self-improvement and cosmopolitan lifestyle could be felt in the interviews.

Xue, a 22-year-old, female undergraduate student who had been in Perth for six months, lived in campus accommodation with Chinese students. She was attending the Business School at Curtin University. She said most of her classmates were young people like her who came from China not long ago. She emphasised to me that ‘not everyone has the opportunity to come overseas’. Chinese companions, Chinese language and Chinese culture, thus, were present almost all the time during her various engagements with the local society.

I: Do you think it makes sense to put Chinese participants with non-Chinese participants? Actually, an all-Chinese workshop could make me collect data faster.

Xue: There are good aspects and downsides. Good ones are that you can collect data faster and our communication will be easier as we share the same culture. Downside is that if all are Chinese, we would not have that many opportunities to speak and share our thoughts.

I: Do you need these opportunities?

Xue: Of course, we need that because we are going to university overseas. It's impossible that we just communicate with Chinese here. It's an incremental process since we really dare not to speak to foreigners at the start.

Ying, who was Xue's classmate, roommate and close friend, was straightforward in dismissing the idea of a Chinese-only workshop.

I: Would you still come if the workshop was all-Chinese?

Ying: If the workshop is all-Chinese, then it is meaningless.

As to telling stories in a second language, instead of being upset, Hao thought English added fun to the ordinary storytelling activity and made the workshop eye-catching for local Chinese residents.

I: Don't you think English inhibited you from telling a story?

Hao: It's like babies learning to walk. Even if they tumble from time to time, they still like to try. However, when you know how to walk, do you still see it as something pleasant?

I: Would you choose English again if given another digital story to make?

Hao: Yes. But if people know they'll make it in Chinese, I think only a few people will be interested.

While expressing their 'normal demand' for a multicultural and English-speaking social activity, Chinese participants also shared their discontent and frustrations in socialising with Chinese peers. Qing, a female student who had come to Perth for eight months, mentioned the language limitation of staying in Chinese circles.

Qing: It [an English-speaking workshop] was important because we wouldn't force ourselves into speaking English in spare time.

Shu, also a student and Qing's friend, said her membership of a Chinese student organisation at a university did not address her needs to engage with people from different cultures.

Shu: Chinese student organisations mainly involve Chinese people. It contacts 'foreigners' only when it tries to show the Chinese culture to them. Its importance lies in that it forms links within the Chinese community, especially in the face of difficulties. It makes sure that there are Chinese people ready to help out compatriots in their free time.

Xuan, a PhD student, recounted an unpleasant experience at a Chinese festival gathering. Comparing the responses to her greetings from Chinese and non-Chinese strangers, she made the point that Chinese peers were self-enclosed, indifferent and unfriendly to unfamiliar people.

Xuan: I've only attended one Chinese event during the Spring Festival which was organised by the university for Chinese international students. It had a huge impact on me. I also discussed this with the organiser. Because I chat with industry people every week, and even on the street I say hi to people. The people I usually meet are quite open to any conversation and I feel it's very easy to merge with them. But in that Chinese event, people only talked to people they knew and totally closed up to others. At first, I said hi to every person, but people didn't respond and even a girl asked me: 'Do I know you?' I told her: 'I don't need to know you to say hi to you'. Chinese people form this very closed circle of relationships that doesn't welcome new faces, while foreigners are very open-minded. This is a very big difference.

Jian was a student and an active leader of Chinese student organisations. He had learned and practised Chinese martial arts since childhood. Every week, he volunteered to organise free learning sessions for Chinese friends to learn martial arts. On his reluctance to socialise with Chinese people, he said he did not identify with most Chinese peers that he knew, because of their slackness in study and life.

Jian: I am actually a 'weirdo' among Chinese students. I was the only person among all the Chinese students enrolled in 2011 who sets up organisations and promotes them. A lot of others just play electronic games and date girls. Sometimes I am the only one sitting in a class, although the class might not be worth listening to.

Meanwhile, the complaint about ethnic circles was not only voiced by Chinese participants. Niko, a postgraduate student in her late 30s, said she could not find a Japanese social circle that suited her either.

Niko: Japanese organisations in Perth mainly consist of people who have retired and moved to Perth, as well as people sent to work in a Perth branch. I don't need to belong to this kind of organisation. There are Japanese women's communities in Perth but all of them are housewives. I haven't heard of Japanese student clubs or communities or associations.

The discouraging befriending and bonding experience with Chinese peers should be viewed in the context of a waning solidarity and growing diffusion among Chinese migrants. When China was ruled by feudal dynasties, self-organised circles of overseas Chinese people sprang up in various locations. The most prevalent form was voluntary mutual-help organisations called *huiguan* or *zonghui*, which were made up of people from the same hometown or clan, who aimed to help each other to make a living 'under the principles of localist and parochial sentiments and old tradition' in a foreign country (H. Liu, 1998, p. 585). The bond between *huiguan* members was largely *preformed*, based on uniform adherence to ways of practicing Chinese culture, shared memories of a geographical origin, the need for support in employment and daily life, kinship, and so on. However, in the changing circumstances of globalisation, the mutual-help organisations have reoriented towards business networking (p. 586). To retain the practical appeal for local Chinese populations, these organisations shifted from outdated values and adopted utilitarianism. While overseas Chinese people have maintained a presence of community by showing up in communal spaces such as churches and language schools (Lalich, 2008, p. 59), with an increasing number of voluntary instead of forced migrants from contemporary China, and their improved economic capabilities and professional skills, the bonding between overseas Chinese people is more contingent on daily situations and encounters. Chinese participants' unpleasant encounters with fellow Chinese people might be considered as exceptional cases, but it needs to be acknowledged that they were frequent, if we consider individuals as an important variable in a loosely connected ethnic group.

Young Chinese people also shared frustrating experience of communicating with non-Chinese peers in the social spaces they entered such as classrooms and extracurricular programs. Hua, a reticent undergraduate, said she was afraid to speak in class because of a language disadvantage. It is worth noting that like Xue and Ying, Hua was also attending business and financial classes in which over half the attendees spoke Mandarin as the first language. Comparatively, native English speakers had only a minor presence. In fact, her English in the workshop and the digital story sounded clear, standard and fluent. This proved that her lack of confidence was based more on comparison with native speakers than her actual level of English.

Hua: How to say, because usually I am not outgoing. I'm bound to be the quietest one in classes. I'm too shy to say anything about what I'm not good at, for fear people will laugh at me, they will think 'Isn't this just explained by the teacher?'

In his experience of joining in a university-organised student activity, Jian believed he could not obtain equal communicative opportunities in socialising with 'local people' due to the language disadvantage.

Jian: However, in the leadership program, because of oral competence and other reasons, it felt hard to merge well when communicating with the local people. Sometimes they were unwilling to bring you into conversations. Of course, I know this was not discrimination, but you have to make them like talking to you.

This feeling of being excluded in socialisation in university due to language unfamiliarity further caused him to abandon the idea of pursuing a position in the Students' Guild, the largest body of student representation university-wide. Moreover, Jian identified people's localness by language. The local people that he saw speak English as their first language might well be foreigners from English-speaking countries such as the United Kingdom or Singapore.

To sum up, young Chinese participants demanded a multicultural workshop because of the expectation for cross-cultural understanding, better English skills and a change in how to engage with the local society. On the one hand, they had been disappointed at local Chinese circles in which most of their social life took place, due to the isolation that was sustained by Chinese peers' self-enclosure and lack of initiative. On the other hand, they were in desperate need of change in the difficult communicative situation with non-Chinese peers. While they blamed language

disadvantage, the lack of self-confidence, inexperience in cross-cultural conversation and sometimes the impatience of people with better language skills were equally important factors that caused the loss of opportunities for bonding with and befriending non-Chinese peers.

To meet their needs, I had to change the recruitment plan by including people from non-Chinese cultural backgrounds. While I tried my best to achieve a multicultural composition of participants, to what extent the workshop was multicultural could only be determined based on cross-cultural interaction between participants.

Without a clear activist goal or external support from any media organisation, the ‘accident-ridden’ recruitment served as good evidence that for the general public, the engagement with new media practice always needs to be initiated and even pushed. The recruitment process laid bare the winding course from the assumed potentials of new media to people actually laying hands on new media. This case study added to the critical value of the DST’s group base in this respect.

#### 4.1.2 Self-expressive dynamics

As a social activity in which young Chinese migrants aspired to engage cross-culturally, DST workshop showed evident dynamics in self-expression. These dynamics were intensively demonstrated at the story-circle stage, in which most interaction between participants took place and I was the host to ensure equality of speaking and being listened to. With the dynamics formed, participants achieved better expressiveness and increased self-confidence in using an unfamiliar language.

Story circle, as the only stage without technological intervention that lasted for less than an hour, was mentioned the most times in interviews and received many favourable comments. As many as eleven participants, nearly half of the total number in WA, stated that story circle stood out as their ‘favourite’, ‘most impressive’, ‘most important’ or ‘quite interesting’ part of the workshop. Story circle was an oral storytelling exercise in the form of game playing. It works in DST as a ‘storytelling energiser’ (Butler, 2012), intended to help participants break the ice, build confidence and train the skills for the ensuing script writing and voiceover recording through devices. As the ‘circle’ suggests, it has people sit in a circle and take turns to tell short stories to designated topics in each game. One after the other,

the games that I invented increased in the degree of difficulty: 1) tell your name, one thing you like and one thing you dislike; 2) draw four random words and do story relays; 3) speak about a childhood friend of yours; 4) handwrite a story to a given picture in 15 to 25 minutes (varied between workshops) and read it out. There were three characteristics of this stage. First, people were given equal opportunities to speak. Second, it was oral and not recorded. Third, it ensured that everyone would be listened to.

It was beyond my expectation that this stage would be so popular. While story circle was necessary as preparatory to technology-afforded storytelling, it was only a secondary activity. If it was long and boring, participants might have reduced interest in the technological parts. For this reason, I practised my games with friends several times beforehand to find ways to keep it short and fascinating.

From the comments given, the Chinese participants felt unconstrained, encouraged and inspired through story circle. The stage also helped them increase understanding of other participants in the workshop and accelerated the adaptation to an English-speaking environment. The following are comments from Chinese participants:

Hao: Story circle was quite special, because there was no restriction.

Mei: Story circle was most important. I like the atmosphere in which people got to know each other.

Shu: Story circle was one of the most important steps. It was inspirational to dig forgotten experiences.

Hua: The important were the first and last steps [story circle and screening], especially because they let us speak at length. I didn't expect I could say such a lot that day.

Ying: Story circle was the most impressive part of the workshop. Because it was my first time to speak English with so many people and I'm bad at making up stories. [...] The exercise helped me improve communication in English better than class during which I'm always afraid of speaking English.

Jian: Story circle and screening are more than a thousand words. You have made many expressions possible in words and videos and there are a million small stories behind them. You can imagine what kind of person he or she is and what he or she went through, you can have associations.

Participants from other cultures found story circle helped create an open, candid and trustworthy atmosphere. Through it, participants could translate storytelling skills,

such as using conversational language, to the ensuing tasks that incorporated oral and written storytelling with technology.

Doni: The story-circle exercises made storytelling easier.

Susi: The brainstorming in story-circle exercises was most important as you have to get your story across to other participants.

Budi: I thought the storytelling exercises was good for warming up, but I also found that some people during that time were really opening up. They told real life experiences; some of them were really touching. I did not expect that.

My role as initiator and host of story circle was crucial for forming the self-expressive dynamic. In a group including people who were not confident in English use or engaging with a different culture, a relaxing and inspirational atmosphere would be hard to build without preventing better English speakers or cross-cultural communicators from dominating storytelling opportunities. It was important to ensure that the group would listen to one another in spite of differences in language abilities. When I was hosting, no preparation, interruption, response or timing was necessary, so each story was impromptu and followed by a short silence, others nodding, eye contact or clapping. The understanding of each other's story thus became visibly mutual, voluntary and achievable. In this visible scene of mutual encouragement, Chinese participants, especially the younger ones, were surprised at their expressiveness in English.

The result showed that the equality of speaking and being listened to did reduce the stigma and fear that Chinese participants, especially the younger ones, felt at using English. According to Jian, participants were so 'intimate' during the story-circle part that 'there was no feeling of cultural difference at all'. Xue said she was much less afraid to speak English after story circle.

I: Why are you braver now?

Xue: Before that [story circle] I didn't dare to speak English to others in public. Before that, when I wanted to express 100 percent of what's on my mind, I could only express 40 or 50 percent due to grammar issues. Now I have reached 60 or 70 percent.

I: But that was only about one or two hours' practice.

Xue: I really think I spoke more English in these two hours than in my entire semester.

Equality in speaking and listening also effectively engaged Chinese participants in the final screening stage. During screening, I was also the host in having each participant introduce the story and play it to the group. Young Chinese undergraduate student, Cheng, told me the half-hour session should be extended to ‘a whole afternoon’ as the stage was helpful in letting him know more about each participant and each story. This was an unexpected comment, as the workshop went overtime and the screening was not held until ten o’clock at night.

Furthermore, Xue’s response suggested that the confidence and techniques in self-expression and networking established in the workshop could be translated to her daily life. She also attached decreased significance to ‘grammar issues’ in reaching satisfaction with interactions in English. This was a proof that the widespread discourse over English deficiency was introducing more excuses for the newcomers for withdrawal from networking with unfamiliar groups, which often included most of their peers in the social spaces they frequently entered.

Chinese participants’ surprising improvements in English use during story circle spoke back to the discourse of ‘English-language problem’ that has been on the rise in the last three decades accompanying the rapidly increasing arrivals of migrants such as international students (Haugh, 2016). The discourse, widely brought up in mainstream media and educational institutions, heightens the students’ awareness of the language barrier in adapting to the local environment, which is misleading. There are many students like my Chinese participants who have a sufficient grasp of English for study and daily conversation, but who lack the social skills to fit into the local culture. The emphasis on ‘perfect English’ causes these students unnecessary dissatisfaction and frustration in engagement with the local community. As Haugh suggests, local students, staff and policymakers often oversimplify the language difficulty of international students into measurable deficiency (ibid.). The difficulty’s affective and moral dimensions, which impact on these students’ relational and communal identities, are neglected. It is arguable that the prevalent ‘English-language problem’ discourse affects more than international students with inadequate English skills. Chinese students in the present study showed self-doubt, lack of confidence and even self-deprecation language-wise, even though they did not encounter serious language issues in the workshop. This could lead to conscious self-

enclosure to diminish the importance of local peers, as found in the participants' accounts. Therefore, the ability to interact and form bonds with non-Chinese peers was a strong rebuttal to the widespread English deficiency discourse around migrants such as international students in Australia.

### 4.1.3 Craftsmanship in video creation

I have chosen to use craftsmanship to describe a participant's general approach to video creation and editing. It would have been naïve for me to expect every participant to be fully devoted to the task I set out. But the steps of video creation were somehow 'magical' in pushing participants to try hard. As I noted down in my workshop journal, participants in WA were so immersed in the technology-afforded stages that the majority of them did not hand in their stories for screening until the very last minute. This formed a sharp contrast with the difficult recruitment process. Even for participants of the three-day pilot workshop, a time limit was a grave challenge.

I: Do you have any suggestion for this workshop?

Feng: Suggestion...eh...I felt the time was a little pressing near the end.

I: Wasn't three days enough? Was it because how the time was distributed?

Feng: No, probably time was too pressing if it was not split. It would be better if we could split the time into segments so that we had longer time to make adjustments to the story.

As Feng said, time was insufficient, especially for video editing. During the pilot workshop, participants had a couple of hours to make final adjustments to their video, much longer than in the two-afternoon workshops I redesigned later. While most videos from each workshop looked well-made to me, there were always participants who wished they had longer time to improve them. As both participants and I did not foresee their artistic ambition and devotion in advance, it was difficult to estimate how much time everyone was willing to spend on DST when I decided on the duration of each workshop.

A kind of chemistry happened when participants became immersed, self-motivated and self-demanding in using software to create videos. Through interviews, I identified two interweaving aspects of craft, namely, emotional input and artistic pursuit.

For Chinese student, Xue, the notable extent of emotional input distinguished DST from other social activities. Comparing the workshop with a student organisation she was familiar with, she commented:

Attending activities in the Chinese student association was like playing with friends, but in your workshop, I must be emotionally devoted.

The emotional side could be felt not only in the stories, but also in participants' unreserved support for my endeavour of bringing DST to overseas migrants.

Participants agreed that telling stories about migration was important for both society and themselves, personally. After each workshop, many of them encouraged me to keep holding and improving the migrant-oriented workshop. Some participants volunteered to write detailed suggestions to me via email, or helped me in other ways that they could. Isuru, a PhD student who migrated from Sri Lanka many years ago, made the suggestion, based on his experience, that I amend my briefing presentation to be more informative and always share my responsibility in a workshop with a co-facilitator. Nana, a Chinese visiting scholar, co-facilitated and photographed two subsequent workshops after her attendance in the pilot run. Shan, who taught video creation courses in China, offered to give a quick guide on Photoshop to other participants when she was attending the workshop. In so doing, participants built a small community in which all of them were making concerted efforts to complete a task that was worthy of their contributions.

The emotional input was also reflected in their artistic pursuit of using the best materials they could possibly find to make video. The choice of background music provides an example. Although, for the sake of saving time, I built a pool of music of 19 pieces downloaded from jamendo.com, there were always participants (four out of nine in one of the workshops) who insisted on using music from other sources. Yi, a Chinese woman who had lived in Perth with family for 15 years, made a video about her son's journey learning to play piano since childhood. She brought a recording of her son playing Debussy's *La fille aux cheveux de lin* from home and set it as the background to her narrating voice. She told me she only wished that her son could watch the story one day. In search of music on YouTube, Aban found a video of an orchestra playing traditional music from his hometown.

Aban: I am attached to it and it is part of my identity and has a touch of sadness, but it is our music, national music.

Isuru found a clip of music being played on the street by Aboriginal people which he felt best characterised Perth. The participants' demanding attitude in relation to music, was also prevalent in stages such as voiceover recording and photograph selection.

Craftsmanship was also intensively demonstrated in additional workshops that individual participants requested from me. In the unplanned workshops, participants were self-driven to improve their skills of video creation. After the workshops they attended, Jian, leader of a Chinese student organisation and Putri, an Indonesian PhD student and business owner, requested one-on-one workshops to make digital stories on topics of their choosing. Previously, during workshops, both Jian and Putri were very active in engaging with other participants. Jian offered to become a co-facilitator in an forthcoming workshop, after he had completed his first story. Also, they were both the only participants in respective workshop groups who proactively made their stories publicly viewable on the video-sharing platforms of China-based Youku<sup>13</sup> and US-based YouTube.<sup>14</sup>

A high quality of self-representation was the central driving force for participants' requests to make additional stories. According to the interviews, more participants preferred a workshop with a fixed time and venue to a hub in which people could come and go freely. The young Chinese participants, for example, believed that with uniformity and discipline in time management, the digital stories were not only completed efficiently, but also achieved a notably higher video quality than homemade videos. Both Jian and Putri wanted to use the voice recording system at the radio studio and the Mac computer at the Mac Lab again. They also wanted to stick to the sequence of staged tasks, which were used in previous workshops.

When Jian and Putri approached me for one more story, they demonstrated a greater ambition regarding video quality. This was primarily because they had found topics that were important for them personally. Jian showed his first story, *Hot Young Blood*, on the journey of practising martial arts and leading student organisations, to the teachers at his former university in China. They asked him if he could make a

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<sup>13</sup> Jian's second digital story can be viewed on Youku at [http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XMTI2NjI3MjM0OA==.html?spm=a2h0k.8191407.0.0&from=s1.8-1-1.2](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMTI2NjI3MjM0OA==.html?spm=a2h0k.8191407.0.0&from=s1.8-1-1.2).

<sup>14</sup> Putri's first and second digital stories can both be viewed on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/UNmF70ISbsk> and [https://youtu.be/2UgM0eY-\\_BA](https://youtu.be/2UgM0eY-_BA).

similar English-language video to promote the university radio station that he had previously worked for as a student broadcaster. Unsatisfied with his first story, which he shared only privately, Jian determined to improve his English pronunciation and make the video as polished as possible in the second workshop. Using heartfelt words and a collection of memory-evoking photos, Putri found DST an ideal way to commemorate her mother who had died nearly a year before.

My involvement in the making of their second stories increased and was prolonged. As I booked the Mac Lab for each additional workshop session, the participants and I collaborated more closely in an undisturbed environment. They consulted me more often on video creation than in the workshops with more participants, and played the half-made videos several times on the projector that was installed in the lab, in order to find any flaws. They became more critical about the script in terms of plot and language, the fluency and accuracy in reading the script, the choice and sequence of photos as well as the synchronisation between voice and photos in video editing. Although they were more adept at using software on the second try, the duration of the additional workshops did not shorten from the previous duration of two afternoons. While Putri still used two afternoons, Jian spent as many as four afternoons with me to complete his second story.

The resulting second videos both had marked quality improvement in regard to story development, audio and visual transitions, suitability of background music and audio-visual coordination. More importantly, both participants had a sense of achievement in telling a story from the heart with improved technological skills. In this respect, technology's motivating force in pursuing better self-expression and self-representation emerged as a new lifeline of the DST workshop. Jian and Putri were a minority among the participants who were full of enterprise and initiative. What they chose to do did not represent the inclinations of all international migrants. However, their spontaneous association between self-expression and DST, as well as their devotion, perseverance and enjoyment in completing and improving the skills in DST did suggest that DST project could be self-sustaining (Hartley, 2010, p. 96) for migratory populations. This might be a direction that DST can advance along in the future: that DST focusses not only on the productive capacity of technology, but also

on how technology may bring to individual users the universal drives for creativity, which are joy, self-improvement and the feeling of being rewarded.

Technical issues such as language and technology literacies posed constraints to craftsmanship. While participants with a weaker English literacy wrote a script of 250 words with difficulty and discomfort, a lack of technology literacy caused participants to take much longer than others to learn to use a Mac system and new software. Fortunately, these issues were foreseeable and, hence, easy to tackle, as long as proper preparation was made earlier.

#### 4.1.4 Barriers to participant interaction

Despite the self-expressive and self-representing dynamics formed in hosted and extended parts of the workshop, the Chinese participants' met barriers in handling cross-cultural engagement opportunities in technology-afforded stages, in which hosting was hard to perform due to the participants' uneven technology literacy and creative goals. Language and cultural barriers and insufficient confidence to overcome them remained present and hindered smooth conversations. The Chinese participants' initiative to interact with participants of different ethnicity or race, or to continue the interaction after the workshop, was weakened by the tendency to racialise non-white and non-native speaking participants.

