

The Sea Wind is Still Blowing

-Stories of a Chinese South African Community in Port Elizabeth

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ABSTRACT

Chinese South Africans constitute an integral part of the South African society as one of the smallest and most identifiable minority groups. Throughout the past, they maintained a low profile so as not to draw troubles in the once arguably most racist country in the world, which, combined with the insignificant population, rendered them not only unknown to their homeland in China, but also invisible in the host country of South Africa and, gradually and unintentionally, neglected and even forgotten by the whole world. This thesis, therefore, points the pen to draw more attention to this minority but distinctive group. The work consists of two parts: a theoretical review and a narrative nonfiction long-form. The former part makes it clear who Chinese South Africans are and gives a brief outline of their history in South Africa. Meanwhile, the Apartheid policy especially the Group Area Act and the discriminations Chinese South Africans faced, along with the influences upon them, are particularly touched on while their identity transitions are also overviewed. It also concerns how Chinese South Africans are documented and portrayed in the limited existing works, including historical books, academic papers and nonfiction narratives. The narrative part focuses on a Chinese South African community in a suburb of Port Elizabeth called Kabega Park, which was the only Chinese Group Area established during Apartheid. This part itself also includes two sections. The first section tells from the third-person point of view a story of a Chinese South African family in the community, covering a time period from 1934 to 2000. The second section is written mainly in the first-person point of view, which mixes personal stories of the community members and my own experiences in the community, with some essential background information also woven in. Altogether, the narrative part draws an outline and portrays a telling life picture of a Chinese South African community which is still running today as well as how this small group changes as time goes by. As narrative nonfiction, the stories told are all real. Most of the content is first-hand collected and is exposed to the public for the first time, making it very valuable and can be used as historical material in future studies on related topics. Written for the first time by a mainland Chinese who does not belong to the community but shares certain characteristics in common with these people, a person who is both an “outsider” and an “insider”, this narrative tells the stories of this minority group from a perspective never been taken before and is hopefully to bring some insights into and reflections on this topic.

I anticipate readers of this piece are people from both China and South Africa. Thus, some scenes detailed described may seem redundant to one group of readers, but are strange and of interest to the other and are necessary for them to better understand the characters, the history and the stories. As most of the people I write about are still alive, I do not touch much on political and racial issues in this narrative so as not to draw adverse effects to them. Excluding these issues from the writing is indeed a loss, fortunately however, it does not impair the articulation of the main theme of this long-form.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the Department of Journalism, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Dan Wang

12nd of June, 2020

APPRECIATION

My appreciation firstly goes to all the Chinese South Africans I wrote about, who were the body and the soul of this narrative nonfiction. Without them, this work would not be possible and it was also through telling their stories that the meanings of this work came into being. They will always be the most glorious protagonists, not only in this work, and in my heart. I would like to give my sincerest thanks to the community members and other people who accepted my interviews and offered me assistance, time short or long, once or many times and their selflessness and kindness in turn inspired my endeavour on this specific topic.

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He was my first reader and free proof-reader. I thank him for enduring my

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Finally, I want to thanks this beautiful and respectable country called South Africa.

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THE THEORETICAL REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

About 150 years ago, some Chinese boarded the ships from the northern hemisphere of the earth, travelled across the Indian Ocean and after more than thirty days of the voyage, and finally disembarked at the land of African continent. Leaving the homeland behind, they hoped to seek new chances in the country called South Africa, which they knew nothing about except for the gold discovered in the area of Witwatersrand. Ever since then, a special history was created, many people's fate changed and, all of the stories, began.

The mass immigration of the Chinese dated back to the mid-nineteenth century as a result of the nation's decay and the invasion of the western powers. Facing continuous famines, bandits infestations, natural disasters and endless wars, a lot of people, especially the poor in rural villages, chose to go abroad to make a living. From the 1870s onwards, the lure of gold in South Africa induced the Chinese to come one by one. With the initial intention of making some money and going back home, they, however, stuck by a series of unexpected events especially the Sino-Japanese war and the civil war, ended up settling in the country in the southern tip of the remote African continent.

Living in a country where almost everything was race-oriented, the story of Chinese South Africans can hardly be told without mentioning Apartheid. With discrimination and racism accompanied almost every aspect of life, making a living turned out not as easy as they originally thought. Meanwhile, being neither too white nor too black, the situation of limbo also brought them some privileges and concession, besides the disadvantages and discriminations. Under all these complexities, the history of Chinese South Africans is one of hopes and depressions, glories and struggles, and adaptations and collisions.

Due to historical reasons, this minority group of people have lived in the world quietly and kept a very low profile all the time. In South Africa, people may know there are Chinese in the country, but most have no idea what they are doing; while in China, most people even do not know such a group. They are rarely noticed, thought of and understood.

I knew nothing about and had no contact with any overseas Chinese, let alone the tiny group of Chinese South Africans who live more than 10000 kilometres away from me, which, ended when I encountered a third-generation Chinese South African by chance after I came to South Africa in 2018. When I started getting to know and communicated with this group of people, I seemed to enter a new world, where specific historical period, special social environment and personal life stories intertwined to create a fascinating big story, which I think is worth documenting and telling to the world. However, the reality is that compared to overseas Chinese in other parts of the world including Southeast Asian, USA, Australia and Canada, Chinese South Africans are much less touched on in researches, and even less is in narrative stories.

There are only two narratives on this topic, both of which are told by Chinese South Africans themselves from what I call an insider's perspective. The

temperament and connotation of a story, especially one on people, is largely determined by who tells the story and is deeply influenced by the storyteller's ethnicity, experience, cultural background and so on. As a mainland Chinese who grew up and live in China for most of my life, I have an outsider's perspective that has never been employed before, which paints this story of Chinese South Africans a different colour.

This long-form, therefore, tries to open the curtain in front of Chinese South Africans to let them be heard and seen, as well as to add a diverse voice to the writings of these people who are unknown to the homeland and invisible in the host country.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Who are Chinese South Africans?

Referring to the Chinese in South Africa, the most known were the mass importation of Chinese labourers to work on the gold mines of the Witwatersrand in 1904, with a number of more than 60,000. They exacerbated anti-Chinese racism and lead to the introduction of a Chinese Exclusion Act in Cape, which had far-reaching consequences for the later Chinese community. It is widely misunderstood that they were the forefathers of the present-day Chinese in South Africa. In fact they were all sent back to China in 1910. (Yap and Man, 1996)

There are three Chinese communities in nowadays South Africa. One is the descendants of the independent immigrants who arrived in the country from the 1870s onwards, with approximately 10,000-12,000 second-, third-, fourth and even fifth-generation (Park, 2011, p.119), who are the writing object of this project. Another one is a small community of about 6000 Taiwanese Chinese who came to South Africa from the 1970s onwards. The biggest one are those who came from mainland China and Hong Kong since the 1990s. As a result of illegal immigration and movement of population, there is no accurate number of the population but most observers put it at over 300,000 and it is still increasing (Park, 2011, p.119). The latter two communities are not touched on in this thesis and the phrases of "Chinese South African" "Chinese in South Africa" "South Africa-born Chinese" "Chinese community" "Chinese group" in this project all refer to the descendants of the Chinese who came to South African from the 1870s to the first half of the 20th century.

In the 19th century, China was suffering from a series of natural and man-made disasters including droughts, floods, bandit infestations and peasant rebellions, as a result of which, famine and hunger swept across the country (Chesneaux, 1973) and the big population explosion from 150 million in the early 1700s to 450 million in the 1850s made the situation worse (Spence, 1993; Smith, 1983). These upheavals, compounded by the endless wars and the reparations incurred exacerbated the Chinese people's suffering and finally, induced thousands of people to seek new chances abroad (Chang, 1968; Tan, 1986; Latourette, 1964).