During workshops in which half of the participants were Chinese and the other half were from other cultures, young Chinese participants wavered between stepping out of and staying inside their comfort zone. During a warm-up stage of story circle that I initiated and hosted, everyone sat in a circle and with very simple properties such as flash cards, took turns to tell past experiences orally on a designated topic to all the others. Every Chinese participant showed courage, thoughtfulness and sincerity in sharing and listened patiently and supportively to other participants when it was not their turn. The dynamic at this stage was looked into in the previous section (see 4.1.2). The subsequent turning point is my focus. As soon as the story circle was disbanded and everyone sat back at their desks to fulfil technology-based tasks, the Chinese participants formed an 'ethnic enclave', if seen from the outside, and had casual conversation only with each other. This situation even continued throughout the catering, when all of the participants and myself sat around a table to share the

meal I had ordered. The sharp turn from positive engagement to withdrawal was uncomfortably noticed by the non-Chinese participants.

Wati: I tried to adjust myself to the, you know, 'Chinese atmosphere'. I talked to them if they were shy. I would say hi and then something. I introduced myself. Yes, but sometimes they spoke Chinese with their friends. I felt they excluded me from the conversation.

Wen, a young Chinese man working in a hospital at the time, had obtained Australian permanent residency just days before the workshop. Being an expat in Perth for over six years, he held a more sympathetic attitude to newly arrived fellow nationals. He believed that the Chinese participants, especially the young students, were genuine in the attempt to step out of their comfort zone but it took time to get used to a different language environment.

Wen: Yes, I think the core reason, the root would be, as you said, they only stay within the Chinese circle, the Chinese communities, so English is unnecessary in daily life unless they have to use it, you know, at uni, during the projects. But definitely if they come back home, they get together with their Chinese friends. They will never think about speaking English with them. So, speaking English is not like one hobby of their lives. So definitely they don't get used to it. So, when they have to speak, sometimes maybe... I used to experience that we have to translate everything from Chinese into English. You know it does take time and you have to rearrange everything like the order of the sentence, blahblahblah...So they don't get used to it, so it's not so comfortable, so natural for them to speak English.

When I asked the Chinese participants why they did not make effective use of the face-to-face opportunity with the non-Chinese participants, they said it was mainly because of language inadequacy, cultural difference and being afraid to talk to strangers. As almost all participants were non-native speakers, the language barrier for young Chinese participants became even more challenging when talking casually in English.

Mei: It's embarrassing to chat with other participants. Since we are all Asian, all of us are not good at English. It's difficult to carry on conversations on any subjects with any depth.

Cultural difference posed as another barrier. Ying tried to chat with Niko from Japan. Niko was quiet and passive in conversation so Ying had to start the chat every time. But it frustrated Ying that there were very few topics that she and Niko had a common interest in, that both knew about or simply grasped the necessary English vocabulary to discuss those topics. Language inadequacy, on this occasion, made cultural difference a wider gap to cross.

Ying: It was difficult to have a clear understanding of each other. Last time I tried to talk to the Japanese participant, but my knowledge about Japan is only limited to entertainment and animation. What's worse was I didn't know what the Japanese celebrities are called in English. I had to chat with her with an online dictionary in my hand.

According to Xue, being afraid to talk to strangers and not confident to speak English well also stopped her from being proactive in chatting with people from a different culture.

I: Do you think there weren't many chances to communicate with them in the workshop?

Xue: Except us Chinese participants, we really felt we were not familiar with other participants. Like others, I was afraid that I could not speak well. So, we just listened. Moreover, we have tasks to do in every stage, and we spent a long time on them so we did not have time to communicate with others.

Compared with the young Chinese participants, the older participants from other cultures held a more pessimistic attitude towards intercultural understanding.

According to Indonesian participant Budi, participants from different cultures who did not know each other in advance should not be expected to communicate in-depth with each other during a workshop.

Budi: Multiculture is enriching but it wouldn't get the depth because there might be some reservations because they [participants from the same country] don't know the participants [from other countries].

Susi, a female from Indonesia, and Aban, a male from a Middle Eastern country (unidentified at the request of the participant), were both Muslim, and agreed with Budi on the reserved attitude people have in cross-cultural communication. Their perspectives on a multicultural group were more cautious than most participants.

According to Susi, storytelling could be 'dangerous' in a multicultural environment. During the workshop, she made a story about her search for a perfect sunset in her home country of Indonesia. Because she changed the script to fit the theme, she made her story in a hurry. Probably also for that reason, she used only one photo for the two-minute story. The photo was shot on a beach, in which cruise ships were scattered on the sea and had no person in them. As I observed, Susi originally put a photo of the same beach with herself wearing a headscarf in it but for an unknown reason she later changed it to the scenery photo. Without commenting on the change, she told me that one should be careful in exposing one's culture to another culture because one might be misunderstood in an unexpected way.

Susi: Although we are basically people, different cultures and religions and you see images and certain sentences and words can be received wrongly by other cultures.

Aban believed that the cultural barrier in cross-cultural engagement was harder to overcome than people usually imagine. He said if I held workshops with migrants from more diverse backgrounds, participants would be more defensive with each other.

Aban: It may make people more protective, more conservative about themselves. They put on a shell, or they pretend. You will find barriers with people from different cultures and backgrounds.

To support his point, he cited an extreme example that isolation could still be found in the more inclusive and diverse 'Westernised society'. The example could easily be associated with extremists who grew up as immigrants or refugees in the West.

Aban: So sometimes you plant a new plant from a nursery and you plant it in your garden. Sometimes this plant grows and is the healthiest plant and produces, and everything. You feel that this plant is happy. But sometimes this plant dies. This does not mean that the soil is bad or the plant is bad, but they cannot get along.

The reemergence of language and culture barriers in the workshop was worthy of attention. As has been found in countries with large-scale immigration, it is not sufficient to form intercultural understandings just by letting people from different cultures live next to each other. The metaphoric address of the United States as a 'melting pot' is inaccurate since the acceptance and understanding of different ethnic cultures has never been as simple and thorough as melting. Misunderstanding and discrimination towards migrants based on race, culture and legal status is still occurring in the most developed countries. In DST workshop, the utopian idea of having participants from different cultures socialise with each other on their own should be viewed with caution. This was the case in my workshop in which all participants went to university and had certified English proficiency; some even held a doctoral degree from an Australian university. There were chances that the ethnically minority participants, regardless of cultural origin, habitually lived with co-ethnic, practised ethnic culture and spoke their own language. It might not be common or comfortable for them to engage with strangers from different cultures for so many hours. So, like their Chinese counterparts, it cost an effort for them to establish confidence and skills to adapt to a cross-cultural scenario. Hence, for me the less than expected cross-cultural conversations were not disappointing, in the

sense that the workshop provided a culturally fresh environment but did not leave enough time for participants to become overly familiar with it.

While DST may improve intercultural understandings through a sustained effort, racialisation between participants was a cause of threat to cultural exchange and diversity in the workshop that required urgent attention. Both Chinese and non-Chinese participants showed a tendency to classify participants by ethnic markers such as the first language they spoke and the part of the world they originally came from.

All workshops were dominated by Asian participants in number. This was because the participants that I used the snowballing technique through were mainly from Asian countries and they were likely to introduce fellow nationals who might be interested. Apart from my own Chinese origin, Chinese participants accounted for half of each workshop, while the other half were non-Chinese participants from Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Australia. All participants' countries of origin were irrelevant to their legal status in Australia, since several Chinese and non-Chinese participants had acquired citizenship or permanent residency of Australia by the time of attendance. One more participant from Australia and a participant from a European country came to a workshop. However, they both left after story circle. The European participant said the workshop was 'very Asian' in a private communication with me.

It seems you have an Asian group here.

For the moment of that sentence, the largely non-white workshop appeared problematised in the supposedly multiculturalist Australia society. When the participant, a middle-aged white person, explained a disinterest in further attendance due to a consciousness of ethnic difference, the DST activity appeared isolated and irrelevant for non-Asian populations. This emphasis on ethno-racial identification and withdrawal from interracial communication worked against the participatory drive which underpins DST and was embraced by most participants and myself.

Meanwhile, the young Chinese participants were also actors of racialisation. In post-workshop feedback, some of them suggested that I invite more participants of European and American origins, implicitly the white native speakers who are

stereotypes of Westerners. Ying's feedback demonstrated her keenness on connecting with more people in the wider society. However, the discontent with the workshop composition in terms of race and ethnicity could only reinforce the imbalanced racial position that she found herself at. Compared with the previously less than satisfactory experience in staying with Chinese peers or communicating with native speakers, the cross-cultural atmosphere among Asian participants who valued the time of storytelling together and shared a minor racial status presented less exclusion, frustration and discomfort for them.

It was noteworthy that the suggestion to invite more white native speakers was confused in motivation, since Ying was aware of the benefits of the workshop on language improvement and self-confidence. A multicultural group worked well to make people with language difficulties feel included, partly because it did not have native speakers who often lead conversations. According to Ying, she was braver and more relaxed in speaking English in a workshop without native speakers.

Ying: Since the overall level of oral English in the workshop was not high, I found there was nothing to be scared of.

The language improvement outcome was similarly acknowledged by Mei. As Mei said, she was pleased to know other participants and would like to attend the workshop again, because of the opportunity to practise English. It, thus, can be said that although some young Chinese participants knew Australia as a multicultural society, they still longed for interaction with white people who are often associated with the mainstream. However, there were opportunities for this desire to be challenged by interaction with non-white participants in the workshop. A similar case has been discussed in a previous research study. While young Korean holiday workers saw only white people as Canadian and Canada as a white space, daily encounters caused them to maintain or challenge or negotiate that opinion (Yoon, 2014a).

As Yoon has also argued, corporeal mobility does not necessarily mean cultural mobility, but cultural barriers such as racial forces always exist to constrain the subjects' mobility (*ibid.*). While the workshop could not completely do away with language and culture barriers and racialisation between people of different ethnicities and races, it might succeed in the sense of providing an alternative social space in

which unexpected interracial encounters take place. It, hence, posed an opportunity for people to challenge the existing ethno-racial knowledge and positioning, by physically getting together and engaging with each other.

#### 4.1.5 Privacy threats

Despite being emotionally and artistically committed, crafting stories and video was threatened by privacy considerations for some participants. Privacy could either refer to private life, or private thinking that might challenge social norms. By refusing to show videos to the workshop group, participants enacted their right to seal up memories of past experiences and keep thoughts to themselves.

Participants were notably sensitive about the visuality of themselves in digital stories. To create video, they often inserted photos of themselves and mentioned the real names of family members and friends. For participants who worried the story might be controversial for prospective audiences, becoming aware of the fact that they as author might be identifiable through voice, image or content seriously deepened the concern.

It was not until Aban was doing a final edit of his video that he asked me not to bring up or show the story to anyone other than my supervisor. The Middle Easterner said he did not want to ‘get in trouble’ with his home country because he expressed reluctance to leave Australia after graduation. Previously in story circle, he was the first person to open up by recalling memories of a childhood friend who passed away. His input in video creation was much bigger than I had expected, too, as he was occupied with study assignments. He also spent considerable time on editing his hometown music from YouTube, as previously mentioned, and kept selecting and adding photos about his life in two countries. When I met him in interview in the subsequent month, he described his feelings about DST in a positive way.

Aban: It was like thinking loudly. It’s kind of releasing the pressure. I asked you not to give full access to other people, just you and your supervisor, but it’s really [released] the pressure.

And he insisted that self-censorship was necessary, to the extent that it would be unsafe to show the story to family members.

Aban: It is personal. I even do not share it with my wife or my children.

Chinese student Qing decided she would leave her story half-complete after she edited the voiceover. She actively shared an experience of making fun of her father and copying class notes from her best friend. However, when she started creating a video on past intimate relationships, she used irrelevant photos to synchronise with her voice. She told me not to show the story to anyone. Although she explained her act as the result of a lack of suitable photos, the unwillingness to expose her private life was still a likely cause for these decisions.

## 4.2 Displaying life in Australia

With the set themes of *challenge* and *stay*, the digital stories produced were mainly built on personal experiences of arriving and settling in Australia. I identified three categories of transnational experience that participants drew on: recreational and leisure activities in Australia, personal growth through hard work in China and Australia, and anecdotes through which overseas life felt interesting and warm. Although most stories were predominantly upbeat and light-hearted, they, nevertheless, depicted the disappointment, helplessness, insecurity, loss and self-doubt in staying overseas for various tasks and purposes. Implicitly, their experience-based agentic view towards Australia spoke back to the entrenched socio-economic ‘welfare view’ (Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000) on migration, which considers that international migrants to economically more developed countries are purely socially and economically motivated and reap socio-economic gains with ease in the destination country. It was noteworthy that tensions formed around participants’ choice of experiences for display and the ways of displaying them, suggesting the mediated nature of technology-afforded storytelling.

### 4.2.1 Leisure stories

Leisure time in Australian life was a recurrent subject, especially for young Chinese international students. In Mei’s story *Memories in Perth*, fresh experiences of travelling around the country, trying out new forms of recreation and celebrating local festivals were examples of the most memorable moments in her seven months’ time in Australia. As she stated in the voiceover, although she was tasked with university study, it was leisure activities outside university that she regarded as the ‘invaluable wealth’ she obtained overseas.

## Memories in Perth

Everyone is destined to stay in a city, a state, or a country for a period of time. The experiences that you gain in each period can be an invaluable wealth for a whole life.

27 July 2015, I came here, Perth, a small and peaceful city in WA.

Tracing back across the past seven months that I stayed here, the life was wonderful and everything was fantastic. Although the main purpose of my coming was to finish my study at Curtin University, I spent plenty of time enjoying the nature and culture of Australia. Lots of first times have happened here.

First time to try sandboarding. Even though I injured my elbow a little, it made the experience more exciting and memorable.

First time to celebrate a real Christmas Day in a country which indeed has Christmas Day. And the funny thing was, it was a Christmas Day in summer; a really different and unforgettable experience.

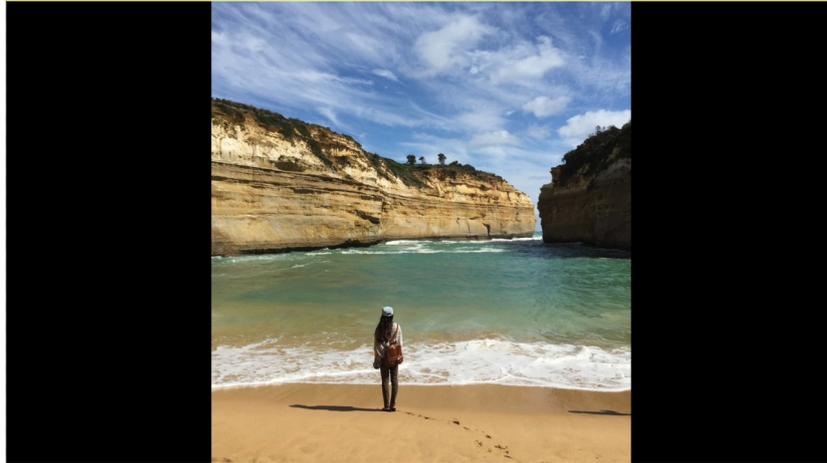
Then, first time to personally celebrate a national day – Australia Day, rather than that of my own country.

When it comes to the home country, the most important thing to a Chinese person is Spring Festival. So, as I was still in Perth during that period, I had to celebrate the Chinese New Year without my family. But I had friends to accompany me to celebrate the Spring Festival, not in China and not at home, for the first time.

Then, during the summer holiday, I went to Melbourne, Sydney and the Gold Coast. First time to see such grand architectures at such a close distance. Before that I had only seen them in books or movies. Also in Sydney, first time to take a helicopter. Everything I saw from the window was amazing, splendid and peaceful.

I love this country; a country of sheep. The time in which I stayed in Australia will be remembered deeply!

Both audial and visual aspects of this video demonstrated a noticeably tourist style. The excited tone was set as soon as she started to exemplify her first days in Australia, as in ‘the life was wonderful and everything was fantastic’ and in ‘everything I saw from the window was amazing, splendid and peaceful’. However, as in tourist promotion clips, the expression of intense affection for the country was not echoed and enhanced in detailed elaborations of moments of acting or thinking. Thus, the effusiveness did not feel as genuine and solid as it was supposed to, with such a substantial amount of material to make it otherwise. Along with the narration of memory, Mei displayed a dozen photos of her posing alone or with Chinese friends at celebratory events, at scenic spots and architectures. As in figure 4-2 for instance, a tourist was exactly how she looked in the screenshot.



**Figure 4-2 Photo of Mei at a scenic spot in Australia in Mei's story**

The leisure-focused tourist-style self-representation was shared by four Chinese participants in WA. Of these four, three were international students. The fourth was Shan, a Chinese associate professor on a visit to Perth. She recounted her family tour to Tibet during a holiday. Differing from Shan's attempt to share a short-term travel experience, the other Chinese students were trying to show the important aspects of living overseas for a relatively extended period of time. For them, the tourist style was not the intended impression.

Nonetheless, looking and sounding like a tourist in the stories did characterise the everyday life of Chinese international students. By searching for and enjoying unique sceneries, commodities, festival celebrations and so on in Australia, Chinese students seemed to be rid of worries for the future, whether it would be overseas or back in China. Nor did they try hard to overcome difficulties in building strong ties with people outside the circle of newly arrived Chinese classmates, roommates who were the only ones they presented as friends in voiceovers and photos. Their state of living as a temporary and tasked resident, in other words, staying in a place but not extending and maintaining a network that included stable local residents, resembled the 'tourist syndrome' which Zygmunt Bauman used to metaphorically characterise a much practised way of contemporary living (Franklin, 2003; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, p. 257). Bauman explains the term in an interview:

When speaking of the 'tourists' or 'tourism' as metaphors of contemporary life, I have in mind certain aspects of the tourist condition and/or experience – like being in a place temporarily and knowing it, not belonging to the place, not locked into the local life 'for better or worse'. That condition is shared with the modality of ordinary daily life, with the way we are all 'inserted' in the

company of others everywhere – in places where we live or work; not only during the summer holidays, but seven days a week, all year round, year by year. It is that characteristic of contemporary life to which I primarily refer when speaking of the tourist syndrome. (Franklin, 2003)

It can be understood as opposite to the ‘pilgrim syndrome’ (ibid.) which indicates a set goal or destination and a state of steady approach to it as time goes by. Whether being used to suggest a lifestyle or specifically holiday making, tourism is always a socially and culturally constructed practice that is inseparable from everyday life. In their more recent exploration, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, John Urry and Jonas Larsen suggest that tourism should be understood in relation to tourists’ everyday habits, thoughts and relationships such as the ‘significant others, such as family members and friends’ (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 194).

Tourists never just travel *to* places: their mindsets, habitual practices and social relations travel unreflexively along with them. Culturally coded patterns of tourist behaviour revolve around class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality, and they generate shared conventions about what should be seen and which actions are appropriate (p. 192).

Did Chinese international students choose to show a tourist lifestyle just because they were lively young people? There must be deeper causes, since the uniform joyous expressions of the love for the country formed such a notable contrast with the anxieties over social closure, language incompetence and cultural difference when sharing thoughts on the workshop (see 4.1.1 and 4.1.4). Of course, a story is always a partial story, but the ‘happy and simple story’ by Chinese students is likely to have left out the thoughtful and critical voice on overseas experiences which they might have allowed to be heard in different circumstances.

The story’s tourist style, while may be an incredible cover or disguise, still exposed traces of the less happy side of the storyteller’s life. Temporariness, also a trait of tourism in Bauman’s sense (Franklin, 2003), can be obviously felt in watching the story. In the story, Chinese students knew about the beautiful land of Australia mostly through consumption instead of adopting a local way of life or engaging with people who had lived locally for a longer time. Their intensive spending on sightseeing and tireless hunt for new ways of recreation served as manifestations of a consumerist spirit on ‘untried tastes, unexperienced sensations’ (ibid.). Their rare investment of effort in becoming a host of the migrant-populated place one day, demonstrated a faint intention of leading a long-term life in Australia. For the young

Chinese storytellers, Australia appeared just as a tourist destination: they knew they would leave it shortly and, hence, were not obliged to grow attached to it.

But the tacit and consumerist attitude towards temporariness was at odds with the storyteller's role as an international student. Since most of the Chinese student participants were enrolled in the discipline of accounting in business school, they had a better chance than counterparts in other disciplines of seeking permission for permanent residence in Australia. Even after the visa tightening measures launched in April 2017, accounting remains the skill that has shown a shortage and a certified accountant is eligible for immigration.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, overseas education was costly for most Chinese families. To lower the expense, Chinese students increasingly chose to study overseas through interuniversity joint programs such as '3+1' which requires students to study three years at a Chinese university and one more year at an Australian university to acquire degrees from both countries. Hua who attended the workshop during the '3+1' program and then moved on to two-year postgraduate coursework in Sydney said her family had made huge economic sacrifices to send her overseas.

Hua: The cost of overseas study can be said to account for a very large part of my family's expenditure. Joking apart, if the costs for these years are added up, the amount of money would be enough to buy an apartment in my hometown.

Temporariness was also less joyful. According to participants, they had struggled over the temporality of stay since the first day in Australia. As they discovered the country bit by bit, temporariness became a point of conflict in communication with parents. While parents, as sponsors and distant carers, believed firmly in the pragmatic value of educational investment, their children were doubtful regarding the value of overseas study and experience. Xue shared that her mother felt that overseas study could bring advantages such as a competitive edge in China's job market, bigger chances of migration to Australia with a lower-stress work and living environment, and a broadened vision. However, the young Chinese students discovered something different: a monotonous social life, a disappointing education and a highly competitive job market. Worse, they commonly found it difficult to convince their parents of these unpleasant discoveries.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/hindi/en/article/2017/04/21/planning-apply-australias-permanent-residency-check-new-occupations-list>

Xue: My parents believed that English skills are bound to improve when staying overseas. They just cannot understand why Chinese people attend activities together, form groups together in class, do assignments together and then communicate with each other in Chinese.

Hua: Sometimes I even wonder if they [my parents] trust me too much. I often pour cold water on their trust, saying the 'gold content' [meaning the quality] of my education was actually very low. But they seemed to feel I was being modest.

Shu: Actually, I feel China has become very open in globalisation and the work environments in Australia and China are more and more similar. Actually, being alone overseas is not that easy. [...] Most of us would report good news and hold back bad news, as parents have some presumptions. It is troublesome to explain to them the bad news.

Parents, however, were also who all young Chinese participants anticipated showing their stories to. Participants generally expected that the story of their life overseas could improve mutual understanding with their parents. The opportunity was seen as so important that Xue even thought of carrying the disk on which the story was burnt back to China and playing it for her mother in person. Yet participants still held back from confronting parents with their disappointment and struggle. Hua, for instance, said she never really wanted to open up in this respect.

Hua: Interestingly, I have never really let my parents know about the discrepancy between imagination and reality. I try to protect their imagination. Maybe subconsciously I want to break it, but every time they started the conversation by asking how I was doing, I just could not tell them that I was not doing well.

As to the creation of a digital story, Ying acknowledged that she intentionally avoided displaying memories that might cause her parents to worry.

Ying: When I was writing the script, I wanted to mention things that brought me to tears. But I gave them up at the thought of showing the video to my parents. When I was sick once, I called my parents and they were very worried. So, I never told them when I was ill again. This time I tried to show them only the happy moments.

Therefore, the completely delightful and fruitful temporariness prevalent in leisure stories was arguably a sign of the well-intentioned manipulation that Chinese student participants exerted to increase their target parent audience's knowledge of the state of overseas living, but without challenging their existing understandings. While only the pleasing parts of life were shown, the uncaptioned English voice further assured parents of the worthiness of overseas education. Asked about their family's comments on the stories, several Chinese students said their parents were proud to

hear them speak English well and showed the story to friends and colleagues. Cheng said his grandfather even cried at watching the story, as he thought his grandson, finally, ‘had succeeded in his study’.

Although I aimed at facilitating unfettered self-expression, leisure stories were examples of the mediated nature of media production. There were always tensions to be identified in the creation and dissemination processes of a story. In the case of leisure stories, the tension was between the need for communicating with parents with a well-made story and the concern that unpleasant experiences might disappoint parents. Anxiety developed around participants’ choice of experience for display. Further, the purely pleasant story content might form another tension with non-Chinese participants’ expectation of developing a better knowledge about Chinese students.

While it might be disappointing that a good opportunity of having a voice, without reservation, was eventually constrained by the anticipation of a parent audience, the fact that the kind-hearted stories were highly valued by participants was worth noting. Telling a story about joining parents and friends in a tour around Melbourne, Shu said her parents were pleased and touched to watch her story. Because of this story, she wished she could make a better one in the future to keep as a souvenir and spend more time with parents. Despite a deliberately lowered critical value, leisure stories were valuable in meeting the communication and emotional needs of their creators. In this sense, they served as a good start for Chinese international students to begin the journey of DST.

#### 4.2.2 Autobiographical stories

The theme *stay* usually means the ongoing state of staying in a place, but it may also suggest not leaving the place. In digital stories, especially by Chinese professionals, stay was interpreted as a decision to continue living overseas. In order to explain the decision, the story was stretched way back to include the whole period of time of living in Australia, sometimes even the previous life in China. In view of the relatively complete record of the transnational life course, I classified these stories into a group of autobiographical stories.

Hao, a long-term employee in a Chinese mining corporation, had worked as a researcher at a mine site in the desolate southern area of WA for the past two years.

#### Stay as a guest

Life is like a running train, and I am the guest, staying on it. The travel started from childhood, when I lived in a village. I am 30 years old now, more than half of which was spent in the village. At that time, I didn't realise I was going to live as a guest in different cities in the coming years.

I moved to Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, East China, where I started my university stage. At the beginning, I was disappointed and not satisfied about it, because I had anticipated that I could enter the better universities but failed. Although I was disappointed, hard work and my stuffy timetable brought me a good result in the end, and I was becoming more socialised during that stage.

After that, I went to another university for my postgraduate study in South China. Although I stayed as a guest there as well, I felt happier than in the previous stage due to less study tasks and several funny roommates. We played basketball, climbed Yuelu Mountain in the back of our campus, took photos on the hill in strange but fancy poses, tried to find girlfriends together from another subject by setting up connections and friendships between our student dormitory and the girls'.

The turning point came with my graduation; I got the opportunity to work in Australia after passing a test and interview. I am still feeling like a guest, and maybe this feeling will never disappear as mankind of the nature; I work happily on the mine site in WA.

Hao's story was aspirational and bittersweet at the same time. The opportunity of working in Australia did not come easy. Narrating the memories since birth in an inland village, Hao presented three different stages of life, in which he pursued education and career in places far away from home. It was years of hard work that finally brought him a career in a world-famous transnational company.

But it was difficult for Hao to feel securely settled in Australia. As he said, the feeling of being a guest may 'never disappear for humans' when on the move from one place to another. Obviously, he was following the job to settle overseas. In the interview, he said he was unaware of when he had to leave the country. In sharing his past ups and downs and memorable moments with friends, he drew a course of winning study and job opportunities. The contingency of location and style of life on work opportunities is common for countless professionals facing prospects of mobility in a globalised world economy.

Wen, a student-turned-migrant, had in common with Hao the never-ending insecure feeling of being 'not yet' settled. During the six years he spent in Australia, Wen

obtained a bachelor degree and worked in a hospital and as an accredited professional translator. As a permanent resident, he responded to the question of whether he would call Australia home by saying that the country was short of his family compared to the place he came from.

Wen: I can't right now because all my relatives are still in my hometown. But I would definitely say Australia is my second hometown, especially Perth. Many stories happened here, some marvellous and some nasty. I'll call Perth my hometown when I get my family here.

Like Hao, Wen's story delivered a mixed feeling about living overseas. With a soothing song in the background, the story title qualifies 'Australian life' with 'look ever forward', the motto for his alma mater, Curtin University. It could be inferred from the title that this story was about a person's courage and resolution. However, as the story unfolded, it became more than simply a positive story. Rather, it was self-persuading and invested most emotion in narrating the extraordinary hardship and loss he went through at a young age in the country in which he pursued a permanent living.

#### Australian life: Look ever forward

I chose to stay in Australia for the future because I like the nation, and eventually my permanent residency has been granted. Once the decision was made, no matter what happened, whether the experiences were sweet or sour or even bitter, I had to afford all of them myself since I have been an adult.

During this six-year period to explore the nation, I learned how to live independently and resolve all the problems and difficulties myself; I have a great pleasure to reveal a prestigious multiculturalism here and consequently I have the chance to make a number of like-minded friends coming from diverse backgrounds, attended the networking events together and joined the conventional Aussie activities, like the birthday parties with alcohol and bbq; the tastes of success and achievements are so marvellous, after the input of intensive time and efforts, in particular.

I will never forget the sleepless nights I spent at Curtin Engineering Building writing up my project reports, said hello to the cleaners at 4:30am; how could I erase my memory about the times I worked in the kitchen of an Italian restaurant for eight hours continuously on public holidays yet was significantly underpaid, surrounded by high temperatures and dirty dishes which I could not see ever ending. I gained a lot, definitely I have lost much meanwhile.

Stay in Australia, the nation full of miracles and freedom, live my dream and keep positive, in memory of my late beloved mum.

The story opened with a dispassionate and self-assertive tone, despite the expression of affection for Australia. In the ensuing words, although Wen showed his enthusiasm for multiculturalism that the country takes pride in, with examples of

crossing cultural difference to find ‘like-minded friends’, he conditioned this with his independence and perseverance. These qualities were evident in ‘the tastes of success and achievements are so marvellous, after the input of intensive time and efforts, in particular’. The narration did not become emotional until Wen started recounting how he survived strikingly difficult periods. The emotion was increasingly intense and drove the story on to a climax. Movingly, he said firmly that he ‘will never forget’ the time of studying day and night to complete assignments on time and definitely cannot ‘erase my memory’ of the endurance in poor working conditions to earn a self-sufficient living. Although the photos for these words were less in number and less elaborate than for leisure time, they appeared as a much stronger enhancement of the miserable narration (figure 4-4 for example).



**Figure 4-3 Photo of kitchen Wen once worked in referred to in his story**

Apart from hardship, loss was another highlight in the story, as in the words ‘I gained a lot, definitely I have lost much meanwhile’. Compared with peers in their early 20s back in China, Wen lost much time for recreation as he had to make extra efforts to adapt to life and study in a foreign country. He also lost the privilege of relying on his family for living expenses, since they were already burdened with his expensive university tuition. More importantly, he lost family companionship, which was particularly challenging for him as his mother had passed away. While Wen gained permission for living permanently in Australia, the painful losses over easiness, comfort and warmth of life were irreparable.

Both the insecure feeling of living overseas shared by Hao and Wen and the hardship and loss that Wen suffered to become a permanent resident rendered questionable the value of migrating overseas. Although Hao and Wen managed to meet their social and economic needs in Australia, they had to overcome self-doubt that persistently

lurked in ‘feeling as a guest’ and ‘definitely I have lost much more meanwhile’ to prevent themselves from cowering back to the previous life. Loaded with so many sufferings, the pass to live for an extended period in a foreign country might sound no longer convincing as a ticket to a better life. While overseas migrants aim to find a greener pasture in a foreign land, does the pasture still look greener than the homeland when difficulties are surmounted and the pass is finally granted?

### 4.2.3 Anecdotal stories

Differing from the other two groups that comprehensively encapsulated a period of time, the group of anecdotal stories looked at only one or two small things. Storytellers in this group narrated self-growth over difficult and embarrassing moments. On the one hand, they did not shy away from the gap between expectation and reality but elaborated it with sincere and honest accounts of experience. On the other hand, they unanimously adopted a humorous style rather than blaming anyone for adversity. In the end, they made positive evaluations of life in Australia based on the goodwill and care they had received.

#### My bicycle Life in Perth

I have no driver’s licence, so the bicycle became my main vehicle in Perth.

I bought a second-hand mountain bike from Gumtree. The owner charged me \$100 and I guessed it was a good bargain.

As soon as I arrived home by bike, I found the tire was flat. Thank god, it did not break half way.

My landlady was pretty kind to lend me a repair kit. I tried to fix the tire by myself. I also installed the rear carrier for the bags and a mobile phone carrier for navigation. I was impressed with myself.

On the way to Heirisson Island with my friends, the gear changer of my bike was broken. What a shame! I was very disappointed and blamed myself for choosing to buy a second-hand bike. I could only go home by train. Thank god, they let me take my bike onto the train.

My warm-hearted landlady helped me again. I bought a new gear changer and her friend John helped me to change it.

Although I consumed some money and time on the bike, it did benefit me a lot. I could travel a lot of places and saw a lot of natural and cultural landscape. I also made some good friends and gained some interesting experiences with them.

I got along with my landlady, and she invited me to have a Christmas dinner with her family and gave me a Christmas gift. Guess what? An apron. Not bad. Huh?

Feng, a visiting scholar who had lived in Perth for four months, narrated his cycling experience on a bicycle that was unworthy of the price. Matching his sometimes frustrated and sometimes grateful tone of voice with springy music in the background, the narration sounded like a comedy which always started with the protagonist in despair but ended with perfect solutions to the problems. The story was not just funny, but humorously positive, as evidently shown in the self-consoling transitional sentence that draws a conclusion on the bicycle: ‘Although I consumed some money and time on the bike, it did benefit me a lot’. As Feng said, the benefits of travelling around the city, making friends and cementing friendship with the caring landlady surpassed all the troubles the bicycle had led to. While he endured losses caused by unexpected difficulties, the help that ensued was found by him to be valuable gains in overseas experience.

Feng was open about the adversity overseas. Compared with a car, a bicycle was an energy-consuming but economical choice for transportation for a newcomer in the expansive city of Perth. Most of the participants, regardless of nationality, did not own a car, which differed from many local people, who ride bicycles only for physical exercise. Moreover, Chinese incomers are usually unfamiliar with bicycle repair, a service that is common and affordable on streets in China. Like Feng, Nana was also a visiting scholar who narrated her embarrassing experience of pronouncing words wrong and mistook dog food for a human meal (figure 4-4). Chinese student, Hua, recounted her journey of learning and improving cooking skills, which turned out to be the gravest challenge in arriving overseas as a young student.



**Figure 4-4 Example of wrong pronunciation in Nana's story**

The honesty, sincerity and open-mindedness in the face of adversity were further enhanced by a unanimous humour. The stories, therefore, demonstrated how contemporary Chinese overseas migrants might involve humour in participatory storytelling. Humour was first translated into Chinese as *youmo* (幽默) by Lin Yutang, a writer and scholar, in the 1920s. In his essay 'On Humour', published in the *Lunyu Banyuekan* magazine in 1932, he believed humour to be important for any country.

Any country's culture, lifestyle, literature, or thought needs to be enriched by humour. If a people do not have this enrichment of humour, their culture will become more hypocritical with each passing day, their lives will be closer and closer to cheating, their thought pedantic and outdated, their literature increasingly withered and their spirit increasingly obstinate and ultraconservative. (Chey, 2011, p. 5)

In migrant digital stories, humour demonstrated the elasticity in migrants' perceptions of the destination society. It served to avoid any simplistic bigotry on the topic of migration. Although these participants spotted unsatisfying aspects of Australia, they preferred to defuse negative thinking by self-laughing and self-consoling. This was where their strength came from, as they did not stop reflecting upon the trivial encounters in life. While feelings of frustration and disappointment usually persisted for quite some time, they were openly acknowledged as interesting lessons instead of bad luck. During the initial periods in which participants experienced materialistic shortages and social isolation, they found mutual kindness and care that replaced former imaginings as the foundation to maintain their enthusiasm for life in Australia.

### 4.3 Conclusion

As I adopted an open-ended recruitment strategy for DST in WA, the WA-based workshops included a diverse group of participants in regard to occupation, years of living in Australia and cultural background. While older Chinese participants stressed the usefulness of the workshop for work and study, the younger Chinese participants longed for casual cross-cultural communication that was largely absent in their everyday socialisation. Because of the diversity in participant composition and demands, the workshop demonstrated a distinctive participatory vibrancy. During story circle, which involved a series of hosted storytelling exercises, Chinese participants experienced obvious improvement in their confidence, initiative and

language ability for self-expression in a cross-cultural environment. They also formed intercultural understanding with participants from other cultures. Nonetheless, there were barriers to the interactive energy. Chinese participants were highly reliant on my hosting role in interacting with non-Chinese participants. In the unhosted technology-afforded stages, a lack of confidence in crossing language and cultural differences, and racialisation of non-white participants emerged as factors causing Chinese participants' withdrawal into a 'Chinese enclave'.

During the ensuing technology uses, both Chinese and non-Chinese participants were stimulated by the opportunity to make high-quality self-representations. Their persistent endeavour in achieving artistic perfection and skill improvement was undoubtedly conducive to participatory and creative storytelling. However, Chinese participants blamed the preoccupation with video creation for insufficient bonding with non-Chinese counterparts. Also, the awareness of the identifiability of the author in visual media discouraged some from completing video creation and dissemination in the workshop. This happened to both Chinese and non-Chinese participants.

The Chinese participants' first-person narratives on life in Australia established experience-based views on relocating and resettling overseas. This diverged from the socio-economic view on migration that has prevailed in hegemonic narratives, especially in more developed countries. By narrating leisure activities, life journeys and anecdotes in daily life, the Chinese participants, who came to Australia for different reasons, exposed disappointment and sufferings but remained upbeat and hopeful. In this sense, the better life that Chinese participants travelled all the way to look for might not be better than life in their home country at all. It was a sense of self-responsibility, the longing for achievement and self-growth and the occasional warmth and kindness they received in local life that persuaded them of the worthiness of not leaving the country.

Meanwhile, the anticipation of a parent audience posed a constraint for young Chinese students in displaying their study and life in Australia. Despite disappointment at international education, these participants avoided showing it and made purely delightful narrations to please their parents. This caused a poor grasp of the opportunity to express their critical views and propositions on living overseas,

which I heard instead in interviews. But it needs acknowledging that the leisure stories did succeed in meeting the participants' emotional needs in communicating with their parents. Therefore, while the voice was disguised in front of viewers, leisure stories remained a valuable trial for improving mutual understanding with their targeted audience.

Hence, in respect to first-person migrant narrative, researcher narrative and technology user narrative, DST participants gained confidence, language skills and software-use skills in the workshop. Their stories enriched audience's understandings of migrant life, but rarely challenged existing biased assumptions in a straightforward manner. For instance, Chinese students complained about a peripheral position in conversing with native English speakers, but did not question the discourses around language disadvantage or ethnic-racial relations in storytelling. Compared with the diversity in the participants' backgrounds, the diversity of points of views delivered in completed digital stories was lacking.

In the next chapter, I present the case study based in Zhejiang province, China. I adopt a similar structure to expand on the DST workshop and the resulting digital stories, in order to conduct comparisons between the two case studies.

## Chapter 5 Remaking south

In this chapter, I discuss the participants in the DST workshop at Zhejiang in China. The participants were uniform in occupation; they were all young interprovincial university students. However, I saw them from a rare perspective: they constituted a vibrant subgroup of internal migrants in China. In *stay*-themed DST workshops, the subgroup displayed their sense-making of relocation experiences from their home provinces to the provincial capital city of Hangzhou or the adjacent county-city of Tongxiang in China's wealthier southeastern coastal Zhejiang province.

In this chapter, I consider how young internal migrants assumed authorship of Zhejiang and produced new narratives of the province, which decentred the privileged position held by more developed southern coastal areas since China's reform era. I specifically examine the decentring processes of migrant narrative in which symbolic resources provided and created by migrant participants worked to break the enduring socio-economic myth of southern geo-advantage.

### 5.1 Digital storytelling participation as play

In September and October 2015, I introduced digital storytelling to interprovincial university students at Zhejiang University of Media and Communications (ZUMC). Although the workshop also encountered problems with regard to recruitment, devices and duration as in WA, it was successful in the sense that this provided a new opportunity for people to take up the workshop-based DST practice, for the first time in China, as far as I am aware.

#### 5.1.1 Self-equipped workshops

Since people in China's mainland speak Mandarin as the unified language, participants in Hangzhou and Tongxiang did not face obvious language and cultural differences as their counterparts did in Perth. Since they were all university students and required to live in dormitory buildings on campus, most of the participants for a workshop were acquainted with each other in advance. However, both the recruitment and the workshop itself proved difficult due to a shortage of personnel and facilities. As the workshop was extracurricular and I was a visiting scholar for

the university, the host university did not grant me access to computer facilities or provide me with a research assistant. Therefore, I had to ask participants to bring their personal laptops which varied in system and installed software. Also as Zhejiang was neither the home province nor the place of study or work for me, it was hard for me to gather participants or resources for the workshop on my own. Apart from giving guest lectures to attract students, I also resorted to personal ties with lecturers. Although students were more likely to participate at the recommendation of their lecturers, I avoided ‘the exertion of power’ by informing them well in advance that they could withdraw at any point or by not signing the consent form. For example, in one lecture given to eighty students, all of them refused to attend the workshop due to a heavy load of coursework assignments. In the final workshop for a classroom of students, only around half of them chose to give consent and complete digital stories. Eventually I facilitated four workshops in whichever office or studio space I could borrow and lent my two personal laptops to participants who did not own a laptop or found their own laptop to be unable to support video-making software.

### 5.1.2 University student as author of domestic mobility

Despite lacking resources compared with the WA workshops, the workshop in Zhejiang made a notable achievement by gathering together interprovincial university students to tell stories about the journey they started with leaving their home provinces. Although Chinese universities have been showcasing their competitiveness and attractiveness by recruiting young adults from all parts of the country, who score highly in nationwide college entrance examination, the massive scale of convergence of internal migrants by universities is usually toned down in the destination city. Gathered in on-campus dormitory buildings which are cheap, safe, centrally managed and close to student facilities, interprovincial students have a limited range of activities. Amid waves of city expansion around China to accommodate increasing urban populations, university campuses are enlarging to recruit more students. As a result, interprovincial students often find themselves in new campus sites that are located in newly built suburban districts at the very edge of the city. For example, ZUMC, a small-scale media-focussed university, has its main

campus located in Xiasha district, an industrial outskirts of Hangzhou, which has been filled with more than ten large university campuses only in the last few years. ZUMC also has a branch campus in the county-level city of Tongxiang, where the campus' finely built architecture and gardens make a sharp contrast with a few shabby restaurants and shops nearby. Both campuses in Xiasha and Tongxiang look expansive, empty and detached from Hangzhou, which ZUMC claims to be located in.<sup>1</sup> Due to China's strict household registration system, interprovincial students hold temporary student *hukou* in Hangzhou and might convert to permanent status if they have demonstrated their talent upon graduation, and if they can meet official requirements for education, employment, family relation and so on.<sup>2</sup> The young people, who came all the way to stay here for years of study, were non-residents in both the official and territorial senses.

However, apart from the autobiographies of star alumni (Jack Ma of Alibaba, for instance) who went on to claim both residency and careers successfully in Hangzhou or the well-known megacities of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, these young educational migrants' journeys to the thriving eastern coast seemed commonplace and unworthy of notice. Therefore, having them come to tell relocation stories and realise their relocation stories would be valued (watched by a group and screened, stored and analysed by a researcher) made the workshops special. Unlike the educational institution and mainstream media, which assess the attention-worthiness of an internal migrant's story based on merit, for example, academic excellence and career success, the workshop provided a non-competitive environment to make even banal migrant stories attention-worthy. This is not simply a move away from success stories or chicken soup tales, but one of 'the other ways of being in the truth' (Hartley, 2010, p. 26), as Hartley claims, citing Richard Hoggart. In 'the other ways', young people were no longer spectators of prominent predecessors' glory and pain, but authors of their own relocation journeys.

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<sup>1</sup> As Xiasha falls in the administration of Hangzhou city, ZUMC claims it is located in Hangzhou on its website at <http://eng.zjicm.edu.cn/>. Like many other universities in China and abroad, ZUMC does not include Tongxiang branch campus in postal address for the public.

<sup>2</sup> Check the newly launched guideline for graduates at the website of the police department of Hangzhou (<http://www.hzpolice.gov.cn/Html/201705/26/939ccd93-5a86-443f-bc2c-ae767651e588.html>).