From the mid-nineteenth century, "Chinese emigration to the 'new world' gained momentum" (Yap and Leong Man, 1996). The peasants who were struggling for survival in rural villages of southern coastal provinces such as Fujian (Fukien) and Guangdong (Kwangtung) were the protagonists of this large-scale emigration (Lee, 1960; Cator, 1936; Fitzgerald, 1972). Thanks to the proximity to the sea and the ports, they had much association with the outside world, which in turn exposed them to the economic opportunities abroad (MacNair, 1926). After Southeast Asia, the gold discovered in the United States, Australia, New Zealand beckoned the Chinese to come and from the 1870s, they finally arrived at South Africa (Yap and Man, 1996).

"Clan" or "lineage" played an important role in the migration. People who had already emigrated would help other clan members (who bear the same surname) to come out and join them, either lending them money to pay the passage or helping with the paper needed for entering to the country. They also formed organizations in the host place to help newcomers to adapt, settle down and survive in the new environment of the foreign land (Yap and Man, 1996; Gao, 2017). As a result, many emigrants were from the same extended clans and same villages, who were tied together closely by a common dialect and place of origin and tended to congregate in the same areas in the early migration period (Pan, 1994; Tan, 1986), which is known as "chain migration" (Pan, 1994; Harris and Pieke 1998).

Most of the early Chinese South Africans originated from two areas and could be divided into two ethnic groups: Cantonese from southern Guangdong and Moiyeane (or Hakka) from northeast region of the province (Yap and Man, 1996). Ethnic differences added by bonds of kinship and clan resulted in Cantonese and Moiyeane settling in different parts of South Africa (Yap and Man, 1996).

For many years, most Cantonese resided in inland South Africa such as Johannesburg, Pretoria, Kimberly while Moiyeane predominated in the coastal areas namely Port Elizabeth, Cape Town, East London and so on (Yap and Man, 1996). But this was not all the cases and later the two ethnic groups began to mix as a unified group to confront the discriminations upon the Chinese as well as support each other financially and emotionally (Gao, 2017).

Initially, the Chinese men came to South Africa alone and left the family members at home, intending to earn some money and return to China (Park, 2009). The wives did not come for three reasons: they needed to look after the parents-in-law; there was no money to support their traveling fare; it was not rational to take one's wives and children to face the uncertainties in a remote foreign country (Gao, 2017). The men abroad sent money back for the families to survive and in later years, such remittances also helped build houses, schools and factories in their home villages (Yap and Man, 1996; Park, 2009). By the 1940s, a few did return to China for good but most of them, because of events such as the Sino-Japanese war and regime changes in China, stayed in South Africa ever since (Park, 2009). The men who saved enough money would return

to China to either find a wife or fetch their wives and children. When their children grew up to teenagers, families that could afford would send them to China for several years to learn Chinese language and Chinese culture (Park, 2009). These to and fro movements mainly happened to the first and second generation and stopped gradually for the reasons including but not limited to the war in China, the stricter immigration policy in South Africa and the gradually settling down of the Chinese in the host country (Park, 2009). When the first generation of South Africa-born Chinese grew up and started a rapid process of assimilating into the local culture, the ties between them and China became weaker and weaker (Park, 2009).

2.2 Apartheid and the Chinese: Racism and Privileges

In a country where everything was race-oriented with white supremacy, it was not easy for the Chinese to live and racism accompanied them all the time until the abolition of Apartheid in 1991 (Yap and Man, 1996). Meanwhile, being neither too white nor too black, they lived in a situation of in-betweens, which brought them some privileges and concessions.

Before the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the four white-governed territories (The Cape, Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal) all expressed prevailing prejudice against the Chinese which they regarded as aliens (Yap and Man, 1996). In this period, Chinese were restricted from immigrating or trading freely (Yap and Man, 1996). The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1904 prohibited Chinese from entering and residing and special “Certificates of Exemption” had to be carried by all Chinese in the Cape and renewed every year, leading to a steady decline in the numbers of Chinese in the Cape (Yap and Man, 1996).

The establishment of the Union of South Africa exacerbated the situation faced by Chinese (Yap and Man, 2009). The government introduced a series of racially-based legislations which affected almost every life aspect including residence, business, transportation, education, liquor, medical treatment and so on, which kept the Chinese out of the centre of the country’s economic, social and political strata (Yap and Man, 1996)

During Apartheid, Chinese were classified as non-whites who were denied any political rights and were restricted in all aspects of life (Yap and Man, 1996). They could not buy land or live in white communities; they could not go to certain places in the country without a permit; they could not study specific majors; they could not buy wines; they could not marry white women etc. (Yap and Man, 1996).

Facing discriminations and suppressions, the Chinese community organizations worked actively to petition constantly to state their situation and reiterated the fact that they were law-abiding people from a civilized country and were accepted by the white society thus should not be treated in certain bad ways (Yap and Man, 1996). Gradually they were singled out to receive some privileges and exemptions from some Apartheid legislation and placed unofficially in a

limbo place between the white and the black (Park, 2009). The Chinese people began to realize that higher education was the only way for their children to get rid of being shopkeepers who always suffered from restrictions and oppressions and more and more younger-generation Chinese went to universities and became professionals in later years (Yap and Man, 1996).

Another response to Apartheid discrimination was emigration (Park, 2009). The first wave of the Chinese emigration in the 1950s was a result of the Group Area Act, followed by the second wave in the 1960s when the Chinese professional were discriminated in the workplace and chose to move to other countries for better opportunities (Park, 2009). Emigration continued in the late 1970s, 1980s to 1990s, which was precipitated mainly by domestic strife and political changes (Park, 2009). Emigration is still happening now but with a quite smaller number. There are no official statistics of the Chinese South African emigrants, but it is estimated that the figure was very big (Park, 2009). For the Chinese people I met in Port Elizabeth, nearly all of them had family members or relatives who had emigrated to other countries such as Canada, Australia, the United States, the UK and New Zealand.

2.3 The Group Area Act and Kabega in Port Elizabeth

In 1950, the Group Area Act was promulgated to separate different race groups by setting aside specific areas for specific races to live and trade in thus artificial barriers between races could be established (Yap and Man, 1996). It was deemed as “the legislation which caused the most upheaval, hardship and insecurity in the lives of the South African Chinese” (Yap and Man, 1996). As most of Chinese were shopkeepers who lived and ran grocery shops in the black, coloured and mixed communities, once the areas were proclaimed for other groups, they would have to close their shops and sell properties below market value. Besides, if they were forced to live together in one area and allowed to trade there only, they would not survive because nearly all of them were shopkeepers (Yap and Man, 1996). Facing this big threat to their livelihood, the Chinese strongly opposed the legislation and petitioned to the authorities for concessions (Yap and Man, 1996). Due to various reasons, Chinese were at last allowed to do business with other ethnic groups and only one Chinese group area was finally established in the country, that is: Kabega in Port Elizabeth (Yap and Man, 1996), where the stories in this long-form took place.

From the turn of the 20th century, the Chinese congregated near the eastern edge of Port Elizabeth where Evatt Street intersects Russell and Hartman roads. They called this area “Malaikim”, most probably adopting the name from Kimberley where Chinese lived mainly in the Malay Camp. Back then Port Elizabeth had already become a busy trading centre and many Chinese from Guangdong came to settle there (Yap and Man, 1996). In the mid-1950s, among the 25000 Chinese in South Africa, around 1400 of whom lived in Port Elizabeth, making PE the densest Chinese community in the country, albeit numerically it ranked second to Johannesburg (Yap and Man, 1996).