### 5.1.3 Across and beyond hierarchy of expertise

The workshop was also special in that it had budding media professionals as participants. Better technology literacy played an important role in their conceptualisation of DST. The university students who participated in the workshops all majored in a media discipline. The courses they took ranged from film directing to television production to advertising. Most of them were officially classified as art students who had to go through additional selection to get into this university. In order to be candidates for ZUMC the film direction students, for example, took tests before the national college entrance examination, which included film commentary, story outlining, art history and television program planning. Upon enrolment, they paid for courses at a higher rate than most disciplines, and the courses covered playwriting, filming, photography and stage performance. It, therefore, came as no surprise that many students turned down my workshop invitation because DST appeared artistically and technologically ‘too simple’ (according to participant interviews). On the practical side, this cohort made self-equipment (i.e., using their own laptops and softwares) a viable solution to a resource-thin workshop, as students who turned up in the workshop usually had an idea about script writing, voice recording and video making. On the theoretical side, there was competition between different levels of expertise for students at the moment of invitation. In Hartley’s discussion on ‘The expert: bully or pulley?’, he points out the manner of ‘dialogic development’ (Hartley, 2010, p. 102), in which individuals may develop digital literacy through dialogues with expert. However, that dialogue is complicated in a media university setting since participants were themselves quasi-experts. The participants’ existing expertise thus reduced the workshop’s desirability in regard to skill acquisition and experiential newness.

Yet DST’s ambiguous position between media use and entertainment served as a desirable factor. This was especially the case for the two workshops held during China’s week-long national day break in which the workshop target participants were the few students who felt the holiday was too short to return to a faraway home. The DST workshop, appearing as easy and yet unknown to them, served as a group leisure program to while away the lonely and boring time.

In *The ambiguity of play*, Sutton-Smith has argued that play itself is a form of culture and is independent from other cultural forms.

When playing, whether play improves skills for non-play functions is not central. Play is about the ontology of being a player and the dreams that that sustains. It is only indirectly about the epistemology of creating other forms of competence. (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 106)

For these participants, the DST workshop fell into the overlapping zone of digital culture and play culture to be a non-competitive technology-afforded group activity. It resembled hobby groups that are emerging in China's big cities, in which urban residents learn English, flower arrangement, knitting, pottery and painting. Having fun and relaxation, rather than acquiring new skills or socialising, are the central incentives for students and employees to be hobbyists in their limited free time. The expertise they learn and practise might not be useful for competitive reasons at study or work, but meet their need to enjoy themselves spiritually. This passion for amateurism makes it possible for a wider range of expertise to reach populations who used to be thought to be disinterested or unavailable. If fun is acknowledged as the essence of play as Sutton-Smith (2001, pp. 187-190) argues, then DST was a kind of play for the aforementioned student participants. The 'having fun' capacity of DST not only made the workshop attractive for quasi-expert participants, but also placed the hierarchy of expertise out of the way.

## 5.2 Authoring Zhejiang

Geo-advantage has been used in China's official discourse (Xue & Liu, 2014) and research (J.-m. Zhang, 2005; Zhao, 2007) to highlight the advantageous geographical locations for natural resource exploitation and the development of trade, tourism, and technology. For the provinces along the coast and south of the north-south divide, the Yangtze River, geo-advantage emphasises the frontier location of coastal areas in China's huge economic leaps since the national reform and opening up policy was implemented in the 1980s. While 'geo' suggests the pivotal position of coastal areas in opening up to international trade before the advent of e-commerce, 'advantage' indicates the natural advantage in locations for marine transportation, which is a necessary condition for the long-held leading position and recent economic legends of southern provinces such as Zhejiang and Guangdong.

Deng Xiaoping, who led the Chinese communist party from the end of the catastrophic Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s until his retirement in 1989, was the steersman of the country's economic reform, and the reform guidelines have been largely adhered to up to the present day. The reformist leader called for open-mindedness towards a market economy, which was widely deemed as capitalist, while preserving the dominance of the socialist planned economy. His 'cat theory' for incorporating a market economy was famously pragmatist: 'It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice' (Faison, 1997). On *News of the Communist Party of China* at the party's official portal [people.cn](http://people.cn), an article in the party history section exemplifies concrete uses of the theory.

The 'cat theory' has been practised all the way through the reform. It can be discovered in many scenarios: township and village enterprise, special economic zones, private economy, securities, stocks... ('Story behind cat theory', n.d.)

With pragmatic thinking, Deng made an imbalanced regional economy a strategy for national development, as suggested by his well-known words 'let some people get rich first' ('Quotes of Deng', n.d.). In his southern tour speech in 1992 to clarify the ideas for reform, he emphasised that the goal of the strategy was common prosperity across the country.

Following a socialist path is aimed to gradually achieve common prosperity. Common prosperity was conceptualised as having some areas which have better conditions be the first to develop and some areas develop relatively slowly. The areas which had early development lead the areas which develop late. In this way, we will eventually achieve common prosperity (Feng & Chen, 2014).

The 'areas which have better conditions' mainly referred to the southern coastal area that occupied an advantageous location to draw foreign investment and gain business experience from more developed countries. Since ancient times, the area has pioneered elements of China's economy due to the convenience of transnational shipping. For example, the Port of Quanzhou in the southeastern Fujian province became the first port for international trade in China's Northern and Southern Dynasties (420 – 589 AD) and grew into one of the largest ports in the world in the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279) and Yuan Dynasty (1271 – 1368) (M. Cheng, 1995, p. 351; Tang, 1995, p. 379). Jiangnan, which means the Yangtze River delta covering Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai, and is equivalent to contemporary *jiangzhehu*, has been the most prosperous area since the Song Dynasty and became the centre of the

commercial revolution during the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries spanning from the late Ming Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty. As Chinese history scholars have noted, Jiangnan-based businesses could reach overseas and to China's other areas through ocean and waterway transportation. China, therefore, saw in the coastal south the earliest large cities of industry and commerce built on capital concentration, most notably Suzhou for silk and cotton manufacturing, and the 'sprouts of capitalism' which were early forms of the modern economy (B. Li, 2011; Tang, 2005).

As Deng suggested, the Chinese government enhanced the southern geo-advantage with policy prioritisation for southern area development. It established the first special economic zone of Shenzhen City in 1979 in the southernmost Guangdong province, granting the city province-level economic autonomy. Formerly a small county called Bao'an, Shenzhen was adjacent to the international, commercial hub of Hong Kong. Its rapid and huge economic success was marked by exponential enlargement of the population. By the end of 2000, Shenzhen had drawn four million migrants with work opportunities (Wang, 2004, p. 80). In the early reform days, getting into private business was called *xia hai*, literally saying going down into the sea, referring to migration to the far south, to Guangdong. Until recently, under the new leadership of Xi Jinping, the 2015 government plan for the One Belt One Road Initiative still found 'the trade port advantage' (Jia & Zhao, 2015) of coastal cities as crucial for this infrastructure building project on which China will cooperate with Eurasian countries. The initiative claims to reincarnate China's ancient 'silk road', which extended westwards across the country's spacious underdeveloped hinterland and neighbouring countries along the western border. According to an analysis report from the Lowy Institute, while the initiative might be driven by geopolitical goals, it also has an objective to 'address China's deepening regional disparity as the country's economy modernises' (Cai, 2017).

As participants of northern origin said in the focus groups, despite economic slowdown and the competitive job market in the south, employers, universities and parents still cite geo-advantage to persuade them not to leave the south. Therefore, geo-advantage has become a myth that is the basis for the mainstream narrative of the south, making the southern coast a destination imagined and desired by millions of Chinese people.

In the following sections, I identify three categories of translocal experience in the interprovincial migrants' digital stories: north-south stories, multi-destination stories and getaway stories. Instead of evaluating the economic advantage of the south, young migrants' stories centred on the cultural south, the option to leave the south and an aversion to ubiquitous consumer culture. This centring process counters the dominant narrative that depicts young migrants as unaccomplished and unnecessary residents and pursuers of the southern geo-advantage. It thus rendered geo-advantage a space of place-making paradoxes.

### 5.2.1 North-south stories

Hong's story told of her experience in Hangzhou after leaving her homecity, Qingdao, a major city in the northern Shandong Peninsula. It was one of a distinctive group of stories in which participants recounted the experience of coming from northern origins to Hangzhou. The group shared some common features: a standard Mandarin voice, juxtaposition of photos taken of homeplaces and Hangzhou, and referring to the host city as the south, or Jiangnan or the coastal area, which had stood on the frontline of China's economic development. These stories usually began with the scene of departure from home and continued with fresh encounters with urban landscapes, food and friends in the destination city. The excitement of living in an unfamiliar place could be felt through numerous close-up photos which were supposed to exhaustively show the uniqueness of the place. Fantasising the future of their life, which seemed to take off in the city, the voiceovers and background music intensified this excitement by attaching interpersonal relationships and personal aspirations to the visual, often in poetic form. However, while they attributed their self-improvement to their stay in Hangzhou, their audial-visual representations of the city told the opposite. It was not the locality, but rather the non-locality of Hangzhou that afforded the meaningfulness of their new experience and dream of the future.

Stay<sup>3</sup>

Travelling from Qingdao to Hangzhou, I'll spend four years here in study.  
Slowly I feel the campus has become the place I stay longest, while 'home' is  
merely a 'hotel' where I live for several days once in a while.

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<sup>3</sup> All digital stories made in Zhejiang were in Chinese. The English scripts I discuss in the thesis are my own translations.

Just as people always say 'time will change everything', the sorrowful feeling of 'all alone in a foreign land' fades out. Here I have made friends with a group of aspiring and goal-oriented classmates. Being influenced by them, my views of the world, life and values have matured.

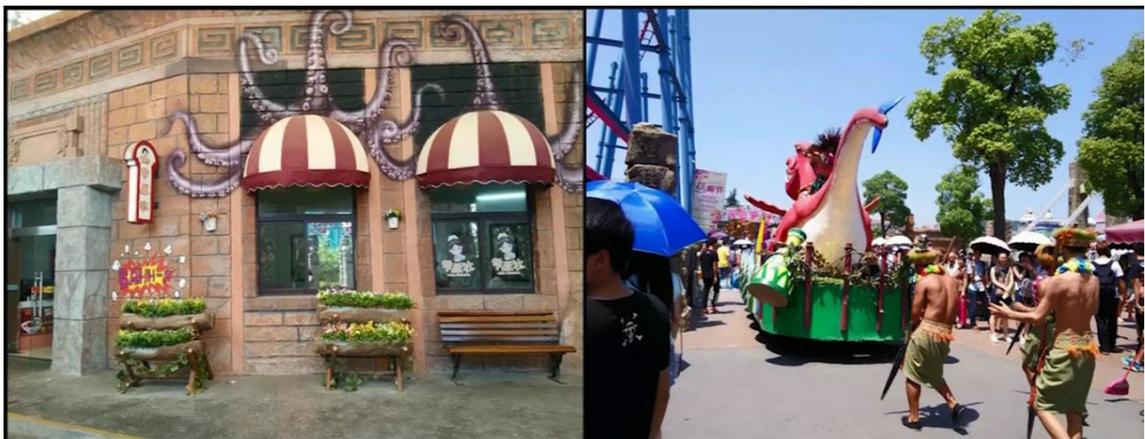
We went through dull and exhausting military training. We got up reluctantly from under the quilt to eat breakfast at the canteen, went to classes feeling tired and waited in exhilaration to see a new film. From time to time, we chat heart to heart at length, about the past, the present and the future. We imagine and dream of the unknowable future, fantasising that we could one day try delicious food around the world. Do you still remember the time we spent in the amusement park? We laughed and played in boring waiting time, we shouted in Flume Ride, we made promises to each other in the cable car...

In Hangzhou, I stay in terms of my time, my food and leisure, and more importantly my ideas, my values. Stay is not stopping or hesitating to move forward, but that we pause in a certain part of the long river of our life history, slow down the pace to look at people around us, pay attention to things happening around us, and then settle down ourselves and enrich ourselves to get ready to march towards a better self.

In Hong's story *Stay*, what was absent was the city of Hangzhou. Despite bright coloured photos of campus, leisure sites and food through which Hong felt and understood Hangzhou, these visual contents were not introduced or explained. Hong did not need to introduce this content for the anticipated audience in China. These urban facilities and services were not particular or native to Hangzhou, or anywhere in China, but adapted and replicated across the country including in Hong's tourist homecity, Qingdao. As the story took place amid China's booming economy and consumerism, it was bound to miss the local side of the city. For instance, a tour in an amusement park that Hong depicted with plenty of photos and words was an imported cultural practice which had quickly grown popular in China. The local amusement park, Hangzhou Paradise (confirmed in private communication), was a theme park developed by a Chinese company. The photos of flume ride and cable car she mentioned and the photos of European-style architecture and parade of popular cartoon characters (figure 5-1), which are not mentioned, all symbolised the recent rise of crowd-drawing theme parks on the outskirts of large and medium sized cities. These parks have multiplied at such a speed that the official Xinhua news agency warned that bubbles were looming (Tang, 2016).

On the one hand, these numerous theme parks mark the ongoing adoption of a comprehensive Western model of entertainment: the massive territorial occupation with a range of facilities for play, catering, shopping and accommodation. Going one step further, it also shows the ubiquitous penetration of popular culture, which causes

an intergeneration shift from the view that amusement parks are for children only. This shift reached a peak when Disneyland finally opened the first mainland theme park in Shanghai in 2016, after the nearest Hong Kong franchise was launched more than a decade ago. However, the much-anticipated park resort was later challenged by China's richest person, Jianlin Wang. As he stated in a business forum in Shanghai, his property development company Wanda Group, which started off building shopping malls, has transformed into a major player in China's cultural industry ('Wang's speech', 2014). He suggested that 'Disney should not have come to China' because it simply migrated its American model and would not meet the needs from the Chinese market. Unlike Disneyland, his theme parks aim to remove seasonal barriers and promote indigenous cultures, according to *Financial Times Chinese* (Ai, 2016). The fact that Wang waged war with Disneyland was a reminder that theme parks have become a battlefield between media conglomerates, just as in the earlier adopter countries in the West, as well as between indigenous cultural forms and cultural imperialism in the imported countries (Davis, 1996). Wang's interest also implied that theme parks are not so different from shopping malls. The development of shopping malls laid the foundation for his wealth. Both kinds of territorial occupation are aimed at profiting from mass mediation and concentrated consumption of popular symbols.



**Figure 5-1 Photos of amusement park in Hong's story**

By displaying scenes of a day-long visit to an amusement park in Hangzhou with friends, Hong's narrative on theme parks became not only non-local, but placeless. One reason was that as an important landmark of the southern city, Hangzhou Paradise symbolised homogeneity between Hangzhou and many other Chinese cities

including Hong's homecity. Immersed in globalised capital and cultural flows, China's urban development is inevitably fuelled by Western investments and thus has urban land uses claimed by Western ideas and business models. Western parks like Disneyland seize the market by massively mediating the exotic and erratic symbols of Western popular media. Although Chinese competitors are emerging, they still appropriate the mass mediation-consumption model, and for that reason, have to adapt indigenous cultural forms into locally and globally acceptable ones. There seems no escape from being homogenous for Hangzhou.

The other reason for placelessness was that the theme park was not exactly urban. Hangzhou Paradise, despite its local brand, is in Xiaoshan district, which used to be a small city separate from Hangzhou's downtown area and was one and half hours from Hong's campus accommodation by subway. Being a temporary Hangzhou resident, Hong and her friends recast themselves as tourists in travelling to this landscape of exotic cultural origin. More importantly, the landscape was as ephemeral as Hong's being a tourist. As research on Disneyland has shown, a theme park 'invokes an urbanism without producing a city' and is 'the utopia of transience, a place where everyone is just passing through' (Sorkin, 1992, p. 231). The business model is based on the transience of crowds and scenes, but also the delight that Hong felt comes from the transient separation from her everyday life based at university, as she exclaimed in the story: 'Do you still remember the time we spent in the amusement park?'

Although homogeneity and transience are prevalent for landscapes originated in the West such as theme parks, shopping malls and modern universities, these characteristics were not just displayed by these parts of the city. They could even be found in the historic architecture in the participants' stories. Ling, from the northeastern Heilongjiang province, visited Wuzhen, a historic town adjacent to Hangzhou, with her mother, in a hunt for the real cultural south before her first semester started. Accompanying the photos of bridges and houses on riverbanks, which Wuzhen was famous for, she narrated in her story, *Faraway from home*:

I travelled to Wuzhen with mum. The scenery of water flowing under a tiny bridge indeed looked gentle and touching.

The words matched the visuals (figure 5-2) in regard to the object of narration, but they fought against each other in regard to how Wuzhen really looked. By fixating on the scenery that Ling caught a glimpse of, the story magnified the distinctive architectural style and beauty that denoted not only the long history but also the delicate southernness. However, what was also magnified was the emptiness of Wuzhen which looked as unusual and fake as postcards. Researchers have argued that the pre-digital postcards work as metaphors because ‘to post is to transfer and mutate’ (Hjorth & Kim, 2011). I argue that the photo-voice story of Wuzhen was metaphoric, too. While the photographer intentionally or unintentionally avoided tourists and vendors crowding the place, the crowd seemed ever more present. Also present was Ling’s imagination of the southern province prior to her relocation: a place depicted in mainstream media as a combination of natural beauty, history and wealth, and it was supposed to be in stark contrast with her relatively less developed, remote and barren hometown on the northeastern borders.



**Figure 5-2 Photos of Wuzhen in Ling's story**

Ling’s visit to Wuzhen after arriving in Hangzhou was a predictable one. The little town rose to fame after a TV drama, *Si Shui Nian Hua*<sup>4</sup>, was broadcast on CCTV, China’s national television channel, in 2003. The drama told a story set in Wuzhen about a local librarian who returned to the hometown after graduating from a top university. He fell in love with a Taiwanese fashion magazine editor whose father was originally from the mainland. The librarian and the editor ran into each other when the former was restoring ancient books in the library and the latter needed to borrow a copy for fashion photographs. Their romance was ignited at the first

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<sup>4</sup> A search shows the drama’s title has not been officially translated into English. It literally means time passes like flowing water.

meeting and was intensified in a series of unexpected encounters. Eventually, they stopped seeing each other because the librarian had to stay in Wuzhen to take over the library from the elderly librarian in the family and the editor had to return to Taiwan to marry her fiancé. While the librarian and the editor symbolised the root of Chinese culture and the avant-garde of modern culture respectively, the finale of their parting and return to the places of their origin was too ideal to be real. The plot used the historic-style residence, hotel, dyeing mill, bridge and alley for the fashion magazine photographs, and the historic culture was interwoven with modernisation. The culture was even uprooted, given that for the editor, in dressing models, the librarian's fake ancient books would serve as properly as genuine ones to form a visual contrast with modern clothing and high heels.

Something similar happened to Ling. Travelling far with the imagination of Wuzhen as the cultural essence of the south, Ling found herself surrounded by the noises of tourists and mass-produced souvenirs. The snapshots of the bridges, the river and the houses became the rare moments evidencing the tranquil natural scenery and historical inheritance that she was searching for. Nevertheless, Ling's story did not get any closer to the authentic southern culture, either. Emptied of tourism, its postcard-like immaculateness suggested the distance and separability between cultural production and the state of cultural rootedness.

Food also disrupted the north-south difference in Hong's story. It was interesting that Hong matched her words of 'We imagine and dream of the unknowable future, fantasising that we could one day try delicious food around the world' with photos of spicy dishes which were not authentic food from the sweet-loving Hangzhou city (figure 5-3). Wanning Sun (2002) has compared diasporas from the Chinese mainland eating Cantonese food Yum Cha to net surfing, and the point-and-click activity, because eating Yum Cha embodies 'a bodily impulse to get "in touch" with the absent home' (p. 155). However, unlike the transnational subjectivity Sun has found in the consumption of Chinese local food, my participants' translocal subjectivity was perplexing in their stories. Hong's 'activity involving "point<sup>5</sup> and lick"' (Sun, 2002, p. 155) chilli chicken and *chuan* (skewers of vegetables or kebab) did not bear uniform regional characteristics. The first two kinds of food in the

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<sup>5</sup> In 'point and lick' in Sun's book, 'point' means the traditional way to order Yum Cha dishes: pointing at dishes on a trolley that waiters push around each table.

photos are widely thought of as inventions of southwestern Sichuan province, while the third originated in the ethnic Uyghur community in northwestern Xinjiang province. Nowadays, they are ubiquitous in street stands and small restaurants in almost every Chinese city. It became even more perplexing when Hong said in the background that she imagined trying every foreign food in the world. How could typical Chinese street food activate Hong's imagination of exotic cuisines? I argue that in Sun's 'point and lick' depiction we must insert 'shoot' to understand food experience in digital culture.



**Figure 5-3 Photos of food in Hong's story**

This part of Hong's story conjured up the scenario of a young Chinese female eating street food with friends in a big city. This scenario blurred interregional boundaries not only in that the foods Hong ate were from faraway origins, but also because Hong's act of ordering and shooting food was a nationwide phenomenon. With the proliferation of urban service platforms (usually in both forms of website and mobile app) such as dianping.com and meituan.com, young people have the ability to compare and choose where to eat at their fingertips. The regional characteristics, sometimes ethnicities as well, of various foods are mediated through online descriptions, pictures, and ratings. In this sense, these platforms construct an alternative urban cartography: a map of food that converges regional food varieties and assigns them with new localities in a city. Roaming on the streets of Hangzhou, Hong and her friends seemed to go through shelves of food in a disorderly supermarket. The food origins were reduced to a line of words on the price tag, telling the destination of the customer's prospective food journey. The exotic foods are thus easier to imagine, given that they can always be located on a food map on Hong's smartphone.

What further problematises the regionalities of food in Hangzhou was to shoot food before eating. As interviewees said in a *The New York Times* article, 'First Camera,

Then Fork’, photographing the subject of the somatic activity of eating is a personal and accurate way of documenting life (Murphy, 2010). The author of the article cited the French philosopher and gourmand Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin’s words written in 1825: ‘Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.’ These words remain applicable in modern Chinese food culture. As Hong showed what she ate as part of her life in Hangzhou, we could tell who she was in the post-reform China.

Just as the food critic Mr Shaw said in the abovementioned article, ubiquitous food photography ‘shows that we are in a spastic food era – we couldn’t get more obsessive’ (ibid.). While China as the largest mobile device user experiences syncretic ubiquity, photographic obsession is not simply an emerging trend, but a turn away from the reform-era food obsession. In Judith Farquhar’s book, *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China*, the post-Mao excess of appetites embodied a breakaway from the deficiency in the Maoist past (Finnane, 2003). This sets the context for us to understand the lavish dining and wining in the reform era. The food-photographing obsession, however, marks another breakaway and transformation of food experience in China. Instead of purposeful eating outside home, either for social or business relationship or ‘to get something done through *guanxi*’, Chinese people increasingly eat for leisure and bonding. And for this reason, they have started to look for affordable and delicious food, rather than expensive Cantonese-style seafood which used to be a symbol of generosity at social occasions. For example, spicy kebab skewers from northwestern Xinjiang used to be deemed as an indecent and unhygienic street food but are now served in many restaurants, even in high-end ones. Aiming her camera lens at affordable spicy food in a coastal city, Hong was not being exceptional. Her act reflected a current trend diverging from the worship of seafood. I agree with Sun that the popularity of Cantonese food among Chinese diasporas indicates ‘a triumph of the cultural and economic interests of some Chinese communities over others’ (Sun, 2002, p. 155). Hong’s eating and shooting cheap spicy food is embedded in a recent rise of the inland food culture. Instead of the north-south rivalry, the popularity of spicy food signifies a coastal-inland rebalancing, or more exactly a reverse of the coastal geo-advantage. Interestingly, although Hong celebrated her life in the coastal city of Hangzhou, her depictions of the consumption of culinary delights demonstrated her impulse to get in touch with

the inland. Food, thus, became another example of the paradoxical locality in Hong's story.

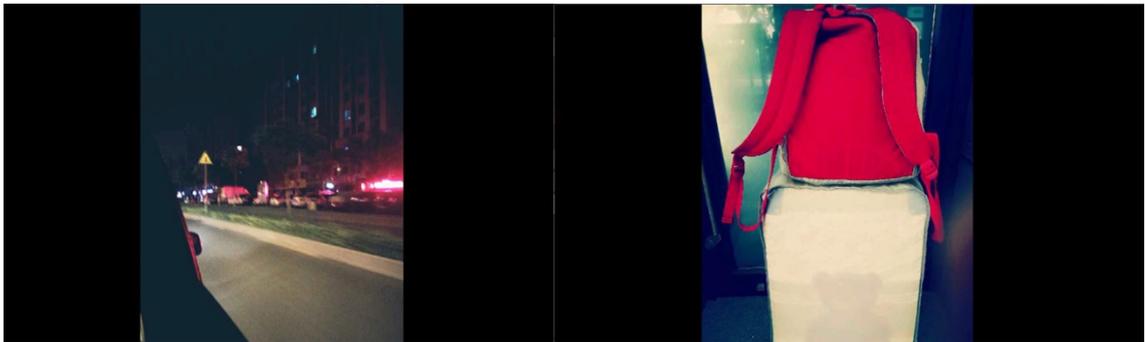
It is arguable that the cultural south that north-origin students looked for in Zhejiang does not exist anymore. In the stories of daily encounters, the province, like many others in China, is broken down into mediated symbols that could be Western, northern or might even not belong to any geographical location.

## 5.2.2 Multi-destination stories

Alongside the common leave-and-stay stories, there were three stories that each contained more than one city for the theme, stay, which took the topic to the radical outcome of endless mobility. In these stories, travel marked the turning points of career pursuit, family migration and tourism. Travel seemed to satisfy the desire for a better life and new experience. Meanwhile, each story gave an open ending, suggesting the incompleteness of mobility. The desire was beyond measure and to satisfy it was beyond the capacity of any place, city or area.

In Xia's story, *Cities I Walked into*, on her study and internship experience, the opening images of her sitting in a car and dragging luggage gave a light and easy sense of modern transportation (figure 5-4). With a bright red backpack neatly placed on top of a snow-white suitcase, Xia's pretty travel images were drastically different from those of the previous generations that had characterised travel as crowded, dirty and burdensome. Given the mainstream representations of Chinese people's travel frenzy, such as during the 'golden week' of the national day break, Xia's images were familiar. They implied a new era in which more and more Chinese people have the opportunity to travel long distance to self-selected destinations. This impulse to pack up and go anywhere was portrayed briskly in the Chinese song, *Shuo Zou Jiu Zou*, by popular Taiwanese singer Jay Chou in 2016. The song's title, meaning setting out to travel without delay, is part of a well-known quote from the American author Andy Andrews' 2002 book *The Traveler's Gift*. The quote, which says to travel without delay is one of the two must-have impulses in one's life, gained popularity long before the launch of the book's Chinese translation by China's CITIC Press Group in 2011. One proof of the book's fame was that in one of the largest online shopping malls in China, the book's translation was on sale with the

quote as a one-liner Editor's Recommendation.<sup>6</sup> A search for the quote on the Chinese search engine Baidu.com finds that the Chinese online space is full of its fake English originals; with limited access to the original version, Chinese netizens have translated the quote back into English themselves. By staying in four cities during the past three and half years' of her university time, Xia lived out the travel impulse.



**Figure 5-4 First two images in Xia's story**

However, her voiceover started with helplessness and confusion: 'I have walked into four cities but haven't found one to settle down yet.'

#### Cities I walked into

I have walked into four cities but haven't found one to settle down yet. Weihai is where it all started; it always warms me and my nostalgia for it will never change. Dad and Mom are there waiting for my return. It has the power to pull me back when I desperately want to fly out of the nest. Here I had the mentor who gave me my first job, an open and positive work environment which gives promotion on grounds of personal ability, and a home at the seaside which I can move into when I retire.

Tongxiang came unexpected. Several years ago when I struggled with pressures to leave home province to learn advertisement in the south, I never thought of coming to this relatively isolated small city. I have had meals in all the nearby restaurants many times and had very limited entertainment activities. But now being in the university for more than three and half years, I start to miss Tongxiang's serenity. This is a city in which I'm eventually a passer-by, but it will be responsible for my most shining four years.

Jinan was a city of more disappointment than hope. I walked two kilometres to the workplace in scorching sun every day. For the first time I worked in the radio and television station and for the first time I learned to be a media professional. I tried my best to adapt to its pace but could not see any space for development.

Changsha was different. Spicy passion greeted me as soon as I set foot on its soil. Malanshan was shabbier than Tongxiang, but there I had the company of a

<sup>6</sup> <http://item.jd.com/10881939.html>

bunch of young people living in rented rooms and fighting for the future. Every day I was upbeat; every deep night when I worked until 2 am, I had the best feeling of fulfilment.

Choose a city to strive towards dream, and choose another one to spend remaining years. No matter where I will be in the future, I wish everyday a bright sunny day.

The background music *The Dreamers*<sup>7</sup> kicked in before Xia's narration started.

Here's one for magic, that lives within

For seeing beauty in the commonest of things.

Here's one for passion, without restraint

To those who stumble to the ground and feel no shame.

(Excerpt of lyrics of *The Dreamers* in Xia's story)

The song was very popular among the workshop participants in China. In the workshop Xia attended, all participants chose the song from the music pool I provided to them. Although the lyrics extol dreamers' courage, the melody is slow and melancholic. Whether Xia paid attention to the lyrics or not, the song did match her voiceover in expressing pride, disappointment and uncertainty in her endeavour to 'choose a city to strive'.

Like Hong, Xia was also from the northern Shandong province. When she found her campus was in a small city instead of the metropolis of Hangzhou, she started interning in her homecity Weihai and home province capital Jinan and the capital of southern Hunan province Changsha, which is famous for Hunan TV, China's most watched satellite television channel. However, these cities all fell short of her expectation. According to the interview with her, there was an ongoing conflict between her media training and the favoured cities. She tried to find jobs near home because her mother wanted her to. Unfortunately, Weihai provided few media jobs and she found the internship in Jinan depressing. She moved on to the southern inland Changsha to join aspirational peers at the well-renowned Hunan TV, but was taken aback by the housing conditions in the Malanshan district for long-term living. She told me her next stops will be Hangzhou and Beijing, before she returns home to marry someone in her late 20s. I will not be surprised if she finally settled in Beijing,

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<sup>7</sup> *The Dreamers* is a royalty-free song by Josh Woodward on Jamendo.com at <https://www.jamendo.com/track/1128216/the-dreamers?language=en>. It requires downloaders to give credit to the creator when using it.

as most large media companies have moved their headquarters there in recent years. Actually she could have chosen Beijing years ago, if she had not struggled with her longing for living near home or in the south.

The traveller subjectivity Xia showed in her story was ambiguous. Whether she made the right choice of city was unimportant. Both her travel impulse and frustration were part of her travel experience. The boundary between reason and experience was blurred, which according to Tim Oakes (2006) is always conveyed by modernity (p. 237). Xia was rational in that she was motivated by job opportunities springing up across the country; she was impulsive at the same time, given the tiring travel and predictable hassles to set up life outside the usual residence of home and university. The blurring boundary was also caused by the unpredictability of Xia's encounters in the destination city. The scorching sun, poor public transport, humble rented housing and unambitious colleagues were out of her control but inevitably constructed her perception of the cities. Xia's travel was gendered, too, given her plan (or family expectation) to settle down before turning thirty years old.

While Xia tried to optimise her choice of destination through travels, it was hard to foresee an end to her mobility. This leads us to question Xia's subjectivity as a constant traveller. Despite her subjective options of the cities to travel to, Xia was nevertheless constrained by the unpredictability of encounters in the destinations and the reactions from her family. The constraints which were supposed to obstruct travel always led to her next travel. Xia's hope of resolving the constraints through constant travel put her in an ambiguous place that cannot be located on a subjective-objective binary. This 'hopefulness of mobility' is rooted in China's early reform time in which rural residents entered cities (*jincheng*) on a massive scale and many became well-off urban dwellers. The difference between the reform-era travellers and Xia was that the formers' jobs were mostly assigned due to the scarcity of workers in almost every industry. Comparatively, her travel is neither clearly oriented towards certain jobs nor warranted to achieve good results. Given the saturation of the job market, her hopefulness braved more risks than her predecessors.

Despite this reform-era mindset, Xia's story resisted the dominant narrative on domestic mobility that privileges outcome over process. Lynda Johnston, cited by Tim Oakes, argues that 'the traveller (or tourist) as modern subject has been

universalized, abstracted and disembodied' (Oakes, 2006, p. 239). While 'following the job', Xia also followed her judgement of bodily and gendered experience. It was on this ground that Xia's story proved geo-advantage an overgeneralising characterisation for any city in contemporary China. Although the geo-advantage myth invoked Xia's imagination of the coastal south, Xia was able to live it, test it and leave it behind. She proved herself a capable professional in travels and always had the choice of leaving. Her endless travels thus contested the very foundation of internal migration: is there a terminal called 'the better life' in China?

### 5.2.3 Getaway stories

In contrast to the aspirational multi-destination stories, four participants' stories recounted their disillusion with interprovincial mobility and the desire to escape from the destination city. I gave these tales the designation of getaway stories. They were special for two reasons. One was that they were the only downbeat stories in the entire transnational DST project. Instead of exploring the current city (like Hong and Ling) or looking for a better city to stay (like Xia) in stories, these authors found themselves stuck where they were. The other reason was that unlike most stories that presented a clear storyline or a string of events, they were fragmented and sentimental, venting discontent, boredom and sadness. One story, which its author refused to screen in the workshop, negated the value of migrating to Hangzhou outright from the beginning. Fengshu Liu (2011) has a similar finding in online space: a strong sense of pressure, frustration and boredom constitutes a persistent theme in urban youth's online self-expression (p. 198). However, what makes getaway stories different from online self-expression is the peaceful and poetic tones of narration. The stories were not just sad, but beautiful, too. Given the flourishing trolling over the Chinese internet, I argue that in order to understand getaway stories, we have to think beyond power relations. Hartley (2009) has indicated that when creativity and knowledge are universally distributed among agents, performing of self should be understood 'in the context of power but also of possibility' (p. 34). Here I take Lei's story *The story of Luohe* as an example.

A story about Luohe city

(Intermittent train whistle in the background<sup>8</sup>) The story of Luohe started from this railway station. This was the Luohe Railway Station in the early days of new China. Luohe is run through by the Beijing-Guangzhou railway line. And just because of this advantage, Luohe came into being. This was a pedestrian on the street in those years; people were poor at that time. This was a political slogan and factory building that were iconic of the time. This was what has become today's Shuanghui Square. In this photo, people were attending the first sports meeting of Luohe City (noise of the crowd in the background). This was a department store at the time. People were selecting from all kinds of goods. Why I like old photos is because I am touched by the unsophisticatedness and kind-heartedness of people in those years. This was a girl, connected by a string to a boy. This probably was where love came from. This was the Luohe Wharf at that time, from which one could travel to today's Shanghai. (White Chinese characters on a dark background: We talk today about our homeland, at the very moment when men's roots have been ripped out of the ground long ago. – Kafka) (start of background music) Gazing at this boulevard, I was pondering. Our life is like walking on this road. It is never possible to stay. But for us, just be brave and go forward.

Lei's homecity Luohe is a small city in the central Henan province. By displaying historical photos he collected from the Internet, Lei made a mini-documentary of the city in the Maoist time (some point between 1950s and early 1970s). Political slogans, strikingly placed on a two-storey building, which read 'long live the People's Republic of China' (figure 5-5) showed a young government with unprecedented political ideals that had just reunified the country after decades of turmoil. Humble images of the street, pedestrians, assembly and cargo ship (figure 5-6), all suggested the country was barely industrialised or urbanised.



**Figure 5-5 Photos of political slogan on a building in Lei's story**

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<sup>8</sup> I insert descriptions of sound effects and silenced scenes in the script so that the reader may imagine the documentary style of the story.



**Figure 5-6 Photos of pedestrian, sports meeting and cargo ship in Lei's story**

Despite being aware of the dearth and precariousness of the early days of the newly founded nation, Lei, as the new generation born after 1995, yearned for living at that time. His appreciation of the closely knit community, the simple interpersonal relations and the reserved romance demonstrated an apparent repulsion for the fast-paced and stranger-populated modern cities. In his narration of the department store, he matched his words ‘people were selecting from all kinds of goods’ with the image and noise of a crowded fair. Here the fair is equivalent to contemporary outdoor markets in busy streets. While Lei might be mistaken in visualising the store with a photo of a fair, the scene of people ‘going to a fair’ to purchase daily necessities does satirise contemporary commodity fetishism fuelled by e-commerce. Before I was sent from my grandmother’s village to my parents in the city at the age of three, I once went to the fair with my grandmother. I remember on the way to the nearest town, we sat with villagers, mostly our female neighbours, on the back of a tractor. The road was bumpy and dusty but all fairgoers felt as if they were celebrating a long-awaited festival. Each woman took a small basket from home; it seemed unlikely that they would buy a lot. When we arrived in the fair, almost all fairgoers and vendors along the street sides knew each other. My grandmother chatted cheerfully with several vendors, but hardly bought anything other than my favourite sausage, which she was not good at making. Today the fair is not necessary anymore because of ubiquitous supermarket and shopping malls. Sidewalk vendors, usually unlicensed, are forced to play cat-and-mouse game with *chengguan*, the urban enforcers of administrative regulations who inspect the streets. The confrontations between them have caused injuries and deaths over the years (Schiavenza, 2013). The rise of online stores is doing away with the ‘human touch’ to a further extent. We do not take baskets or care about their size because there is always a ‘cart’ of unlimited capacity and durability. We do not need to catch up with outbound tractors, either, or show up in front of any vendor. Compared with the past, we are acting

more like a predator than a social being. We are wasting the opportunity to bond with each other in commercial activity and maximising wastefulness.



**Figure 5-7 Photo of market in Lei's story**

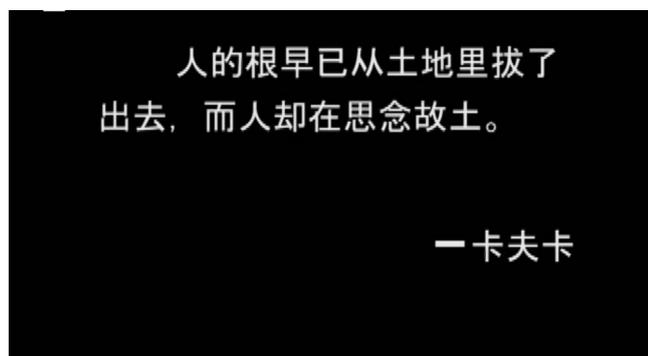
As Lei looked back at a pre-reform period earlier than his birth, he expressed nostalgia for a place, which in a temporal sense he had never been to. I call this sentiment of his the ‘imaginative nostalgia’. In the post-workshop interview, Lei said he would avoid big cities and settle down in a smaller one. However, I doubt that a smaller city could feed his longing to live his homecity’s past. His narration sounded like a pastoral poem and the historical photos showed a rural lifestyle.

This idea of getting away from urban life might not be realistic, but is thought-provoking. While nostalgia is inevitable for migrants, it has only recently become a salient issue for China’s floating population. After the massive migration to the southern provinces for work opportunities for the last thirty years since reform, nostalgia is more than sentimental for even the well-protected interprovincial adult students. Acknowledging that they are nostalgic, the students were advocates for a collective reflection on the younger generation’s drive to move to wealthier cities.

After guiding a virtual tour around historical Luohe, Lei made a line of quotation from the novelist Franz Kafka into a single image (figure 5-8). The ‘quote picture’ practice is proliferating in social media such as Flickr and Pinterest. Placed in white colour against dark background, static for a few seconds, the quotation looks solemn and slows the audience down. It was originally published in English in *Conversations with Kafka* by Gustav Janouch:

We talk today about our homeland, at the very moment when men’s root have been ripped out of the ground long ago. (Janouch, 2012)

Spoken by Kafka roughly a hundred years ago, the quote reminds us that the paradox of our nostalgia remains unsolved.



**Figure 5-8 Quote picture in Lei's story**

When I returned to *Conversations with Kafka*, I found the quote was closely preceded by Kafka's criticism of internationalism.

We use the word *Internationalism* and by it we mean Humanity, that is to say, an ethical value, whereas in fact Internationalism is in practice primarily a geographical expression. (ibid.)

While we hope that our humanity expands when we cross geographical boundaries, we actually lose it. Kafka's argument is still valid today and can help us rethink around internal migration. In the fluid Chinese cities, we are not only losing the human touch, but also the awareness of treating contributing migrants as dignified equals. We should not forget that migration, except for the privileged few, is always tasked. In a sense, most migrants are approved by institutions to migrate because of their potential contribution to the destination society. However, their contribution, which serves as the basis for the allocation of welfare is valued unjustly. Just as visa types divide migrants in Australia into temporary and permanent entrants, the household registration in China, designed to control rural-to-urban mobility, also divides migrants into temporary and permanent categories. The most severe issue this system has caused is to make millions of rural migrant workers permanently excluded from the urban welfare system, especially in megacities. This group has worked hard to build housing and have significantly contributed to the country's world-leading economy, but many have had to leave their families behind in the countryside due to the lack of access to urban education, medical service, home loans. Sorrowful accidents involving wives left-behind and returned children point to the dysfunction of our moral values when our society centralises commodities rather

than humanity. In this historic time, the nostalgia for the country's rural past awakens our humanness. Lei's idyllic dream was not immature; instead it sends a strong message questioning the commodity fetishism that is prevailing in cities. To answer his message, we need to embrace both morality and sanity.

It is in this sense that we can understand the emergence of quote pictures. This common and simple digital practice is a gesture of appeal for collective thinking and review of the world we are living in. It stands for the awakened and expanded humanity which Kafka could not predict in his non-digital era.

### 5.3 Conclusion

DST workshops in Zhejiang had a relatively homogenous group of participants: most of them were young Chinese university students on media production courses from provinces other than Zhejiang. Many of these participants were acquainted with each other and were technologically literate, and the workshop appealed to them for its playfulness. They found it a fresh experience to narrate interprovincial relocation and recreational to exchange accounts of experience and creative artwork with peers. Hence in Zhejiang, the workshop's playfulness underlay the participants' assumption of internal migrant authorship and the suspension of a technology-based view on digital creation.

Interprovincial students' stories demonstrated the paradoxes over the place-making of Zhejiang as the origin of southern culture, the terminal of a better life and an economic legend. In spite of all the imagination and expectation invested in southernness, participants' everyday encounters in Zhejiang, as displayed in their digital stories, were culturally non-local and even placeless. Zhejiang became merely a point of departure and arrival in participants' spatial-temporal imagination and review of the country. The stories broke the myth of southern geo-advantage that has persisted since the reform era, and were consistent with the disillusion that many participants related in interviews and focus groups.

Breaking the myth did not break young migrants; instead, it reshaped their identity in the urban south. Their appreciation of mundane leisure declared their pride in being equal citizens in an unfamiliar city. They were longing and passionate for diversified

translocal experience but also able to earn and live it. Their appreciation of frequent travel and their home province refuted the mainstream view that migrants had to cling to the destination society and leaving was not an option. As participants equated stay in a new city to the formation of ‘ideas and values’ (in Hong’s story) and mobility to ‘be brave and go forward’ (in Lei’s story), they resisted the determinist assumptions on migration and foregrounded instead momentary and sentimental discoveries of friendship, love and growth. Therefore, the storytellers were not the obliged receivers of the destination culture but were its creators and appraisers. Following Hartley’s argument that the medieval bard functioned as a knowledge provider (Hartley, 2010, p. 58), here storytellers chanted new findings about China’s post-reform urban culture.

In the next chapter, I reveal the possibilities and challenges DST is faced with as a means of reaching Chinese migrant audience groups. I also analyse the significance and future for DST as an experimental practice method for research on digital content creation.

# Chapter 6 Digital storytelling for digital inclusion amid technology advancement

After carrying out a dozen DST workshops, I asked myself whether DST ‘worked’ for the international and internal migrant participants as a self-representing activity and research method. While the workshops were successful regarding completion of individual stories, their processes, which I got deeply involved in, demonstrated both possibilities and glitches. In this chapter, I unravel the DST workshop process to assess the extent to which it provides quality access to Chinese people on the move for improved social inclusion and adds to understandings on the issue of social inclusion. Furthermore, I discuss how the findings may help produce insights into assumptions we have made about the relationship between media and Chinese migrants.

## 6.1 The notion of digital inclusion

Social inclusion has been a natural focus for DST. From the outset, DST was meant to make the realm of the arts inclusive for amateurs as a community arts practice, according to its inventor Joe Lambert (Lambert, 2009, p. 79). Ensuing studies have put the potential of DST to the test as a sustainable strategy of inclusion for various socially marginalised subgroups of the population, or as researchers have specifically put it, as an ‘agent of change’ for women in Turkey (Şimşek, 2012) and ‘everyday activism’ for Australian queers (Vivienne, 2013).