The Group Area Act was steadily implemented from the 1950s and Kabega, 14 kilometres west to the Port Elizabeth city centre, was set aside for Chinese in 1961 (Yap and Man, 1996). It is said that one of the reasons of Kabega's proclamation was its proximity to the then Chinese School (Yap and Man, 1996). Along with the accusations against the community leaders for accepting the group area, by 1976, most of the 1400 Chinese in Port Elizabeth excepted for 71 families, had moved to and settled in Kabega (Yap and Man, 1996). Before officially abrogated on 5 July 1984, Kabega had existed for more than 20 years (Yap and Man, 1996).

The Group Area Act once made the Chinese anguished but it was not an absolutely bad thing looking back now. Forced to inhabit intensively in the same place, a very close Chinese community was formed. The proximity of the Chinese school, the setting up of the community institution (Eastern Province Chinese Association) and the establishment of the St. Francis Xavier Church in the area, also contributed to the moulding of a tightly-knitted community (Yap and Man, 1996). A lot of Chinese people especially the old, still live in Kabega to this day. They do service together in the church every week, eat dinner together every once a while and organize the Chinese market periodically; almost everyone knows each other well in the community.

It needs to be noted that the Chinese South African community in this long-form also includes people in Uitenhage. Located about 35 kilometres northwest to Port Elizabeth (about half an hour's drive), this small town has a history of Chinese inhabitant as long as that of Port Elizabeth, though the number quite small¹. Due to the geographic proximity and the relatively small number of the Chinese population, there are lots of interaction, communication and population mobility between the two places, mostly in the form of intermarriage and running businesses. You can easily find one in Port Elizabeth marries his/her mates from Uitenhage or a person who has a shop in Uitenhage lives in Port Elizabeth. For a long time in the first half of the 20th century, most Chinese adolescents in Uitenhage went to Port Elizabeth to study at the Chinese school. During Apartheid, the Chinese in Uitenhage were also assigned to live in Kabega (Yap and Man, 1996). Although some people have moved out of Kabega after Apartheid, the close relationship is still there. Chinese in both Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage together form an integral Chinese South African community which I focus on in this long-form, neither of whom could be excluded.

2.4 The Identity Transitions of the Chinese

Before the 1940s, a lot of Chinese people were still sojourners and recognized themselves as Chinese due to frequent communications with China and the early

¹ As is told by the community members, there used to be as many as 30 Chinese families in Uitenhage. When I visited there in May 2019, there were only 3 Chinese families living or doing business there.

intention of “earning money and coming back home” (Park, 2009). Later, though they tried to assimilate to the local culture, the huge discrimination, exclusion as well as the deep-rooted notion of a “great and powerful China” prevented them from being completely integrated into the country (Park, 2009). Apartheid, which emphasized race differences and put strict restrictions on Chinese served to reinforce their identity as Chinese to some extent in the early Apartheid period (Park, 2009). From the 1960s, the Chinese began to gain some concessions and privileges from the authority as well as be accepted by the whites, as a result of which, they went further in adapting to the country, especially to the white community (Park, 2009). But they refused the offer of white status and stuck to the Chinese ethnic identity (Park, 2009). Communicating with them, I find that even to this day, the new generation still holds the Chinese identity. Some identified themselves as Chinese South Africans while some insist they are South African Chinese. Some say South African first, Chinese second, some put Chinese first, South African second and some regard the two identities parallel (Park, 2009). Taking into account of language, traditions and festivals, beliefs and values, Park examines the innate South African Chinese identity and finds out that the Chinese culture has not decreased but transformed into a unique “Chinese South African configuration of culture and ethnic identities” (Park, 2009).

3. NARRATIVE AIM

This long-form centres specifically on the Chinese South African community in Kabega, Port Elizabeth. By telling a story of a Chinese South African family, narrating my own experience in the community and weaving into personal stories of the community members and related history information, it intends to tell the past, present and the future of the community, through which to draw a picture of Chinese South Africans, of how they came, settled down and fit into the country. It is also a process of standing at present to look back to explore how things change as time went by. Meanwhile, the topic of migration, Chineseness and identity is also touched on in some artful ways. Through this work, the small but unique group of Chinese South Africans is expected to be known by more people.

Based on first-hand information collected by face-to-face interviews, email exchanges, my own observations and immersions, etc., the stories are all real, and cover various aspects of Chinese South Africans’ life such as education, business, hobbies, lifestyles and Apartheid experiences, which, as a result, is expected to add to the relatively scarce historical material on this minority group and serve for further studies on this topic

Attention is specially paid to the second generation Chinese South Africans, who were born in the first half of the 20th century. Raised by parents who came from China, but living in a society of western lifestyle, this generation is influenced by both Chinese and western cultures. Moreover, they have gone through the entire period of Apartheid, from its inception in 1948, through its heyday in the 1970s, to its decline in the early 1990s, as well as the post-Apartheid era. From the “old”

period of racism to the “new” era of “equity for everyone” since 1994, their lives are tightly related to and greatly affected by the different political, sociological and historical environment of different periods of South Africa.

This generation bears and is defined by the characteristics of cross-cultures, in-between positions and multiple life experiences at the same time, making them quite unique. Now a lot of these people have passed away while the rest are all in the dusk of their lives, it is necessary and urgent to write down their stories. Otherwise it will be too late.

The long-form focuses on a specific community in PE and it does not intend to and is not possible to cover all cases of Chinese but rather part of it. Meanwhile, the characters mentioned do not represent all of their compatriots in this country.

4. RATIONALE

4.1 Rationale

First of all, no previous literary works on this topic focus on a specific Chinese South African community and this long-form will be the first one to do this. The only two narratives that can be found on this subject are personal and family stories. *All Under Heaven* by Darryl Accone that tells the story of his Chinese-South African family over three generations. In *Paper Sons and Daughters*, the author Ufrieda Ho writes her own personal and family stories growing up as a Chinese in South Africa. As to the also very limited academic literature, scholars usually study Chinese South Africans as a whole instead of centring on one particular community. That is, the field of writings and researches on specific Chinese South African community is blank so far and this long-form is expected to fill this gap.

Second, the community itself is distinctive and typical enough to write about. As is told above, Kabega was the only Chinese group area in the country proclaimed and finally developed during Apartheid, which makes this Chinese community the one and only in the country, even in the world. Compelled to live together in the assigned area, a very close Chinese community came into being and it lasts till today. While most of the Chinese are scattered in different places, it is a rare community across the country where Chinese South Africans are so densely inhabited and so closely related nowadays and you can hardly find another one. When I talked to Ross Taylor, the chairman of the community in May 2018, he said there were no more than 1000 people in the community, most of whom were the old and the number keeps decreasing. As the old are passing away one by one and the young are moving to bigger cities or even abroad, the community is inevitably getting smaller and smaller. What will it be like in the future? Whether or not will it still exist years and years later? We have every reason to write something about it as soon as possible or we may have no chance to do it.

Third, Johannesburg has occupied the dominant position as the setting place in narrative nonfiction on Chinese South Africans all the time. In terms of the only

two nonfiction narratives of Chinese South Africans, one is a memoir of a Chinese family in Johannesburg while the other one tells his family stories which happened in Johannesburg, Pretoria, and China. That is, stories of Chinese South Africans outside Johannesburg have never been told. ,.

Before 1994, South Africa consisted of four provinces (Cape, Natal, Transvaal, and Orange Free State). Although the four provinces had the same aim to limit the development of the non-whites, including the Chinese, there were many differences when it came to the policy and its implementation, as a result of which, the life experiences of the Chinese in different provinces are not the same, which makes writing stories of Chinese South Africans who live outside of Transvaal, especially Johannesburg a thing of value. What is more, as to the two Chinese ethnic groups in South Africa, most Cantonese are in Transvaal while the Moiyeane (or Hakka) predominate in the coastal areas such as Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. The difference between the two ethnic groups and their distribution in South Africa add to the rationale of writing stories of this Chinese South African community in Port Elizabeth.

Fourth, the stories in this long-form are told from the perspective of a Chinese from mainland China, which, to the best of my knowledge, is the first try. At the moment, authors of works on Chinese South Africans fall into two categories: non-Chinese such as Karen Leigh Harris and Yoon Jung Park who dedicate to researches on history and identification; South African Chinese such as Melanie Yap, Dianne Leong Man, Darryl Accone and Ufrieda Ho who pay attention to the history of Chinese in South Africa and Chinese South African narrative stories. To make it simple, the former writes from the perspective of outsiders while the later writes as insiders.

Belonging to the same ethnicity but growing up in different cultures, I have something in common with and something different from Chinese South Africans simultaneously, which provides me an advantage of being free to “advance” or “retreat” when writing their stories. On the one hand, the Chinese in South Africa used to be unwilling to proffer information to researchers in order not to draw attention and bring about negative consequences in a society of racism (Yap and Man, 1996). Though the old era has ended, Chinese are still not very talkative or expressive to the outsiders. As we are all dragon sons and daughters who keep certain Chinese values and traditions, it is easier for me to get access to and integrate into the community to observe and immerse, as well as to better understand them in some aspects compared with the non-Chinese researchers. On the other hand, I can easily discern and understand the group in terms of their Chineseness. My position makes it possible to examine the community from the dual perspective of Chinese and Western cultures, which contributes to portraying the community from a more comprehensive image. Meanwhile, not an insider, it is possible for me to be objective, neutral and not too emotional in writing some painful issues like experiences of racial discrimination.

Lastly, as a minuscule group inactive in political and social affairs, Chinese South Africans are unknown to the homeland and invisible in the host country. A lack of

coverage, reporting and documenting makes them a mysterious group. Most of my Chinese compatriots in the remote eastern hemisphere do not even know such a group in the world while lots of my South African friends tell me they know there are Chinese South Africans in the country, but do not know much about the group. As for the only two narratives mentioned above, one covers a period from 1911 to 2001 while the other one also mainly tells stories happened in the 20th century. Years have passed and how are the Chinese South Africans now? What is their life like in the country after the first non-racial general election of 1994? Are there any influences on them after the People's Republic of China established diplomatic relationship with South Africa? It is necessary to update the stories of the group in the new century. In an era when the communication between China and South Africa becomes much closer, the number of readers from both China and South Africa who are interested in this specific group of Chinese South Africans is potentially larger and is expected to rise in the future. It is the right time to do this research at this moment, which adds value to enhancing the mutual understanding between people of the two countries.

In a word, unlike the previous works, either personal memoir, family story or academic literature that regards Chinese South Africans as a whole, this nonfiction narrative for the first time turns the pen point to a specific and distinctive Chinese South African community and fills a gap in this subject. Written from the perspective of a mainland Chinese, which has never happened before, this work is expected to bring insights and reflections to the topic of overseas Chinese in South Africa. Stories dug out and written in this narrative also enrich the relatively scarce historical material on Chinese South Africans.

4.2 On the Title: “The Sea Wind is Still Blowing”

Every time when I think of the old days when the forefathers of Chinese South Africans came a long way from China to South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, a scene flashes across my mind unconsciously: A ship carrying thousands of people was sailing lonely in the vast Indian Ocean, from sunrise to sunset, day after day. What accompanied it was the sea wind only, blowing sometimes mildly, sometimes wildly, taking the Chinese men on the ship back home in the poor villages in China, or to the uncertain future on the southern African continent they were sailing to, in daytime and midnight, in memories and dreams. This is how the title “The sea wind is still blowing” comes from at the very beginning.

The Chinese community in Port Elizabeth has inextricable relations with the sea in the physical sense. They came across the seas to arrive in South Africa, settled in a city by the sea and, however, were not allowed to fully enjoy the seaside life for a long time during Apartheid in the country. I guess the sea must mean something to them.

To understand it in a deeper way, “The sea wind is still blowing” has three implications. First, it means Chinese South Africans are still living and prospering

in the country, generation after generation, 150 years after the first day when their forefathers arrived at the continent. Second, it means Chinese culture and Chinese values still have influences on them, after a long time of active adaptation and passive assimilation to the local culture. They are still people with yellow skin labelled as Chinese. Third, it also means changes are happening all the time. The sea is still the same sea and the wind is still blowing like before. However, things have changed a lot and are changing as time goes by. What will happen to the Chinese community? Where and how is the future of them? No one knows. Just let the sea wind blow and let time go and finally, we will see.

4.3 Personal Motivation

Choosing this topic as the theme of my master's long-form was not a whim but a relatively long process, along with contingency and, luckiness.

Overseas Chinese (Huaren in Chinese language) used to be a group far from my life. In my impression, the term Huaren belonged not to real life but to the television program and books. It appeared in the annual CCTV (Chinese Central Television) Spring Festival Evening Gala when the hosts say "We also send Spring Festival's greetings to all the overseas Huaren and ..."; in news report: "the overseas Huaren celebrated Hong Kong's return to China" or "the overseas Huaren donated actively to the victims in the Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan province", which always flashed across my eyes and slipped away from my ears in no seconds. I had no idea of this group of people. Neither was I interested in them because it seemed to me that they were from another world.

Born and raised up in Confucius' hometown—Shandong province in northern China, where local people were *Antu Zhongqian* (being content with native land and do not want to move to other places) as a result of the deep influence of Confucianism advocating "When your parents are alive, do not travel far" (quotes from *Lunyu* by Confucius), I have never seen or heard stories of people in my extended family or in my town moving to other countries in the old days when China was very undeveloped. I could not imagine that people would travel tens of thousands of kilometres to a remote country with a totally different culture to make a living in a time when both transportation and communication were terribly poor. Why and how did they do that? What happened to them afterward? Quite a few questions intrigued me when I, for the first time, "encountered" this topic in South Africa.

I never thought I would have anything to do with overseas Chinese until I met one in Johannesburg in December 2018, the year when I resigned from my job as a journalist in Beijing and reunited with my husband who was working in South Africa. It was a sunny Saturday morning when I came across Jonathan in a park in Emmarentia after I finished a parkrun in Albert farm. Having come to that area several times before but never encountered any Chinese, the moment I saw a man with a Chinese face (Jonathan was walking his three dogs in the park), I went straight to him and said hello in mandarin before he told me he was a third-generation Chinese South African and could not speak any mandarin.

This was the first time I met a Chinese South African face-to-face in my life. In the short chat, I was attracted by the words “Port Elizabeth; third generation; grandfather; the beginning of the twentieth century...” in the brief introduction of himself and his family. Finding that I was interested in the topic and wanted to know more, Jonathan said I could talk to his father who was a first-generation South Africa-born Chinese. It was at that moment that I was aware that some stories might be there.

Shortly after the encounter, Jonathan wrote me an email with his father’s contact and a recommendation of two books on Chinese South Africans. One is *Colour, Confusion and Concessions: The history of the Chinese in South Africa* by Melanie Yap and Dianne Leong Man and the other is *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa* by Yoon Jung Park, both of which played an indispensable role in providing background information and references in the writing of this long-form project.