However, the idea of DST operating to bring about social inclusion is not self-evident or stable. According to Tanya Notley and Marcus Foth (2008), writing on Australia’s digital divide policy, social inclusion or social anti-exclusion first emerged as a policy concept in France in the mid-1970s to demonstrate concern towards people who were not protected by the government welfare system (p. 96). The concept was later widely adopted in policies in EU countries. As Notley and Foth have emphasised, there are viewpoints that have questioned the usefulness of social inclusion. They have quoted from Peter Saunders and Kayoko Tsumori (2002)

that its opposite, social exclusion, ‘can mean almost anything and can be applied to almost anybody’ (p. 32). The concern is understandable, since the inclusion/exclusion binary, without explicit doer or doing, sounds aimless, helpless and plaintive. On the positive side, as these authors have argued, the social exclusion concept used in EU countries has consistently focussed on ‘processes that cause deprivation and exclusion’ (Notley & Foth, 2008, p. 97), suggesting exclusion could happen in many different ways and needs to be found not only in results, but also in concrete processes.

Knowing the use of social inclusion in policymaking helps conceptualise digital inclusion, a notion addressing a kind of new form of social exclusion – the digital divide. Although the U.K. government made a pioneering effort in funding a Digital Inclusion Team in 2005 (ibid.), academic research into digital inclusion remains nascent. Increasing numbers of current researchers are convinced of the need to ‘unpack the complexities of the digital divide’ (Selwyn, 2004), rather than oversimplifying it into technology haves and have-nots, despite the dichotomy’s continued handiness for governments to frame political discussions of social issues (ibid.).

Fortunately, there are studies that could contribute to the gap in knowledge on the quality of access, especially for young people. One study by Livingstone and Helsper has argued that different uses of the Internet, influenced by contextual factors, such as demographic, use and expertise, vary in breadth and depth (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). Therefore, to maximise the benefit for internet users, we need to identify ‘the practical skills and subtle competencies which facilitate confident uses’ (p. 674). Another study concludes that it is important to know what kinds of participation young people desire, even if they appear dangerous (Notley, 2009). Drawing on the work of Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, Notley has emphasised that social inclusion could only be achieved when technology helps people to ‘participate in society in ways they have most reasons to value’ (p. 1211). While the meanings of confident uses and desirable participation remain to be elaborated, it should also be noted that discussions on digital inclusion have concentrated on populations in the developed Western countries.

At the beginning of this thesis, I raised the question of whether DST provides social inclusion opportunities for the case study workshop participants: overseas and internal Chinese migrants. After analysing the participation dynamics and digital stories in DST workshops, I further inquired into whether the workshop process proved to be a form of quality access for migrant participants. This part of the thesis, focussing on quality access, makes a new contribution to current academic literature on digital inclusion, or social inclusion through digitally afforded participatory and creative practice.

## 6.2 Digital storytelling as audience reach for Chinese people on the move

### 6.2.1 Researcher/facilitator as resource mobiliser

The role of researcher in DST always draws interest as it is one of the recurrent topics about the DST workshops in which the researcher acts as a facilitator and observer at the same time. However, unlike many studies referring to researchers as co-creators alongside participants and expertise transferrer, I find myself, a researcher and facilitator of DST workshop, to primarily be a mobiliser of resources for participants. This is because on the one hand it is my duty to gather resources in order to guarantee that the workshop runs towards completion and on the other hand this was the only role that I played consistently and controllably during a half year of fieldwork. Although a resource mobiliser does not sound as deeply involved in workshop processes as I should be, resources such as my network, devices, venue and free online materials were crucial in making the DST workshop independent and vibrant, both pragmatically and ideally. Moreover, my ability to connect with participants emotionally and my own knowledge, to let them know they were understood and protected, became a kind of intangible resource that supported and inspired participants' digital creativity. Amid the recent rise in individual use of digital device and services, these features of DST become especially valuable for grassroots digital activities. In the following sections I elaborate on the resource mobilisation during the DST workshops from the perspective of a researcher and facilitator.

## 6.2.2 Non-digital resources for independent digital storytelling

The independence of people's voices could be said to be what DST was created for, since Lambert (2009) claimed that freedom of expression had been his principal commitment (p. 82). Independence is supposed to cause DST to be unpredictable and to potentially break our assumptions about society, as Lambert asserted in the 2003 Digital Storytelling Conference in Cardiff: 'we shouldn't know what we're doing' (Thumim, 2012, p. 92). While the global spread of DST is extolled as 'something of a social movement' (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009a, p. 4), it is noteworthy that most programs, hundreds of them, have been hosted by educational institutions, community organisations and cultural institutions (McWilliam, 2009, p. 39). In contrast, grassroots-level DST has rarely been developed. The outpouring of support from public institutions was worrisome for Thumim. She found that in *Capture Wales*, hosted by the BBC, one of the largest and longest DST projects to date, the institution's aims could be at odds with participants' free will. For example, BBC executives were more concerned with the outcome rather than the process – whether the resulting stories met broadcasting standards so that what the BBC had promised in funding proposals could be fulfilled (p. 91). With the institution's brand to protect and the duty to reach policy goals, I am doubtful that DST workshop could still be open and flexible to welcome any outcomes and creative works that its targeted community, group or category of people might offer.

Nevertheless, for a rookie DST facilitator like myself, independence was my last choice. When I started out preparing to hold DST workshops, I tried multiple approaches to avoid independence, including writing to educational and cultural institutions for collaboration. I am grateful that my university provided me with the best computer lab on campus. But I was also thirsty for additional facilitators and participants so that the workshop would be filled with participants and each participant could be attended to at the same time. Unfortunately, I failed in my attempt to incorporate the workshop into any university course or any established community program. Not surprisingly, for workshops that took over ten hours each and could not promise anything other than catering, I had to recruit participants by constantly asking around and facilitating workshops alone most of the time. This

forced me to be open to anyone who was willing to join my participant groups of Chinese migrants and anything that could happen during the workshops.

Hosting DST workshops on my own meant limited resources for each workshop. Because of this, every sort of resource became indispensable and urgently needed recognising. The first thing that I realised was that most affordances for this digital activity were non-digital. Although DST always has a story-circle section which does not involve any digital uses, non-digital affordances have not drawn much attention from researchers. The focus on what is happening electronically and online has caused a blindspot. At the end of 2016, the victory of Donald Trump at the U.S. presidential election shocked the world, especially media researchers. We felt the urgency to revisit our work, since we were apparently caught off guard by a Twitter-loving presidential candidate and his rumour-reproducing supporters (on Barack Obama's birthplace<sup>1</sup> for example). Some internet uses by American politicians and voters to extract and produce information during the election, such as circulating fake news on Facebook<sup>2</sup>, fell into a grey area of media empowerment and productivity that we knew little about. As Graeme Turner has pointed out, it is time to look at divergence rather than convergence of media uses.<sup>3</sup> To find out the root causes for the unexpected internet uses by Trump supporters, tracking online activities is not enough. Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild, author of *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (Hochschild, 2016), spent five years studying older, blue-collar, white people in southern Louisiana, a group which later turned out to be Trump's biggest supporters. According to her, their alt-right standpoint came from how they felt about the government in daily life. In spite of positive actions by the government, they felt socially, economically and culturally marginalised over the years. Hochschild referred to how their views seemed to her to be a 'deep story' which would stay neglected if she did not reach out of her

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Trump falsely claimed that former president Barack Obama was not born in the United States but denied the claim later in his presidential campaign. Reuters reported the course of events at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-idUSKCN11M1F3>.

<sup>2</sup> Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said in a Facebook post after the U.S. election that he would take steps to fight fake news. It was reported by Reuters at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-facebook-idUSKBN13E0QN>.

<sup>3</sup> This idea about divergence of media uses and its connection with the Trump win are inspired by the presentation of Emeritus Professor Graeme Turner on 17 February 2017 at Curtin University. Information on the presentation can be found at: <http://news.curtin.edu.au/events/media-studies-cultural-studies-possible-futures-humanities-research/>.

geographic, media and electronic enclaves.<sup>4</sup> Whether Hochschild's findings can explain Trump supporters' online behaviour is yet to be proven. Southern supporters' anger with the state, shown in her book, does help in understanding Trump's popularity on social media. Her research has demonstrated that it is necessary to look away from media in order to understand media, given that our understandings critically lag behind a changing society that is constantly regrouping its audiences. For this reason, I give particular attention to the non-digital factors in the DST workshops, which proved to be helpful resources for the production of meanings.

With this understanding, I identify two crucial types of non-digital resources that were common for my workshops for international and internal migrant participants. They served as pillars for the workshop's independence. Sometimes they even led to an extended life for a workshop.

- 1) The expectation-reality discrepancy in transnational/translocal mobility experiences, and their problematic communicability;
- 2) Getting together with acquaintances and strangers.

### **Increased communicability of expectation-reality discrepancy in migrant storytelling**

Experiences, or the memory of experiences, are the most valuable asset for DST. They are the raw source of stories or even critical voices. However, for people on the move transnationally or translocally, their experiences of geographical mobility always fall short of their expectations. In other words, they felt their migration caused 'downward social mobility' (Lim et al., 2016) and adversity for them at least temporarily. This was common for young Chinese expats and overseas migrants and Chinese internal migrant students, as well as other Asian expats and migrants in my workshops. I believe expectation-reality discrepancy is a common resource for meaning-making work in DST, because it is by nature tasked to destabilise our assumption and bias towards migration. Our new knowledge on migration does not come from facts, but from the exposed gap between the imagined and the factual.

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<sup>4</sup> The interview video and transcript can be found at:  
[https://www.democracynow.org/2016/9/28/what\\_drives\\_trump\\_supporters\\_sociologist\\_arlie](https://www.democracynow.org/2016/9/28/what_drives_trump_supporters_sociologist_arlie).

As mentioned in chapter 4, the discrepancy served to disinterest some potential participants who thought social events were fruitless and time consuming. However, when they had their confidence and skills enhanced through story-circle exercises, the discrepancy between expectation and reality, which cannot be known unless experienced, became a source of storytelling authority. Participants felt the urge not only to reveal the ‘hard truth’ about geographic mobility with personal observations, but also to make a point about its worthiness for their lives. In doing so, storytellers always stretched the story about recent geographic mobility back into the time when he or she was immobile or in their homeplace. While the comparison between two places was inevitable, it was looked at from an experience-based perspective that emphasised experiential diversity instead of socio-economic outcome.

In Xue’s story *My University, My Life, My Precious*, her previous experience of going to a Chinese university culminated in a pompous night gala following her graduation ceremony (figure 6-1). In contrast, her narration of life in Perth saw a consistent absence of bustle and excitement. The most joyful scene was a small gathering with her Chinese friends on a lawn. Despite the obvious difficulty, loneliness and boredom in life overseas, Xue expressed gratitude equally for both periods of life, starting each line with ‘This is my university’. With adversity in the background, Xue delivered a message about personal strength, courage and persistence in pursuing education overseas. This message on geographical mobility is by no means conventional, as it bestows value not on social or economic betterment, but on experiential enrichment.



**Figure 6-1** Photo of night gala in Xue's story

Like Xue, many other participants in Australia and China told their stories by displaying different experiences in parallel. One strong example was Xia's story about her constant travels for study and work, which I analysed in detail in chapter 5 (see 5.2.2).

In addition, Indonesian participant Doni interwove experiences of being a father and a PhD student in his story. He started recounting the life in Perth with the naming of his son. As his son had gone through several paediatric diagnoses and treatments since birth, Doni's journey to Australia in pursuit of academic aspiration was impacted by his son's worsening state of health. But because of adversity, he found the reason to stay in Perth and fight: a caring wife and a son with a 'special ability'.

#### The reason for staying and fighting

Attila, a great warrior from central Asia, I gave my son this name after him. On his birth, he had to be supported by additional living support, a complicated medical instrument that I never understand how it works. Attila, my son, was diagnosed by the paediatric doctor that his heart and his lung cannot support his metabolism. He was in the neonatal intensive care unit about 40 days and after he got out of this intensive care unit, we had to be aware of his brain development, his eyes development and several neurological developments. Due to this condition, we had a monthly routine schedule to visit physiotherapists and a paediatric doctor.

When he was nine months old, we were very shocked with a diagnosis from the team doctor that mentioned that my son has cerebral palsy syndrome. This situation was getting worst when I had to start my journey as a PhD student at Curtin University three years ago. The Attila situation, in which he cannot stand up properly with his own legs, his right hand and his right leg are weaker than his left hand and left foot, has distracted my concentration as a full-time research student. In this situation, I got adequate support from my family especially my beloved wife's patience in taking care of Attila in my absence. Two years ago, when I got a short video of Attila when he recited Surah Alfatihah, the first chapter of the Qur'an, a Muslim holy book, made me cry happily. Since then I believe behind a man's handicap, there is a special ability.

It is arguable that the stay in Perth is a struggle for Doni which incurs for himself a sense of guilt, nostalgia and pain, albeit there may be a potentially long-time benefit. As Doni told me in an interview, he had supported himself financially in pursuit of the PhD degree so it was an arduous journey for him. However, he managed to see his experience in a positive light and wanted to share it because he thought he could help people with his story.

Doni: First of all, I don't want to share my story with everyone. But after some experience of time, I believe that my experience could be used, could be sent for other people who maybe have similar problems as me, on how to deal with children with special abilities.

Through the selection and organisation of stories by Chinese and non-Chinese participants in the WA-based workshops, I saw an increase in the communicability of the subject of migration. While nearly all overseas participants had hundreds of pieces of photo-evidence lying in their smartphones and computers, the reality-expectation discrepancy was not a popular topic in their everyday digital communication with family and friends back home who they were most expressive with. One reason is that the discrepancy is always seen as a ‘problem’ for these intimate audiences. Many participants shared their stories outside the workshop even before I encouraged them to. Describing the fact that they enjoyed life in small Chinese circles rather than multicultural environments, their stories served surprisingly well in pleasing their parents and friends. Overseas students’ parents even cried watching the stories, saying, for example, that their child had finally grown up and made achievements in study. Before making the judgement that ‘pleasing stories’ were unhelpful, we must realise that living and studying with Chinese friends is always in disagreement with Chinese parents’ assumptions of life overseas. Xue said in a follow-up interview that she always left the discrepancy untouched in talks with her parents because ‘they cannot understand’.

Xue: They [parents] feel that we must get more in touch with foreign [Australian] students, but they do not know that most of the time the Chinese students cannot get into the foreigners’ social circles. Big cultural differences cause our inability to understand their jokes when they talk. Chinese parents imagine their children speaking fluent English and chatting cheerfully with foreigners, but the fact is completely otherwise.

Hua said she felt ashamed that she did not live up to her parents’ praise and expense. Although relatives’ admiration ‘sounded harsh’ to her, she was not driven to tell the uninteresting aspects of life abroad.

Therefore, showing digital stories on life abroad to parents was an unusual move in that it did not just reveal what life abroad really looked like, but also became an acceptable way to inform parents both explicitly and in-depth. Xue and Hua chose to recount the expectation-reality discrepancy and showed both its fruitful side (personal growth) and fruitless side (lack of communication with local people). Rather than making a clear-cut conclusion on their experiences, they elaborated a positive yet mixed picture of overseas study, which their parents had a rare chance to see. By adding voiceover to the visual, they made clear what they had achieved rather than what they were supposed to achieve. What they exchanged with parents

was not only information, but the perspective on overseas education and life. I therefore argue that instead of being pleasing, overseas students' stories were both informative and educational for their parents. Half visual and half verbal, the expectation-reality discrepancy changed from being a barrier to storytelling into being the source of meaningful stories.

The insufficient communicability of the discrepancy is also found in interprovincial students' daily communication. Unlike their international counterparts, interprovincial students were not loaded with expectations in regard to language and socialisation. However, they stated in interviews that they needed to tell stories in order to 'slow down', 'self-reflect' or 'have a better idea about the state of oneself'. Participants told me that they were disappointed with Hangzhou, which used to be their dream city. Hong said she did not expect her values to be thought as too conservative by her dormmates from a different part of the country. As a result, she had to force herself to accept some liberal ideas, such as some ideas concerning private life. Several participants said living in Hangzhou enhanced their sense of belonging to their homeplaces (usually cities). Some said this sense of belonging at home was because things were handled differently in Hangzhou; some said it was because the city did not provide them with a broader vision than their homeplaces. In spite of these insights, visual resources such as photos in their phones were rarely mobilised to support these viewpoints.

To elaborate the discrepancy not only requires courage and technique, but a second look at the photos that storytellers once archived in smartphones or shared on social media. Interestingly, while our photos keep increasing thanks to digital devices' increasing camera resolution and data capacity, the time we take to look at them is shortening. This is especially true in Hangzhou where Alibaba, a forerunner in China's online business, has its headquarters. When I flew to Hangzhou for fieldwork in August 2015, I was shocked by the extent of digitalisation of urban life. As long I carried a smartphone with me, I could make payments in almost every store near my accommodation, order takeaway, call a taxi and ring someone through apps. Most of the time, I did not go outdoors at all, since food and other commodities were more affordable online than in store, and could be delivered very quickly to me for free. Therefore, what made my life easy and comfortable in Hangzhou was not a

car or a phone plan or a washing machine, but a smartphone, a bunch of apps, data packs and Wi-Fi.

When I was introduced to interprovincial university students in Hangzhou, it struck me that every student, regardless of homeplace and family background, possessed a fancy smartphone. By fanciness, I mean the considerable size of the screen (at a time when Apple and Samsung were competing in phone size), a good number of apps and all kinds of decorations (shell, string, sticker, screensaver and background photo) that the students gave to the phone. In addition, whenever there was no conversation, students would look at their phones so attentively that I could barely be hardhearted enough to interrupt. Obviously, smartphones were very important for them and with their phones they were very adept at using apps and shooting photos and videos. Differing from overseas participants who only used photos as visual materials, workshop participants in China took the initiative in using personal videos in combination with photos in their video making. However, in everyday life, they rarely used photos and videos to tell their story about moving from one part of the country to another. In interviews, several participants told me that they were impressed with how photos that were forgotten could contribute to a good story.

Meng: I'm in my fourth year of university. Looking back, I thought I had not done anything. But when I browsed my photos, I found I did many things and they were very rewarding.

Gang: I hope I won't have to delete photos and can save them all, so that I can make a better video.

There were sparkles of frustration, loneliness and loss depicted in several stories made in China. Among them, Bing was an example of how unhappy experiences could be made into a well-organised and touching story. The viewing of Bing's story was nothing short of resonating and thought-provoking.



**Figure 6-2 Examples of Bing's photos**

### Bing's story

As to entering university, apart from the excitement at receiving the letter of admission, there was not much emotional fluctuation. I came to campus by myself and had things handled by myself, and it felt nothing very different from the independent high school life outside the home. Most memories I have about my entry to the university were those useless but endless lectures. Military training was boring, classes after it were boring, I muddled along every day without knowing what to do. From then on, I learned some things that I could do alone: reading alone, running alone, playing electronic games alone, travelling alone... Sometimes I could feel lonely, but became unwilling to change anything when I lived in this way long enough. Facing some collective activities and social activities, I always found some kind of excuse to turn them down. This is actually out of my fear that I would be dull for others, as well as my lack of self-confidence for no reason.

Many times, when I ran, I asked questions to myself and answered them in mind. After that I have figured some things out, but remain troubled by some other things. But at long last I do not hate myself as much as in the past.

This was the second activities for my classmates. I attended it.

One day in the morning I was disgusted with that bored self in the mirror, for whatever reason. I went to a barber to shave my head bald. At the beginning, I felt a bit strange about it, but slowly got to enjoy this feeling of neatness. Sometimes I felt advantaged when I saw men and women fiddling with their hair all day. After the summer holiday, I got my first motorcycle. I had fun every time I went out with it. Motorcycle and road will never care who you are; as soon as you hit the road, they will be your good company.

What was it like to make a story about boredom in resettling in Hangzhou? After the workshop, Bing compared video editing to 'opening the drawers of memory'. His feelings were 'aroused by photos and background music'. He also told me that he would take more photos of himself in the future. Therefore, Bing could not have made boredom into a story without the photos he had taken. Actually, the shortage of

photos he discovered during storytelling reminded him of a lack among the objects of his photographs: himself.

While it might seldom have occurred to DST facilitators ten or even five years ago that photos would overtake words to be the major source of stories that people live with day to day, this is the fact we must learn today. At least for people in China, the largest buyer of digital devices in the world, everyday photographing using a smartphone is an activity of representation that is pertinent for what we did for DST in China. My fieldwork in China tells me that we certainly do not need new photos to be taken to tell a story about internal migration. Instead, we need to probe into the question of whether we can use our stored photos and videos for something else when starting to pay for disk storage and cloud space to put them away.

Although we seem to give up a welfare view on migration (Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000), how agentive migrants could be seems hard to measure. Are they agentive just because they become expressive? According to my case studies, I believe migrants are agentive when they have the proper means to contribute new knowledge on migration. As a matter of fact, they are the only ones that hold authority on what migration really means; the credibility comes naturally from experiences. Chinese people would not honour *Xu Xike's travels* as an important geographical documentation if not for Xu's brave travels around China hundreds of years ago. Today migrants' stories are much more interesting than Xu's, given the unpredictable multidirectional and multicultural feature of geographic mobility. It is also more possible than ever for migrants to act as knowledge providers due to the increasing affordability of digital devices and the concomitant spread of digital literacy. However, the expectation-reality discrepancy, which can serve to break our assumptions and add to understandings of the complexity of migration, is still hard to represent and often left uncommunicated. One critical barrier is that migrants, international or internal, have not realised that by combining voice, and words with the photos they have taken, they can carry out more in-depth communication on migration, at least for a narrow public made up of family members. Migrants' common assets of expectation-reality discrepancy and digital usage also provide a point of connection between the kinds of experiences which are often thought of as incompatible as oil and water: international and internal migration.

## Embodied and individuated production for processual quality

While the expectation-reality discrepancy bestows participants with storytelling authority, how the participants worked together demonstrates DST's processual quality in reaching Chinese migrant audiences. By processual quality, I do not mean to conduct processual analysis; instead I want to emphasise the energy I saw and felt during the workshop process. The energy, too thick to be called 'atmosphere', mounted into each insider's zeal for artistic creation and perfection, which is a privilege enjoyed exclusively by arts professionals. However, this energy is always reduced to a spin-off of new media use. As a study on the phenomenon of the flash mob has asserted, the 'sublime power' of the mob is always reduced to effects of new technologies yet it actually is a powerful medium (Shapiro, 2017). As flash mobs are categorised into virtuous and vicious in mainstream narratives, commodity marketers quickly co-opt virtuous mobs while the authority deploys online surveillance and police force on the street to prevent dangerous ones. Shapiro has argued that the authority's handling of the matter neglects the political appeal from spatially excluded low-income neighbourhoods, such as allocating support to community centres and public schools, and hence deepens unjust divisions. The author has identified that 'a more accurate story of flash mobs' is 'how mobile and social media technologies are interacting with the powerfully ambiguous social mediation of "the mob"' (ibid.). Considering the mob as social mediation is echoed by the mediational view towards DST, as mentioned in 2.1 above. Thumim has explained the process of cultural mediation as 'the points of view and experience of the audience members' (Thumim, 2012, p. 59). In her analysis of participatory projects organised by cultural institutions, *Capture Wales* DST project of BBC for example, Thumim has looked at cultural mediation in DST through participants' opinions on motivation, BBC, quality. She has found that participation in DST gives rise to tensions over the concepts of community and quality between participants and BBC. In the view of Shapiro and Thumim's mediational approach to new media-centred group activities, I argue that embodied congregation in my DST workshops for migratory Chinese populations deserves more scholarly attention. To understand it, we should not regard it as the consequence of new media, but a socio-cultural phenomenon that may interact with new media in supportive, resistant and other ways.

The workshop energy, as elaborated in 4.1.3 Craftsmanship in video creation, was most intensely demonstrated in the creative parts of DST. I wondered what happened to participants when they changed from reluctant attenders to artistic perfectionists. I call this energy emitted by a congregation of participants, ‘digital craft’, representing a digital user’s inner drive not just to own a voice but to incessantly better it. Digital craft in DST workshops was made up of every participant’s creative devotion and concerned more than content and style of self-representations. According to findings from the interviews, three processes in the workshops contributed to craftsmanship:

- 1) Input of self-expression;
- 2) Identification with other participants;
- 3) Ritualisation of exhibiting self-representations.

Indonesian participant Budi points out that ‘more sessions mean less atmosphere’ so a consistent group presence was crucial. Several participants also told me that a workshop is better than a hub in that people would not complete or enjoy making a digital story without getting together at a uniform time and place. Some participants also believed that screening was the most important part of the workshop; Chinese student Cheng even advised me to prolong the screening session. This feedback, similar to those from the workshops in Hangzhou, all pointed to the fact that participants felt connected and touched in making and sharing stories in a group. This fact, which is consistent with observations from DST workshops in previous studies, is always seen as signifying community building and bonding.

However, I find this intriguing because the three processes remind me of the root of DST in the community arts movement and independent filmmaking. While Lambert invented DST in the hope of crossing the boundary of expert and amateur (Lambert, 2009, p. 79), the gap between video-making experts and amateurs seems to be quickly widening. An example of this gap is the huge leap forward in visual technology versus consumption-focussed popular video-making tools. Professionally made video, such as film on the big screen, has seen staff and work specifications multiplying in the background. A blockbuster gives credit to hundreds if not thousands of people and takes at least months to produce. The human obsession with imagining the world’s past and future, advancement in post-production and the

affordability of 3D and 4D films have all fuelled the explosion of sci-fi films which are shot in unconventional ways and amplify visual-audial impact to an unprecedented extent. While visual technology keeps inspiring industrial innovation, non-professional digital users are assumed to be better at simple tools for video making that require no more than finger tapping. These tools are heavily templated and their use is as insular as it could be between a person and a device. Gauntlett has questioned whether the new Apple products facilitate users' creativity as the company used to in its early days. He has suggested that the tablet device, iPad, 'was a step backward in the evolution of personal computing devices' (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 175). On the one hand, Gauntlett has pointed out that all programs are built-in on iPad, limiting the kinds of visual materials, tools and means of sharing for video-making. On the other hand, the community of app developers is enclosed by Apple: one has to pay to get in and apply for the company's permission before publishing an app. Gauntlett has called this 'a control-freak reversal of the generative ideal of computers, the internet and the Web' (p. 180). Quoting Ivan Illich's *Tools for conviviality* and Jonathan Zittrain's *The future of the Internet and how to stop it*, Gauntlett has asserted that to set creativity free, tools must be both generative and 'tinkerable' (p. 176). In other words, we should not expect tools for creativity to bring a one-step process. Therefore, the digital craftsmanship that I witnessed was a result of the opportunities not just to make something, but also to experiment, fix and make changes. And this could not be achieved in a centralised and enclosed system. In the following paragraphs, I explain how the decentralised and embodied DST workshop gave rise to digital craftsmanship.

The system which arose from my DST workshops was a non-centralised and open one, compared with the mobile device that Gauntlett has criticised. First, I put in maximum facilitation and minimum intervention on participation, production and dissemination. Similar to a Lego set, a digital story is made by putting photos, voice and music together. It is fair to say that participants started from scratch in making a story. With guidance to use the basic functions of the necessary software, the participants had freedom to decide if they should explore more functions, add more photos, say more words and spend more time in editing. I also respected their decisions on sharing. Several of them withdrew from the screenings. It was particularly interesting that it was difficult to let the participants follow 'the rules'

that I set for the sake of time and legality. Participants insisted on using music from ambiguous sources regarding intellectual property. A WA participant even put photos which were totally irrelevant to her voiceover on past relationships. In China, interprovincial students proactively inserted video clips into the supposedly photo-voice video. A participant made a ghost story that completely diverged from the given topic but was horrifyingly entertaining. However, it was this state of uneven individuated production which was a bit chaotic (and exhausting) that enabled spontaneous creativity. Rules on video making and time management can be left disregarded.

Second, an embodied congregation helps decentralise the dissemination of know-how as opposed to online intermedium. Given the increasing amount of online lessons ranging from braiding hair to Harvard's psychology<sup>5</sup>, one can self-teach on DST without the hassle of going outdoors and meeting strangers. However, it should be noted that lessons available on online platforms are disseminated in a centralised fashion. 'Online', which serves as an intermedium between person and lesson, justifies and amplifies the usefulness of the know-how in using the platform, the style of webpage and the skill of teaching. It is supposed to be viewed rather than spoken back to. As Gauntlett has noted, in relation to YouTube, although the platform enables creative production, 'what you *consume* is essentially just more television-y stuff' (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 108). In a home environment, an online lesson is both a centralised and dominant source of knowledge which is forced upon the viewer. As the Zhejiang-based participant Yun said: 'To do DST in a dormitory would be a task; to do it together is activity'. So how can we free the knowledge from screens, at least in the case of DST? I found the answer to be a decentralised system enabled by embodied congregation.

When participants gathered in person, centrally disseminated knowledge became less attractive. At the beginning of each workshop, I gave a ten-minute introduction to all participants on the three main types of software for use. It was certainly insufficient but seldom responded to. I also made reader-friendly handouts on IP measures (attaching a Creative Commons license, see figure 6-3), software use (figure 6-4) and

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<sup>5</sup> The 23-episode psychology course on happiness from Harvard University is translated and published on China's Netease portal at: <http://v.163.com/special/positivepsychology/>. As of March 2017, about 60,000 netizens have left comments on the course on Netease.

simplified software use for several workshops (figure 6-5), but participants put them aside most of the time.

### Handout on Creative Commons License

Creative Commons licenses is a free copyright tool which you need to use to

- i) protect your copyright and;
- ii) avoid infringing other people's copyright.

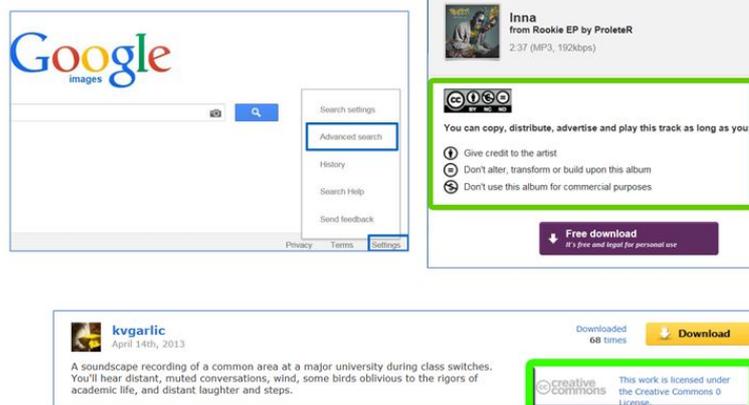
For more information, please visit <http://creativecommons.org/>.

	<a href="http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>		<a href="http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/">http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/</a>
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#### ❖ Resources

When in need, please download pictures, music and sound effects from following websites.

Materials for download	Website name	Website address
Pictures	Google Images-Setting-Advanced Search-usage rights	<a href="https://www.google.com.au/imghp">https://www.google.com.au/imghp</a>
Music	Jamendo	<a href="https://www.jamendo.com/en">https://www.jamendo.com/en</a>
Sound effects	Freesound	<a href="https://www.freesound.org/">https://www.freesound.org/</a>



The screenshot displays a Google Images search for 'Inna'. On the left is the Google Images search interface. On the right, the search results for 'Inna from Rookie EP by ProteaR' are shown. A Creative Commons license icon (CC BY-NC-ND) is highlighted with a green box. Below the license icon, the text reads: 'You can copy, distribute, advertise and play this track as long as you: 1 Give credit to the artist, 2 Don't alter, transform or build upon this album, 3 Don't use this album for commercial purposes'. A 'Free download' button is visible below the text. Below the search results, there is a preview of a sound effect recording by 'kvgarlic' with a 'Download' button and a Creative Commons license icon.

Figure 6-3 Handout on Creative Commons license

## Handout for Day 2

### Use Audacity to edit soundtrack

#### Please note:



The soundtrack turns blue when you select it using . Before editing, make sure you have paused or stopped playing sound. You can always try out different tools and click "Edit" – "Undo".

#### Steps of editing:

1. Import voiceover to Timeline, "File" – "Import" – "Audio"
2. "Effect" – "Normalize..."; "-0.1dB"
3. Zoom in by clicking , click then click and drag to select a clip, press spacebar to play or pause the clip.
4. Use to cut, copy or paste the clip for any deletion or insertion. You may also use "Ctrl" + "X", "Ctrl" + "C" or "Ctrl" + "V" like how you edit Word document.
5. Add effect, click "Effect" and use only "Amplify" or "Reverb...".
6. Add background music. Import music and it will appear below your voiceover.
7. Save unfinished soundtrack, click "File" – "Save project as..." – save the file as "firstname\_editing.aup" in folder "4-voiceover".
8. Save finished soundtrack, click "File" – "Export Audio" and save it as "firstname\_final.wav".



Figure 6-4 Handout on sound editing

16/04/15

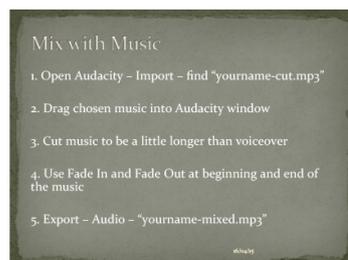
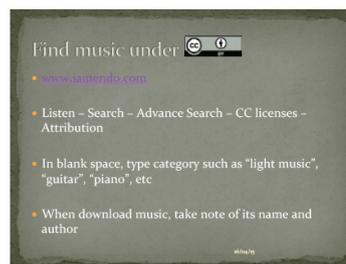


Figure 6-5 Updated handout on software use

Instead of rushing to acquire rigid knowledge on video making, my participants started by forming a dynamic circle to exchange ideas and help each other. More often than not, the source of knowledge was not me or my handouts, but participants themselves. They would ask each other for a little favour in adjusting the brightness of a photo or attaching a title page. This not only reduced the burden on the sole facilitator, but coincidentally simulated how experts 'organise' video making. While the advancement of visual technology is eye-catching, what is often missed is the human side of the media industry: a good video usually comes from collective wisdom and team effort. Experts do not just spend time on technology, but also on gathering inspiration, support, advice and feedback. While we keep blaming technology for the expert-amateur gap, it is worth remembering that experts' grasp and innovation of technology is underpinned by their interaction with peers and experienced resource management. In my workshops, participants' time was not eaten away by obsession with and overstress on software because it was the atmosphere that encouraged a hands-on and interactive method of skill acquisition. Several participants, who were teachers and students of multimedia-related courses, preferred to make videos which were 'raw' in technology but enriched in visual-audial contents. The rawness, usually due to poor time management for new hands, did not greatly affect the stories' completeness or expressiveness.

Third, during individuated production, participants connected and identified with strangers by sharing the simplest joy and agony. To have a clearer view of the common sentimentality aroused by storytelling, we must realise that a crowd can be both exciting and daunting. As Shapiro has suggested, citing Le Bon, a 'crowd', in which 'every sentiment and act is contagious', can be 'deindividuating', too (Shapiro, 2017). In other words, while an individual voice can give rise to common sentiments, it risks being drowned at the same time. As I found in my workshops, storytelling evoked a strong common sentimentality; meanwhile, individuated production and mindful listening preserved the individual story's distinctiveness.

The story-circle session, in which participants sat in a circle to orally share impromptu stories, helped participants build the mindset, prior to video making, that good storytelling is clear, direct and sincere. This coincides with what Lundby has argued as accounting for the persistent existence of storytelling in his latest interview:

‘A good story has a point and touches people emotionally’ (Knut Lundby, Mark C. Lashley, & Brian Creech, 2017). Chinese participant Yi said good stories also have to be simple in a DST workshop. For her, storytelling to a gathering of people, just as participants did in story circle, resembled the Chinese traditional form of storytelling by *shuoshu yiren* (literally meaning book-telling artist). Unlike making random stories, this kind of storytelling is directed at certain audiences and does not require deep thinking or sophisticated structuring. By having participants learn the skill of oral storytelling to a stable embodied crowd and using it for digital production, DST is bound to produce good simple stories. In the WA workshops, stories of simple English language and narrative structure crossed barriers of language and cultural difference to have a strong emotional impact on participants.

The open-heartedness and devotion of participants in storytelling was contagious, which was unexpected by many. The preparatory oral session in which participants answered questions such as ‘tell about your best friend in childhood’, saw participants retrieve delightful memories of friends including pets as well as sad stories such as a friend’s death. For Chinese overseas students, face-to-face storytelling in a small multicultural crowd was helpful in overcoming a lack of confidence in cross-cultural communication. To their surprise, they not only came to enjoy speaking English, but also felt empathy with people from other cultural origins.

Simple stories of common topics such as love of family, excitement for travel, nostalgia and feelings lost were also powerful to attract mindful listening. Mindful listening is ‘the process of deliberately paying attention to the present moment in a non-judgemental way’ and demonstrates ‘a transparency of understanding was publicly and interactively achieved’ (McManus, Holtzman, Lazarus, Anderberg, & Ucock, 2006). Consequently, participants relabelled each other, especially those of other cultural origins, with their stories, while putting aside cultural differences. The occurrence of this relabelling can be found in participants’ responses after watching each other’s stories. For example, Banya and Doni from Thailand and Indonesia respectively were the most vivid participants in their workshop, not because they were more active, but because their stories about being a husband and father moved many participants. Before their stories were played, both male participants were very

quiet in video making. They were also the last ones to finish and hence left others waiting for dinner and screening. In addition, their voiceovers in English were heavily accented. I was worried these voiceovers would affect the power of the stories to come across to the audiences. In a rush for completion, Doni forgot to adjust the volume of the background music to be weaker than the voiceover. However, these adverse factors of personality and language as well as aural flaws did not get in the way for these storytellers to leave their mark on the workshop and the minds of other participants. Instead of human beings identifying themselves through education, language, race, religion, it was the universal pursuit of warm humanness, ‘something unquantifiable and indescribably valuable about telling stories’ (Kavoori, Lashey, & Creech, 2017), that turned out to be the common language binding people together, as exemplified in Hua’s comment.

Hua: The two married gentlemen, because they persisted in finishing their stories until very late, even I felt it might be inappropriate to leave ladies waiting, especially when they were starving. But when I saw the contents of their stories, I was a little moved, just because they were showing very important parts of their life - their families and children. I suddenly felt their persistence was reasonable.

Hua’s understanding of the two participants was based upon her increased personal knowledge about them. It demonstrated a rise in motivation and empathy in the interaction with those Chinese participants often referred to as ‘foreigners’. The personal accounts about family and friends, the relationships everyone cherishes, evoked sympathy and formed a common ground to discuss life in Australia among participants. Through watching each other’s stories, Chinese participants such as Hua viewed others in the workshop on an individual basis regardless of their cultural and language backgrounds. A digital story, in this respect, became a platform to build and extend the bonds between participants. The story’s in-built mutual trust and respect developed and enhanced through mindful listening and sharing provided incentives for interactions with non-Chinese peers. Therefore, I argue this action of relabelling, shown in participants’ change of attitude towards each other, cannot happen without individuated production or embodied participation.

Despite the importance of non-digital resources that support DST at grassroots level, researchers and practitioners seldom think of diversifying the design of non-digital elements or increasing non-digital resources. In most ongoing DST projects, the preparatory session continues to be having participants playing games together and

serves the function of a warm-up. The innovation, however, concentrates on catching up with technological upgrades. This means most DST workshops, including mine, still resemble computer classes: participants are supposed to sedentarily and quietly interact with digital devices in an indoor environment. However, this poses a grave challenge for people who look for interpersonal interaction and thus wastes the workshop's potential for sociality. With the increasing portability of the mobile device, we can innovate and enlarge non-digital resources by taking different stages of DST to various geographic and social spaces. Fortunately, scholars such as Şimşek are painstakingly experimenting with DST in kitchen and urban street scenarios for women and migrants in Turkey.<sup>6</sup> I argue that by migrating the workshop outdoors and innovating with the non-digital elements, we might see DST elicit new ways of engagement with devices and produce stories with more diversified genres, narrative structures and combinations of modes of representations.

### 6.2.3 Privacy concerns over online sharing of personal stories

Distrust was the most voiced attitude by participants towards online sharing of digital stories in WA and Zhejiang. Participants generally gave me a brief answer to the question of whether they would upload the story to online video-sharing platforms: 'No, it's too personal.' This was consistent with participants' unanimous support of my proposal to attach Creative Commons licenses to each video in order to protect video copyright. This phenomenon may appear to us as a good thing, as participants were not reckless internet users. However, the heightened awareness of privacy protection, so prevalent and antagonistic to online sharing, also releases the signal that the online world is not only unsafe but increasingly compartmentalised. Although most Chinese participants shared their stories with families and friends back in China, my following discussion will not be limited to privacy concerns of Chinese internet users.

Online scams that appropriate the internet user's personal information with ill intent pose a security threat to online sharers. The official China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released information security reports for 2013 and

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.digitalstoryhub.org/>

2015 that started to look into the safety issue of mobile phone use specifically. The 2013 report covering all kinds of digital devices began:

We should not be optimistic about our country's information security environment. Up to 74.1 percent of internet users encountered information security issues, totalling 438 million people. [...] During the past half year, information security issues incurred an economic loss of 19.63 billion RMB [2.85 billion U.S. Dollars] to the whole country. (CNNIC, 2013)

Without mentioning loss incurred, the 2015 report on the safety of mobile phone use aimed to promote awareness of increasingly hidden security threats, one of which was 'the leak of personal information' (CNNIC, 2016). Profile photos which are easy to extract and copy became an object causing widespread worry among social media users. In a news report by China's official news agency, Xinhua, both WeChat's customer services and technology experts denied the likelihood of scamming with duplicated profile photos and account names (Z. Li & Zhang, 2014). Ironically, roughly nine months later, another Xinhua report covered a financial scam through a clone WeChat account (Zuo, 2014). The fact that the Chinese participants in my workshops in both countries were conservative towards online video sharing might be due to their concern that the video can be repurposed by an unknown audience.

Surveillance by authorities and hence self-censorship, not limited to China, was another restraining factor. A Middle Eastern participant who expressed his confusion about the future refused to have his story played to other participants or anyone outside the workshop (including my PhD supervisors). Asked why, he told me in a private communication that he did not want his country's government to hear what he said in the story. Putting aside the content of his story, his precaution that sharing digital work might cause trouble to him reminds us that our feeling of insecurity is not only from scammers. Like scammers, state governments are prying into our online activities without prior consent. Media control measures including censorship and shutdown of prominent Western internet companies carried out by the Chinese government has stirred controversy as regards human rights (Dowell, 2006; Helft & Barboza, 2010; King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013). However, internet policing is also taken up by the United States to investigate crimes, exemplified by Snowden's exposure of U.S. government surveillance and more recently the FBI's high-profile hacking of a suspect's iPhone (Lichtblau & Benner, 2016). The FBI's disregard of iPhone maker Apple's protest as well as the global attention symbolises the 'post-

Snowden Era' (Gaudion, MacCormick, & Williams, 2016) for the superpower that has instructed the world about universal values for decades. Therefore, my participants' self-censorship is not an isolated phenomenon for a certain country. It reflects a widespread tension between privacy and freedom of speech which internet users worldwide feel helpless about.

In addition, while I endeavoured to provide a non-competitive environment in the workshops, participants believed that online space is inevitably judgemental. A Muslim participant articulated why she did not consider online sharing to be an option.

Because...maybe I'm thinking too much, although we are basically people, but different cultures and religions and you see images and certain sentences and words can be accepted wrongly to other cultures.

While we may attribute her concern about being judged to possible cultural and religion differences between her and online viewers, even Chinese participants would not consider sharing on Chinese platforms such as Youku that is mostly used by co-nationals. Instead, most Chinese participants in WA and Zhejiang chose to share stories with the narrowest public – family and roommates. It is worth noting that all the Chinese participants' stories in WA and Zhejiang did not contain or were likely to elicit any political discussion. In interview, some of them told me their refusal to undertake online sharing was because they would be laughed at for their imperfect English pronunciation or poor editing if they shared the story with a significant number of friends. After sharing with their most intimate audiences, they all told me that the feedback was very positive, even if the audience could not understand the story in English. It seems agreement and admiration were the only reactions that participants were after, rendering doubting, disagreeing and discouraging comments unacceptable. Rather than adding to the diversity of voices that are circulating in the public sphere, participants maintained the closure of existing social circles that share similar ideas and values. As an article, *Stay in stratosphere nurtures narcissism*, has argued, while social media are technically multiplying the channels of information, there is an increasing tendency for individuals to immerse in similar perspectives and ignore divergent ones (J. Li, 2017). This is demonstrated in the phenomena that netizens holding opposing ideas would not listen to each other. The consequence is deepening division instead of mutual understanding between different groups.