A few days later, I visited Jonathan’s father Jerry in a retirement community in Johannesburg. After talking for nearly three hours that day with the then 81-year-old first-generation South Africa-born Chinese (also the second generation Chinese South African) who was born and spent nearly all of his life in Port Elizabeth, I started to walk into what I used to think of as “another world” of overseas Chinese. When I left, Jerry gave me the book *Colour, Confusion and Concessions: The history of the Chinese in South Africa* which was no longer published again and lent me the book *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa* to read and introduced me to one of his friend in Cape Town, whom I met in January 2019 and kept frequent communication via email ever since. I also got in touch with and talked to Melanie Yap, one of the authors of the book *Colour, Confusion and Concessions* and she helped me to connect with the Chinese community leader in Port Elizabeth. I went to Port Elizabeth in May 2019 for the first time and was warmly welcomed by the community members. The courteous, friendly and hospitable people helped me a lot in collecting information, conducting interviews and visiting places. Joining them for dinner, taking part in church services, attending funerals and so on, I was getting closer and closer to them as a person from outside the community. Then I found myself in an advantageous position to explore and record the stories of this community.

I always felt that there was a mysterious power that somehow guided me little by little to this topic which I never thought of before. If I did not go parkrun that day...if I did not go to the park nearby after it....if I did not meet Jonathan but someone else...if Jonathan’s father was not so talkative....I do not think I will be writing this thesis at this moment if anything in this link is missing. I sometimes think it is destiny to meet these people in my life and have the chance to write their stories and in Chinese language, we call it Yuanfen (predestined affinity).

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are limited studies on the topic of Chinese South Africans, which can be roughly divided into two categories: scholarly research and literary narrative

works. The former generally deal with the history of Chinese South Africans and topics on identity while the latter are nonfictional personal stories/memoirs. Authors of these works fall into two categories: non-Chinese such as Karen Leigh Harris, Yoon Jung Park and Linda Human who dedicate to researches on history and identification, and Chinese South Africans such as Melanie Yap, Dianne Leong Man, Darryl Accone and Ufieda Ho who pay attention to the history as well as narrative stories of Chinese South Africans. Simply put, the former writes from the perspective of outsiders while the latter writes as insiders.

In this section, I will firstly review the scholarly works and narrative works separately. Then, as this program is a nonfiction narrative, I will discuss the literature on literary nonfiction journalism/new journalism as a genre, as well as probe into the application of reasonable imagination/reconstruction of facts in nonfiction writing that blur the boundary between fiction and nonfiction.

5.1 Literature on Chinese South Africans

Referring to Chinese South Africans² discussed in this long-form project, only a few researchers specialize in this area and produce a finite quantity of studies.

The Chinese people of South Africa: Freewheeling on the fringes, a sociological study that appeared in 1984, was the first published academic treatise focusing on Chinese South Africans (Karris, 2009). The author Linda Human looks at the lifestyle and position of the Chinese in order to evaluate how much Chineseness they still keep, especially the traditional Chinese culture (Karris, 2009). Human (1984) finds that Chinese still hold a Chinese value though their way of life has been westernized. By comparing the Chinese in South Africa with those in the USA and Britain, he concludes that “their position differs markedly from their overseas counterparts: ‘paradoxically’ they have ‘the least equality (in terms of legal status) with, but the greatest amount of assimilation into, the ‘host’ society of possibly many of the communities of Chinese people resident abroad”.

No national histories or historiography publications paid attention to Chinese South Africans before the mid-1990s (Worden 1994; Thompson 2001). Karris (1998) attributes this to four reasons: a white historical writing tradition, the small number of the Chinese population, a paucity of research material and the community’s choice to maintain a low profile in a racist country.

Now, studies on the group mainly focus on history and identity. Melanie Yap and Dianne Leong Man, both third-generation Chinese South Africans, are pioneers in this field. Commissioned by the Transvaal Chinese Association (TCA) in 1988, they spent 9 years completing the monograph *Colour, Confusion and Concessions: The History of the Chinese in South Africa* under the South African Chinese History

² This Chinese group are made up of the descendants of the independent immigrants who arrived in the country from the 1870 onwards, with approximately 10,000-12,000 second-, third-, fourth and even fifth-generation of Chinese South Africans (Park, 2011, p.119), as is mentioned in the “Introduction” section.

Project, which was funded and supported by the Chinese organization as well as individuals in the country (Yap and Man, 1996). With the intention to write “the first comprehensive record of the Chinese in South Africa from the earliest times to present”, the book uses a chronological approach and covers the period from the arrival of Chinese in the Cape from 1660 to the new era in the 1990s (Yap and Man, 1996). Ten of the thirteen parts of the book deal with Chinese South Africans with the other three parts pay attention to the Chinese exiles and convicts, the indentured Chinese labourers, etc. This book provides detailed accounts of the Chinese South African community activities and developments in different regions and across time periods. With a great deal of data, newspaper references, private pictures and anecdotes, the book gives an outline of the historical development of Chinese South Africans, including why Chinese came to South Africa, who they were, how they developed in different areas, the various immigrations acts concerning Chinese, the influence of discrimination and Apartheid on them and their responses, Chinese associations, Chinese schools and so on. However, as neither Yap nor Man is a historian³, the book, though called the history of the Chinese in South Africa, is not strictly a historical study (Yap and Man, 1996). According to the authors, it is “a somewhat introspective account of the Chinese people in South Africa...attention is directed largely at the Chinese and those historical developments which shaped the community” and “serve as a record of the activities of the communities in each area” (Yap and Man, 1996). Karen Leigh Harris⁴ (1997) regards the authors’ intention of “recording the names and contributions of as many community members as possible” as the greatest defect, which, in her opinion, renders the book sometimes a who’s who as well as undermines its historical value.

As a historian, Harris studies the history of the Chinese in South Africa within a South African social context. She (1998) argues that in a society of South Africa where race is always emphasized when talking about history (Marks and Trapido, 1987; Beinart and Dubow, 1995), a new angle is added to the binary structure of black-white by the Chinese people. This argument was reiterated by her in 2009: “A study of their place within South African society, whether it is historical, literary or sociological, tends to divert the thrust away from the age-old binary perception of South Africa in starkly black and white terms. It adds a new dimension to an understanding of the intergroup relations as well as other societal processes fundamental to the complex weave of South African society” (Harris, 2009). She also applies a comparative perspective including a comparison with overseas Chinese in other countries such as the United States, Australia and a comparison with other Asian South African community such as

³ Yap is a freelance editor and proofreader and Man is a librarian at University of the Witwatersrand. Also, Yap was the vice-chairperson of the TCA while Man was “very involved in community activities” (Yap and Man, 1996).

⁴ Karen Leigh Harris is a full professor in the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies lecturing in history as well as heritage and cultural tourism at University of Pretoria.
<https://www.up.ac.za/historical-heritage-studies/article/2362230/professor-karen-harris->

the Indian, which makes it possible to better assess the Chinese South African experiences and developments (Harris, 1998). Her doctoral dissertation “A history of the Chinese in South Africa to 1910” covers a period from 1660 when the first Chinese arrived at the Cape to 1910 when the new Union government was formed, during which time, the period from the 1870s to 1910s was related closely to Chinese South Africans and marked the early history of this group (Harris, 1998). She (1998) presents the lifestyle of the free Chinese immigrants as traders, laundries, shopkeepers and so on and holds the view that the negative behaviour of the indentured Chinese labours rendered the free Chinese to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1904 while the large-scale influx of the other Asians (Indians) into the then Transvaal as merchants who took some business away from the whites subjected the Chinese to an unwelcome situation of stringent regulations. She argues that the history of Chinese South Africans by 1912 had laid the pattern for the future history of this group: a minor role in South African politics; a limbo position as a result of being neither white nor black in a society structured by race and colour (Karris, 1998).

Researches carried out by Yoon Jung Park, a Korean American who once studied in South Africa, mainly deal with the identity construction of the Chinese community in South Africa. She examines this topic in detail in the book *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa*, which is based on her doctoral thesis and her other researches. She points out that the ethnical, racial and national identities of Chinese change over time and “developed largely in response to Apartheid” (Park, 2009). She makes clear the reasons contributing to identity construction with an emphasis on the role of China, both political and cultural, the real and imagined, in constructing the Chinese South African identities (Park, 2009; Harris, 2009). She argues that “their ‘experience of exclusion’ made them ‘for at least three generations’ ‘look to mainland China as home and cling to an increasingly distant and mythological China’, concluding that China act as a place of belonging and ‘a peg upon which they could hang their identity’” (Park, 2009; Harris, 2009). Harris regards this as a valuable finding which is gained through Park’s insights and her close and perceptive interactions with the Chinese South African community (2009). Focusing on tangents of identity, minority and cultures of Chinese South Africans, Park’s studies differ significantly from other researches dealing with historical issues (Harris, 2009). Meanwhile, with an inclusion of 77 first-hand interviews of Chinese South Africans and 141 completed questionnaires, the research also serve as a useful database for future studies (Harris, 2009).

5.2 The Two Narratives on Chinese South Africans

Other than studies discussed above, Darryl Accone’s *All under heaven: The story of a Chinese family in South Africa* and Ufrieda Ho’s *Paper Sons and Daughters: Growing Up Chinese in South Africa* also touches on the Chinese South African history and identity, however, in the form of literary nonfiction narrative. Accone’s work tells the story of three generations of his Chinese South African family. The story began from the early 20th century when his great grandfather left a rural village in China for the gold mountain in South Africa and ended up

with her mother's generation in the first year of the 21st century (Yen, 2005). Ho's memoir is on her personal story growing up in a Chinese family in Johannesburg. The story spans from the 1950s when her parents came to South Africa separately as stowaways, to the new era of the country after the 1994 election. The two narratives will be reviewed from the following four aspects.

First, both works mentioned their families' coming from China to South Africa, at different times. Accone's great grandfather came in 1911 as a herbalist to work for the Chinese in Johannesburg, the motivation behind which is the "gold rush" (Accone, 2004) while Ho's father came in the 1950s when a new China had already been established but was in extreme poverty. Ho's father came as an orphan sponsored by his fellow countrymen to make a living in South Africa. All these descriptions, in fact, point to the reasons and background of Chinese immigration to South Africa.

Second, they both show the life of Chinese, telling how they managed to settle down, pulled through during Apartheid and adapted to the local society. Every family life story told is a microcosm and a tangent of the history of Chinese South Africans, through which we can possibly piece together a picture of the whole group. Accone's grandfather was a shopkeeper, the work most Chinese people were up to. It echoes the era when there were exclusions and restrictions on Chinese thus they could only take up occupations like trader, shopkeeper, laundryman and so on. This also explains why Ho's father became a fahfee man, who ran a small-time numbers game in the black townships after he arrived at Johannesburg. Though it is illegal, he had no other choice, being a young Chinese man who could not speak English and had no money to run a business. In writing this, Ho shows the hardships of her family managing to survive in the country, which was commonly seen among the Chinese community members.

Third, identity is an important theme throughout the two works. They both write much about Chinese elements including food, rituals, superstitions, social activities etc., via which we can see the Chinese identity was rooted in their life and was imparted a "sense of being a 'people' with historical roots and destinies outside the time/space of the host nation" (Clifford, 1997, quoted in Ang, 2003). Yen (2005) regards Accone's "detailed and almost idyllic descriptions" of the natural life in rural China as "an appeal to origins, 'roots' or ancestry as a basis for 'Chineseness'". Park (2009) proposes that Apartheid and the discriminations Chinese suffered in South Africa reinforced their sense of Chinese identity to a certain degree, which, was also reflected in the two books. Their works both touch on the question "what does it mean to call oneself 'Chinese' in South Africa?" (Yen, 2005), which is significant to Chinese South Africans, but even today there are no explicit and standard answers yet.

Last, there are topics the two books do not explore, among which are the Group Area Act and its effect on Chinese. One of the reasons that the two writers do not write much about Group Area Act might be that there was no such area established in Johannesburg. As for identity, they discuss from the Chinese South Africans' perspective, which makes sense but not enough. As it is a topic on China,

Chinese and Chineseness, an added angle from a native Chinese is helpful. This narrative *The Sea Wind is Still Blowing* intends to contribute some perceptions of these aspects.

5.3 Literature on Narrative Nonfiction

5.3.1 Narrative Nonfiction and Narrative in South Africa

Narrative nonfiction, also referred to as creative nonfiction, literary nonfiction, literary narrative, literary journalism, and new journalism, could be traced to writings of some American journalists during 1960s to 1970s, a time when “journalists began to discover the devices that gave the realistic novel its unique power”, variously known as its “immediacy”, its “concrete reality,” its “emotional involvement,” its “gripping” or “absorbing” quality (Wolfe, 1972). As the representative personage of this writing movement, Tom Wolfe (1973) emphasizes the literary qualities of new journalism and regards it as a new literary genre that “consumes devices” from all manners of prose, journalism and fiction included. He makes the concept clear by expounding the writing devices used in this genre: scene by scene construction, dialogues, third-person point of view and symbolic details such as everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing etc. (1972). In Wolfe (1972)’s opinion, it is mainly from these devices that the extraordinary power of nonfiction derives.

Barbara Lounsberry’s description well points out the two key elements of narrative nonfiction: in terms of the content, it is fact-based and in terms of the writing style, it is literary. “Verifiable subject matter and exhaustive research guarantee the nonfiction side of literary nonfiction; the narrative form and structure disclose the writer’s artistry; finally its polished language reveals that the goal all along has been literature” (Barbara, 1990). For people who are caught up with the different names “literary nonfiction” , “creative nonfiction” , “new journalism” and tried to distinguish one from another with an answer, the South African narrative nonfiction writer Antjie Krog said she was *deurmekaar* (an Afrikaans word that means confused, disorganized, messed) whenever she was asked the question (Brown and Krog, 2011). She indirectly responded to the question in a public panel discussion with an answer borrowed from a book buyer: “apart from biography and memoirs, we have only two main rubrics – nonfiction and literary nonfiction. By the latter, we simply mean that it is better written than nonfiction, more skill, more craft, more literary devices and better language” (Brown and Krog, 2011). In this sense, Krog tends to think that there are no essential distinctions among the various names.

Different from the four devices proposed by Wolfe, Krog depends on three devices in narrative nonfiction writing: a literary form to tell the nonfiction; a more imaginative language; and the pronoun ‘I’ (Brown and Krog, 2011). Obviously, the primary difference lies in the point of view. The third-person point of view, in Wolfe’s eyes, “presents every scene to the reader through the eyes of a particular character, giving the reader the feeling of being inside the character’s mind and experiencing the emotional reality of the scene as he

experiences it" (1972) while the first-person point of view, in Krog's opinion, "immediately creates space allowing for an individual take on facts, a deeper reading and interpretation of the nonfictional 'reality'" (Brown and Krog, 2011). She (2011) further argues that the "I" also allows the author's personal access to facts as well as assists the reader to be part of the story by imagining that he/she is the "I", who would never abandon the readers. In my view, both points of view make sense if they are applied felicitously to the stories told.