After the EU court's ruling established 'the right to be forgotten' (RtbF) in 2014, over 500,000 people filed a request to be delisted from Google Search (Tirosh, 2016). At the beginning of 2017, Snapchat, a mobile app for publishing and auto-deleting images and video clips, launched its initial offering on Wall Street and became the new favourite for investors in new technology. While ordinary people may be willing to make a point in DST, whether they would firmly release their voice into the wider public decides if their point will cause a ripple and hence push forward social progress. Both external and internal barriers to the scaling-up of story sharing reveal to us that despite increased digital literacy for many populations, the voices we hear might be lessening. Over a decade ago, Elizabeth Soep (2006) worried that youth may find it difficult to translate skills acquired in media production projects into life in the outside world. Now we should worry about how to use these skills for the online world, which is not only insecure but also challenges our weaknesses as social beings.

### 6.3 Digital storytelling as practice approach to digital content creation

After a close look at the Chinese migrants' participatory dynamics and digital stories (chapter 4 and chapter 5) and DST's advantages and shortcoming in working towards digital inclusion (chapter 6), in this chapter I move on to discuss the methodological significance that DST holds for our understanding of the vast social field of migration. During DST workshops in WA and Zhejiang, my firsthand observations demonstrated that the success of each workshop was supported not only by digital and non-digital resources but also by what I felt from my participants: being proud, obliged and enthusiastic to complete a story. Rather than digital and non-digital resources that DST gathered, it was my participants themselves who worked constantly towards social inclusion. While this observation was not reinforced by participants' interview responses, it was strong enough to force me to reflect upon my use of an established media practice, workshop-based DST, as a research method. Here, I draw inspiration from Couldry's proposal for a practice-based paradigm for media research (Couldry, 2004) and Ryfe's argument on the practice perspective on news production research:

A great virtue of practice theory is that it provides tools for working across levels of analysis: from the micro level of performance, to the meso level of practice, to the macro level of social fields. (Ryfe, 2017)

I believe the DST method can help us rethink the hot-potato topics of media mobilisation for Chinese migratory populations. We hence may understand better the methodological usefulness of the ‘migrancy as agency’ paradigm proposed by Sinclair and Cunningham (2000).

### 6.3.1 Lessons from past ethnic media studies

New media provides opportunities to individuals for mediating self-representations with the aid of a few devices and simple-to-grasp know-how. In the case of Chinese migratory populations, this means a chance to synthesise the two existing methods of examining Chinese migrants’ mediation of their own voice: interviews and surveys on audience responses and participant observation of migrant organisations. While both methods have been productive of insights in past decades, they reached drastically different conclusions about the prospect of Chinese migrant community cohesion and activism. Examples of studies on media uses of overseas Chinese migrants, of which there are a significantly larger number than studies on Chinese internal migrants, are considered below in a bid to show how divergence of viewpoints grows out of different focusses and methods.

For Chinese migrants who live overseas especially in more developed countries, past studies on their spectatorship of old ethnic media such as newspaper and TV have been pessimistic about media’s mobilising ability for the group in the host society. A study on Chinese migrants’ consumption of ethnic media such as China-produced TV series in the United States has noted prevalent passiveness over activism in participants’ interview responses (Shi, 2005). Despite the discovery that Chinese ethnic media users did ‘imagine coherent and continuous identities and hence create desirable meanings of their ruptured and shifting experiences’, the researched has maintained that a collective cultural identity for Chinese migrants is difficult to form due to the group’s heterogeneity in gender, religion, class and political tendency. Another study in the United States has considered Chinese migrants’ spectatorship of local news stories in ethnic newspapers in comparison with those of Korean and Latino migrants, in order to explore the relationship between ethnic migrants’ consumption of local stories and their engagement with their neighbourhood in a

multicultural setting (Lin & Song, 2006). The study has found that both Chinese newspapers and readers placed most importance on home-country news. The author has argued that this presented a consistent finding with other researchers who have concluded that Korean and Chinese residents had less neighbourhood engagement than Latino residents.

While a dim activist prospect has been painted by mass media scholars over a decade ago, Chinese migrants' passion for participation and change was rarely lacking in studies on overseas migrants' voluntary organisations. As early as in 1999, combining participant observation and oral accounts, Minghuan Li portrayed Chinese voluntary organisations in Netherlands in detail as an 'ethnic niche' in which Chinese migrants take collective action to benefit from straddling two worlds (M. Li, 1999, p. 3). Although these organisations faced doubts that they served to insulate Chinese people from the Dutch society, the niche they constituted provided symbolic power to convert migrants' social status from invisible and marginal to visible and assertive (p. 208). In another research study, Chinese voluntary organisations sought to hold world meetings to globalise their presence (H. Liu, 1998). With business networking as the major mission, the new linkage forged and enhanced 'its cultural affinity with its ancestral homes' (ibid.) in the meantime.

As the contrast between the two aforementioned conclusions demonstrates, a sole focus on old media's spectatorship, which does not involve proactive meaning production acts could omit the dynamics for change in audience's other aspects of life. While interviews have been the only reasonable approach, according to Ryfe (2017) quoting Anderson, 'it can be dangerous for scholars to simply accept what people say about what they do.' Because of the reliance on deduction rather than occurrence, studies on old media place considerable importance on participants' sociological indicators, assuming viewing media content has a certain effect on a particular demographic. Nevertheless, sampling in these studies has always turned out to be a struggle, except for migrant organisation research. Although a good number of words have been devoted to describing the demography in regard to statistics such as 'place of origin, geographic distributions, patterns of settlement, population size, varieties of migrants' (Shi, 2005), almost every study has considered sampling to be subjective, limiting and unrepresentative.

However, what we see in recent studies on international migration is that the official typology of migrants is losing its normative power. With the globalisation of the workforce and capital in the background, constant mobility instead of permanent settlement is becoming a new norm for Chinese overseas migrants (H. Liu, 2005). As Polson (2015) has pointed out, there is a new generation of expats whose ‘lives become characterized by “geographic promiscuity” and movement is valorised as “a permanent state of mind”’. Looking at temporary migrants in Australia, Robertson (2014) has argued that migration is complicated temporally by revealing that the lived experience of some temporary visa holders was not as transient or self-reliant as it was supposed to be. This was echoed by Cover (2015) who has indicated that the anxieties towards temporary migrants in Australia were ‘anxieties over the increasing complexity of mobilities that do not follow specific flows of movement’. Therefore, what we need to collect urgently is not the existing categories of migration, but information about migrants’ self-perceptions, imagination of communities and social action that enhances or breaks this categorisation.

### 6.3.2 Experimental practice method

Based on findings gleaned from previous ethnic media studies, I believe that new media has opened many doors for researchers. Media technologies are available to an increasing number of people to produce and disseminate media content and thus ‘mesh with our wider habits, our ways of “getting by”’ (Couldry, 2012, p. 19), and, therefore, the audience’s daily life, especially those dimensions involving media, becomes more and more visible. In his proposal to theorise media as practice rather than text, Couldry (2004) has put the audience in a proactive position and developed an indiscrete view of audience practices. I argue this presents a chance for us to recategorise migrants based on their meaning-making practices, such as new media use. We, then, are less constrained by migrants’ basic personal information and can focus on what they actually do with media tools. During my fieldwork, the passion for storytelling was only felt in the workshop, but rarely talked about in interviews (e.g., participants often commented on the workshop with a one-liner: ‘It was quite interesting.’). As an old saying goes, actions speak louder than words. But it is worth mentioning that this thought of mine also shows that media practices are insufficiently analysed and theorised.

Furthermore, there are enough digital and non-digital resources for us to experiment with migrant recategorisation. Through experimentation, we can remove established media practices from their usual scenario, such as being alone at home or writing news stories at a workplace, and put them together with other socio-cultural practices, just as in the DST workshops. The value in this shift is that we can gain access to not only participants' reactions to a new scenario, but also the contingencies and negotiations (Ryfe, 2017) which would be invisible without direct observation. It was these happenstances, such as identification between Chinese and non-Chinese participants, participants refraining from in-group sharing and a few participants' requests to have extra workshops, that pose sharp questions to our assumptions about Chinese students and professionals in Australia.

In *Story circle: Digital storytelling around the world*, Taub-Pervizpour (2009, p. 251), a facilitator for DST with disadvantaged youth, has argued that DST facilitators must be courageous and reflect upon the role they play and the responsibilities they undertake for the targeted community. As a temporary migrant from China, for the benefit of the overseas Chinese community and myself, I have the responsibility to find out not only how they resort to media, but more importantly what hinders them from certain uses of media and what they do not know about media. Since answers to the latter questions are more difficult to find compared to the former, we can complement the interview and survey approaches with practice-oriented experimentation.

While researchers have raised doubts about DST's interactivity, because 'workshops guide participants to originate a personal story from personal memories, rather than respond to an ongoing debate' (Watkins & Russo, 2009, p. 271), the stories that I collected showed the participants were debating on the worthiness and the values of migration, based on their experience and where migration might lead them in the future. Some debates were continued in interviews, in a more straightforward way. Perhaps researchers need to reconsider digital storytellers' capacities for interactions that are built on a higher level of expressiveness. This does not mean DST looked utopian or was conducted with utopian ideals. As a matter of fact, my workshops resembled the real society. Although there were some resources provided, participants were on their own. According to their interviews, they were frightened at

meeting strangers, did not know what to do in spite of my guidance, felt embarrassed at having nothing to talk about over the dinner table and tried to choose the best photos for video making, all of which were not fully aligned with their intent to ‘have a fresh experience and make friends’. However, these are observations that captured moments of not just media technology use, but digital self-representation being embedded in people’s acquainting, learning and communicating experiences. Because of this embeddedness, DST cannot be an isolated practice in my or any participant’s daily life. Moreover, DST’s success with migrants demonstrates new possibilities for migrants’ ethnic, cultural and social identities. Rather than being activist on any specific social issue, Chinese migrants formed solidarity in the workshops to push the boundaries for their self-identification, which gave rise to a kind of migrant identity activism. In this sense, DST did generate ‘in-between spaces’ for Chinese migrants which ‘provide the terrain for elaborating strategies for selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself’ (Bhabha, 2004, p. 2).

### 6.3.3 Future for research on Chinese internal migrants’ new media use

So far, I have discussed studies of media uses by overseas Chinese migrants. However, the experimental practice method would also be of benefit to studies on Chinese internal migrants. At present, internal migrants remain a less considered topic in research on China, as they are comprised of many categories. Among them, the most studied group has been rural-to-urban migrant workers (usually called migrant workers or rural migrants). On the whole, internal migrants’ media use is still under-researched and there are seldom innovative approaches to this field.

The monograph *Subaltern China* by Wanning Sun (2014) has already looked into a range of digital-political photographing practices taken up by *Nongmingong* who are rural-to-urban migrant workers in China. By analysing activist efforts made by amateur migrant photographers, Sun has emphasised the importance of visual media in rural migrants’ activism:

Visual-media activism through DV documentaries and the phone camera may well be characterized as ‘small’... But their significance cannot be easily

dismissed, because fully fledged and officially legitimated working-class cultural institutions and practices are still nowhere in sight. (pp. 250-251)

Sun has also called attention to the notion that ‘their (rural migrants’) consciousness is inextricably linked with the extent to which they are inducted and initiated into the technology-enabled process of politicization and socialization’ (p. 179). Sun’s findings have reflected the large-scale adoption of visual media practices among elite professionals and subaltern amateurs as well as the phenomenon’s rising socio-political implications. This argument warrants both the feasibility of and a need for a practice approach like DST, which is pedagogical and productive at the same time.

One of the interprovincial student participants in the workshops suggested in interview that I might not limit my research only to educational migrants but could expand it to more disadvantaged migrant groups such as Hengdian migrants (migrant workers seeking jobs in Hengdian town where China’s largest film production bases are located), northeastern migrants (people leaving China’s three provinces in the northeast) and elderly migrants. While digital media has raised these groups’ visibility, an absence of a clear typology of internal migration still remains. The workshop participants in China, who were young and aspirational, rarely considered the official *hukou* (household registration) issue for their migration plans. In fact, *hukou*, which was designed to control rural-urban flows of population, was much less complicated in specifying migration purposes than the international visa system (especially visas for migration from developing to developed countries). In this sense, we have the mission to discover and reach out to categories of internal migrants that we barely know about. We are further tasked to find out if digital literacy can be used to break the myths and hence the marginality and reconstruct identity as it did for my workshop participants. I hope I have the opportunity to work with harder-to-reach internal migrants as my research participants in the future.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Yuval Noah Harari, author of *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, argues that the view of the world that will possibly shape the future is increasingly algorithmic, as in his claim of ‘organisms become algorithms’ (Harari, 2016). Although an algorithmic view of the world sounds unacceptable in cultural studies and DST is more about storytelling than digitalisation through adopting digital means (Hartley, 2010, p. 72),

we inevitably need to deal with what technological advances mean to DST. Given fewer efforts have been made to enrich non-digital resources for DST for migrants, we, as practitioners, remain engaged more with technology than with people. While Tirosh (2016) has suggested that we should think of ourselves as ‘storytelling animals’ instead of ‘data subjects’, the mindset that we are data subjects prevails when we feel at a loss about emerging threats to our privacy. Our ability to customise sources of information on the Internet turns out to be a shelter for our closure, ignorance and arrogance. These unfavourable conditions indicate to us that there is so much more to overcome to be a digitally included person. Nonetheless, the creativity, bonding and energy that I witnessed, as well as participants’ proactive craftsmanship, are all manifestations of the inclusive potential of DST. It is just these aspects of processual beauty and warmth that make DST, even at grassroots level, a sustainable practice for Chinese people on the move.

While DST as invented by the Center for Digital Storytelling has been doubted for its manner of participation, narrative structure, sustainability and so on, it continues to be an effective research method for an increasing number of studies. Its efficacy, according to my workshops, lies in different socio-cultural groups’ resilience to accept and adopt it. As we are facing a continuous lack of content with official and commercial powers controlling content trends, DST and other practice-based methods at least serve to diversify the contents with increased expressiveness for non-professionals. Meanwhile, their capacity to inspire creativity shows what people do not normally do with media technologies. Although many problems arising during DST remain unsolved, our primary task should be to use it with as many socio-cultural groups as we can. As explosions of media contents are occurring in more and more parts of the world, the timing for making use of practice-based DST is not only ripe, but passing quickly.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

In this study, I sought to reveal the opportunities for having a voice about migration that the digitally afforded self-representation activity of digital storytelling (DST) could provide to Chinese international and internal migrants in Australia and China. By finding how opportunities emerge and are made use of by Chinese migrant groups in their respective destination societies, I unravel the complexities of voice formation and amplification in the use of new media technologies, specifically in a DST workshop scenario. I argue that research on DST, a video production practice invented to counter the expert-amateur gap and to achieve free expression, should adopt a mediation view to take into consideration various factors that might influence and shape the making of digital stories, such as researcher-researched power relations, collaborative energy, selection of materials, and affordances of distribution platforms.

Using the qualitative approach, this study focusses on qualitative data and case studies in order to present an in-depth analysis of individual responses to DST. I develop a storytelling approach to the study, which incorporated narrative inquiry methodologies, in order to focus not only on the resulting migrant-created stories, but also on the collaborative process of migrant storytelling, in which researcher and new media technologies both play indispensable parts. I propose that DST could be used as a practice-based research method in this research area, in view of its advantages over traditional qualitative methods, especially in exploring the democratising potential of emerging forms of narrative.

During fieldwork, I carried out comparative case studies that mainly involved workshop-based DST projects for Chinese international and internal migrants based in migrant-populated states or provinces of Australia and China. The findings show, on the one hand, that by displaying personal experience, digital stories created in the two locations both diverge from the socio-economic view of migration that has prevailed in the dominant migrant stories in the receiving societies, while on the other hand, the extent to which migrant participants have a voice on migration through DST varies, and is contingent on participant motivation, prepossessed digital literacy, and anticipated audience.

Digital stories by both international migrant participants and their domestic counterparts pose as alternatives to the dominant stories on migrating from one place to another. In the stories, whether crossing national borders or provincial divides, people on the move are faced with similar issues in the early years: a lack of social network, material foundation and clear prospects for living locally. In spite of the struggles they have to endure to improve living conditions, migrants to more developed countries or provinces are always misunderstood or partially understood to be purely motivated by socio-economic gain. In the participants' stories there is a common upbeat sentiment in which participants try to keep a positive attitude towards life away from home. However, in their accounts of arduous pursuits and adventures, the sentiment feels self-persuasive rather than convincing. Not only is the idea of pursuing a better life through migration worth doubting, any attempt to pin down migrant life as secure and permanent with legal status should be questioned. The stories affirm that the extent of the receiving society's inclusion of migrants can only be found in migrants' own accounts.

Although both projects saw the formation of a participatory dynamic in the course of technology-afforded storytelling, the Zhejiang-based DST workshops were less constrained by language barrier, cultural difference, technology literacy and audience anticipation than the WA-based counterparts. However, it is noteworthy that workshops in Zhejiang had a group of people from the same culture, who were acquainted with each other, and, hence, they experienced less stress over socialisation in the group. They were also much more adept at using video-making software due to pre-existing skills acquired in university. These existing skills meant that there was sufficient time to develop and improve the stories. Moreover, the two projects both encountered difficulties in recruiting participants and both had migrant participants withdraw from showing their stories to the group in workshops due to worries that exposure of private life and private thoughts could cause unexpected consequences. Without underrating the unfavourable factors for these projects, it comes as less surprising that despite fewer constraints, the participatory dynamic in Zhejiang, like its counterpart in WA, did not lead to the straightforward and unreserved expression of critical viewpoints on resettling away from hometowns or home countries in most stories.

Besides enabling a comparison, the DST projects both demonstrated the potential of self-representation through DST to empower migrants. First, it was significant to have migrants as authors of international or domestic mobility, as an alternative to professional media producers and ‘star migrants’ acclaimed for considerable achievements. In the context of deepening urbanisation and globalisation in many parts of the world, only a minority of international and internal migrants have had their personal stories heard in the public realm. For Chinese internal migrants, in particular, a weak awareness of their storytelling authority on internal migration resulted in their absence from the current heated discussions on the reception of incomers that is going on in many Chinese cities. The charm of DST here was that upon workshop completion migrant participants affirmed that they were the rightful speakers on issues of migration.

Second, stories created in both locations became alternative stories in strikingly similar ways. Most stories followed universal themes for humankind: leisure, study and work. They usually elaborated these themes with everyday communicative encounters with family and friends. These seemingly mundane stories became repertoires in which newly created symbolic resources such as voiceover converged with those stored in the memory of participants’ digital devices including smartphones, laptops and cameras. While audial and visual resources were supposed to be working in mutual support, they were also independent meaning-generative symbols on their own. That was why each two-minute digital story video could suggest a unique narrative or discourse around migration that could contend with the dominant narratives. In this sense, the simple act of completing a digital story with a migrant’s personal archived photos can be empowering, regardless of how the story turns out. The independence of the thoughts and attitudes presented was always guaranteed by the story’s originality. With the formation of original migrant voices, DST workshops resembled a forum in which each migrant had a point and was bravely self-expressive and equally respected. This scene of migrants becoming confident speakers in discussing migration, with even the smallest public, has consequences for imagining a more inclusive world for people on the move.

There were several limits in regard to the methods of this study. One principal shortcoming was the limited diversity of participants in both case studies. Although

the sample size collected for this study was relatively larger than many previous studies involving DST, young students accounted for a large percentage of participants in both locations, while there were few professionals, workers or people out of education and employment. Most participants had lived in the receiving society for less than five years. The limited variety of participants' migration experiences may not have covered some of the more complex issues of social inclusion and citizenship for migrants. The other shortcoming was that I had participants respond to only two ways of distributing digital stories: screening them in the workshop and uploading them to video-sharing platforms. Since online platforms have increased privacy settings on video sharing and there are multiple other ways to have videos viewed by a limited number of people (via instant messaging, for example), my interview question was not specific enough on the issue of video sharing. It omitted participants' more nuanced understandings of privacy in the use of new media.

The two case studies point to new possibilities for DST. There are three directions that future research on DST might follow. First, researchers could undertake independent grassroots-level DST workshops to engage a variety of social groups. Since many people are increasingly familiar with new media technologies, and non-digital resources such as migrants' natural need to communicate on the expectation-reality gap and embodied gathering are not difficult to mobilise, it is time that DST researchers reduce reliance on institutions for resources. Being independent, DST would face fewer constraints that might arise from incongruent expectations between researcher and institution or from the power relations between researcher and participants. This could help us find a better model to facilitate free expression to a larger extent.

Second, as DST proved well adapted to different migrant groups and social environments in practice, researchers might conduct DST workshops with harder to reach migrant groups. These other migrants, such as rural-to-urban migrant workers in China, Chinese migrant workers who live overseas, and the children left behind by both groups, are all marginalised groups that are seriously under researched.

Third, the exploration of the methodological usefulness of DST needs continuous efforts. Recognising DST as a research method not only indicates our progress in

catching up with emerging ways of using new media technologies, but also demonstrates what we are yet to achieve. DST as a media practice widely used for academic research remains insufficiently theorised in respect to its value for research. We must push the boundaries of methodology for the rapidly multiplying and shifting modes of using technologies, in order to keep up to date with technological development, as well as with people's mindsets and values that might be transforming amid the increasing technological penetration in daily life. Despite the shining technologies that are often associated with the imagination of the future, we as humanities researchers need to put people at the centre of research, to critically observe whether technology is used in the service of life betterment of the underprivileged. While we can never obtain a fully satisfactory answer to this question, the universalisation of digital media is providing us with the opportunity to be a problem-solver. The experimentation with DST for improved models of technology use will not only add to our skillset, but redefine our responsibilities as researchers. Instead of being simply a neutral observer of the digital culture, we are helplessly immersed in it, just like our research participants. We must first appreciate the participatory, collaborative, creative and innovative spirit of technology use, which distinguishes this era from any preceding ones, before taking action to inquire into how far technology can possibly take humankind towards social change.

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