To define narrative nonfiction, the role of "scenes" cannot be ignored. Lounsberry (1990) makes the point that the use of "scenes" is "inspired" and "crucial", which can "bring the reader face to face with events, personalities, places and experiences in the narrative". Danelle van Zyl-Hermann (2015) goes even further to assert it as "the trademark of creative nonfiction".

Scholars also explain narrative nonfiction by interpreting the boundary between nonfiction and fiction. However, some discard the words "binary" or "boundary" and claim it as a more "complicated" and "creative" space in which literary nonfiction lives, where its proximity to the novel exists and the exchanges between the two can happen (Clingman, 2012; Barnard, 2012; Brown and Krog, 2011; Nixon, 2012; van Zyl-Hermann, 2015).

Gianna Moscardo (2010) points out the role of story-telling in triggering audience engagement, discussion and interpretation as well as stimulating understanding and communication, based on which, Stevenson (2019) highlights that true stories can be used to share diverse experiences and encourage cross-culture communication and critical reflection. If we replace "story-telling" and "true stories" with narrative nonfiction, the same holds right. Considering the features of narrative nonfiction mentioned above, I propose that, narrative nonfiction enjoys a unique advantage in facilitating reader engagement, discussion and interpretation, documenting and presenting the social reality as well as stimulating social can cross-cultural communication, understanding and reflection. What is more incomparable is it makes the three things mentioned above happen at the same time, enabling it a perfect genre to present true stories especially in multi-culture and multi-racial societies with barriers and a lack of understanding among people. I think this is the reason why Duncan Brown (2011) remarks that narrative nonfiction "has become in a sense 'the genre' of South African writing" in the post-Apartheid years.

The last decade has seen a rapid development of narrative nonfiction in South Africa with a considerable amount of compelling works produced by authors like Panashe Chigumadzi, Jacob Dlamini, Mark Gevisser, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Antjie Krog, Sisonke Msimang "exploring the country's ongoing transition with great ambition, texture and risk" (Twidle, 2019). In post-Apartheid era, a widespread viewpoint is that literary fiction has given way to nonfiction in accounting for the social situation of the country in terms of "seriousness, originality and capacity" and emphasis on the "reality hunger" in South African literary culture was broadly claimed (Twidle, 2012), which in fact echoes Krog's argument that "nonfiction remains the most appropriate mode of exploring

contemporary South African society”, a country where apartness and inequality is always there and still keeps working (Brown and Krog, 2011). She also suggests that in a society like South Africa with so many stories untold, people who know the story will feel they are obliged to fill the gap because “you only begin to write when you come across something in your life that you find nobody has written or has written about how you see it” (Brown and Krog, 2011). This explains to some degree the reason South African society becomes fertile soil to breed narrative nonfiction as it is rich in raw material: plenty of untold stories that are worth telling. It is in this context that my long-form of the stories of Chinese South Africans comes into being and makes sense.

5.3.2 How to View the Fictional Content in Narrative Nonfiction?

When reading some narrative literary works of Chinese migration family stories, such as *All Under Heaven: The Story of a Chinese Family in South Africa* by Darryl Accone and *On Gold Mountain: The One-Hundred-Year Odyssey of My Chinese-American Family* by Lisa See, I find both the two are blends of facts and reconstructed facts: while the whole story is based mainly on facts, it also contains a lot of detailed dialogues, scenes and psychological description of the author’s grandparents or even great grandparents, which obviously are all reasonable imagination, in other words, reconstructed facts that is fictional as it is impossible for the authors to get those detailed details from their forefathers. So, are these narratives still nonfiction? Tom Wolfe (1996) used to make a very well-known and classic statement on narrative nonfiction: “it enjoys an advantage so obvious, so built-in, one almost forgets what a power it has: the simple fact that the reader knows all this actually happened, which enables the readers an absolute deep engagement into the story”. This statement, in fact, points out that the essence of nonfiction is fact and the marvellous thing about narrative nonfiction is that it is not fictional.

So, the first question is: How to view the fictional content in narrative nonfiction?

Duncan Brown and Antjie Krog (South African nonfiction writer) had a dialogue on this question in 2011. The latter applies fiction-making in some of her nonfiction narratives. She thinks that the main body and the core idea of a story must be true, however, “the rest can be negotiated by fictional elements”, such as putting together events that did not actually happen together through “cut and paste” (Brown and Krog, 2011). Besides, scenes and dialogues reconstruction, adjusting the time order of things, assumptions and exaggeration are also common means of reasonable imagination used in narrative nonfiction (Krog, 1998). According to Annjeanette Wiese (2015), any selection and rearrangement of the events are fiction because it inevitably transforms the original fact, creating a new reference world instead of presenting the existing one. Brown (2011) proposed a question, if fiction is included, the “advantage” of narrative nonfiction that readers know all the stories told have actually happened will not hold. As a reply, Krog (2011) argues that the fictionalizations she uses do not damage the “inherent content” and the imagination such as the “time breach” is

not a problem if the “manipulation” can help keep the “integrity” of the story she wants to tell.

In narrative nonfiction written from the first-person point of view, the word “I”, on the one hand, underlines the authenticity of the story told (Mineke Schipper, 2000); on the other hand, it also conveys a message to the readers: “things are as this ‘I’ remembers and tells them” (Brown and Krog, 2011). A meaning behind the word “I” is that the facts are not the objective facts, but subjective facts selected by “I”, seen from my perspective and shaped by my state of mind, which is happening when the author is deciding what to write, what to leave, which angle and word to use, and how to write (Krog, 2011). The moment when the story is written, the objective fact and reality has already been affected and tampered (Brown and Krog, 2011). There are also possibilities that a writer may mishear or misunderstand others in an interview, or remember only part of the content, which will unavoidably lead to non-fact (Brown and Krog, 2011). Thus a 100% fact is hardly existence in narrative nonfiction writing.

The writers can never make up a story, but it is practicable to grasp the core fact while manipulating other elements in order to tell a good story (Brown and Krog, 2011). Just as Stevenson (2019) says, rather than imagining a story, narrative nonfiction is more like using imagination to tell a story.

5.3.3 The Boundary between Nonfiction and Fiction, and Reasonable Imagination

Based on the discussions above, here comes the second question: What is the boundary between fiction and nonfiction?

From the day narrative nonfiction was born, the so-called boundary between nonfiction and fiction blurs. Concerning the writing mode, narrative nonfiction consumes many devices and techniques used in fiction and mixes them with every other device known to prose (Wolfe, 1996) while regarding the content, there are fiction, imagination and rearrangement in narrative nonfiction. Fiction and narrative nonfiction bear too many similarities, both from outside and from inside.

One popular view is that we do not need to get caught up in the differentiation between fiction and nonfiction because the word “boundary” itself is not that suitable or accurate to describe the situation between fiction and nonfiction. Just as Clingman (2012) suggests, “If we see that boundary as a wall, we are left in the world of either-or: either it is fiction, or it is nonfiction, and never the twain shall meet. But if we see the boundary as the place of contiguity and crossing, the space of navigation, then different conceptual possibilities open up entirely.”

Some scholars tend to regard the nonfiction’s very proximity to fiction as a space full of “considerable challenge yet also possibility” (Clingman, 2012). In this space, various narrative writing techniques, both fictional and nonfictional, are drawn on, “refashioned and blurred into each other” (Twidle, 2012). Danelle van Zyl-Hermann (2015) indicates that this space is where literary nonfiction lives

and creativity comes. Barnard (2012) identifies with this opinion by saying that the boundary between fact and imagination, informative and aesthetic is permeable, and we must jump out of traps of those endless binaries and oppositions. He (2012) points out there is a willingness to cross conventional generic and disciplinary limits to play across different genres and modes in South African narrative writing. In the paper based on the dialogue *Creative Non-Fiction: A Conversation*, a point is made that South African creative nonfiction writing “makes its meanings at the unstable fault line of the literary and journalistic, the imaginative and the reportorial” (Brown & Krog, 2011). Twidle (2012) corroborates these views and says, fiction and nonfiction “have for a long time been in an unusually intense, intimate and one might even say constitutive dialogue with each other” in South Africa.

Many narratives have gone beyond the simple category of nonfiction or fiction and formed into a hybrid model, which combines various documentary modes including long-form analytic journalism and reportage; experiments in oral history, microhistory and archival reconstruction; life-writing, memoir, and the personal essay together, and makes them refashioned and blurred into each other (Clingman, 2012; Twidle, 2012). Hedley Twidle (2019) regards this popular writing form in South Africa as “new-nonfiction”,

All the content, either factual or imaginary, fiction or nonfiction, is in the service of expressing the theme and producing the meaning of the story told. In this sense, they are the same thing: writing materials. Just as Clingman (2012) says, let us not be too concerned about the category but focus on the writing, the story and, the meaning.

6. NARRATIVE APPROACH

6.1 Writing Style

“Tell me a fact and I will learn; tell me a truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.”

-Native American proverb

This long-form is written in the genre of narrative nonfiction, in which fictional devices and techniques such as dialogue reproducing, scene by scene construction, detail depicting, metaphor, flashback and a little reasonable imagination are adopted to make it more readable. To be more specific, it is a “hybrid-nonfiction”, a mixture of travelogue, profile, memoir, reportage, oral history and so on.

Narrative nonfiction has its advantages in telling true stories.

First, compared to fiction, narrative nonfiction is based on facts and always holds the power of truth while compared with history books and academic literatures, it is more vivid and interesting. Chinese South Africans are not numbers in the files of the immigration office; they cannot be defined by the general appellation

of “the Asians” or “the Chinese” under Apartheid policy; nor are they just the “research objects” in the academic researches. They are different individuals with various characters. However, in history books or academic works, the “people” are hidden behind the “events” or numbers as a flat shadow without a clear appearance, thus we can hardly see and feel a real three-dimensional person with specific appearance, character and emotions.

Second, the Chinese community in Port Elizabeth, as mentioned in the rationale part, have never been told before. Not only Chinese people but also South Africans, know little about it. Narrative nonfiction, with its descriptions, details, scenes and dialogues are more attractive, readable as well as much easier to understand can reach a wider range of readers. It provides useful information while triggering emotion, evoking thoughts and driving readers to reflect on real society issues.

6.2 Structure and Point of View

The narrative part consists of two sections. The first section is a family story told from the third-person point of view and includes 12 chapters written basically in a chronological order, covering a time period from 1934 to 2000.

The second section primarily employs the first-person point of view to tell my own experiences in the community, including what I see, what I hear and what I feel while the third-person point of view is also adopted to tell some personal stories of community members. The chapters in this section are not chronological but are driven by persons and places, which may seem loose, but are connected by inherent coherence. These mosaic themes compose a grand picture of the Chinese South African life and by telling personal stories, the fate of the group as a whole is also presented and better understood

In this section, the first-person point of view gives the readers a strong sense of participation, as if they are the “I” when reading the story. By combining images, tastes, sounds, smells, climates, feelings and emotions together, it facilitates readers’ engagement and immersion. Besides, it also indicates that the stories are based on my experience, observation and memory and told from my perspective, which means that they are very subjective with strong personal colour and they are selected facts which do not represent all the cases.

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Desktop Research

I have read literatures on the history of the Chinese South Africans, including the reason of migration, Apartheid and its influence on the Chinese, the Chinese community organizations, the education and religion as well as the identification.

I have also collected and read articles, podcasts and videos related to the topic on various kinds of media to enrich the research material, which supplemented the main sources in providing information and triggering writing inspiration. For

example, I watched a video on the topic of “paper sons” on YouTube, which is a panel discussion held by the Asian American and Asian Research Institute of the City University of New York discussing the history of “Paper Sons” and its impact on the Chinese community during the 20th Century in the United States. As the phenomenon of “paper sons and paper daughters” were also commonly seen among Chinese South Africans during the early days, this video is of great value in helping me to understand this special “product” that existed in a special era and social context.

7.2 Public Museums, Associations, and Personal Archives

I have been to the Port Elizabeth Chinese Association to have a look at the place itself as well as the material it keeps, including books, magazines, photos, old personal documents, activity records, minutes, community newspaper and posters etc.

I also went to South End Museum which was once a mix residential area home to Chinese, coloured, Indian and black during the pre-Apartheid time. Knowing the history of the South End helps me better understand the Group Area Act, which had a big influence on the Chinese community in Port Elizabeth.

I collected much information from private archives, including diaries, family photographs, autobiographies, old documents such as passport, identity card and so on and had taken pictures of them under permission. Luckily enough, two community members shared me with their written life memories (informal autobiographies), which incorporate many details of their life. I also got a copy of a diary written in Chinese by a Chinese woman who came to South Africa in 1934. I was also showed by the community members a copy of a passport issued in 1910 by the then Chinese government, a publication of the founding of the original Moiyeane organization and the gazettes of the then Chinese High School. All of them has never been published before and contains a lot of information.

7.3 Fieldwork Research: Observation and Immersion

I visited the community twice. The first time was in May 2019 and I spent a week there. Then I went again in July 2019 and stayed for five days.

During the stay, I visited all the sites related to the Chinese community, including churches, schools, cemeteries, people’s former houses, Chinese restaurants and the old port of Port Elizabeth where the Chinese went ashore in early days. I took part in various activities in the community, such as church services, a funeral and several dinners. Some community members showed me around in their old houses, their former shop locations and train stations where they took a train to school when they were children.

I went to Uitenhage twice, guided by two different Chinese who were born and grew up there. We went to the old houses of the Chinese people and talked to

two Chinese families who still live or have business there.

I visited a community member who now lives in Johannesburg and talked to him for several times and I also went to Cape Town to visit another community member. They are both main characters in my stories.

7.4 Interactions and Email Exchanges

I would rather use the word “interaction” to replace “interview”. Sometimes I do conduct interviews. For example, I interviewed the chairman of the Port Elizabeth Chinese Association to get basic knowledge about the community. However, most of the time, I just chatted with people in an informal way and in a casual atmosphere, which makes them relaxed and are much more willing to talk.

I keep frequent email correspondences with a community member since February 2019 and it is still happening now. Some of the content has been written in the long-form.

I conducted lots of face-to-face contacts with the community members, did extensive observations and immersed myself deeply in the community. I spent as much time as possible talking to them, doing things together or just staying with them, during which time, I did lots of observations of their appearance, expressions, actions, clothes and so on. I also paid attention to the food, the weather, the surroundings and the natural environment, which were all woven into the stories to add colour to the long-form. I took a lot of pictures and recorded many audios when necessary under their permission to help me remember as much details as possible. Most of the people I talked to are old ones who are more than 70 years old and apart from them, I also talked to several young Chinese South Africans to get essential information.

8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

8.1 Privacy and Partiality

I have gathered a lot of personal stories and some of them are very private. As is told before, the Chinese South African community in Kabega is a small one. People in the community are closely related and know each other well. It is easy for the community members to discern who is who in the personal stories. I only write after I get permission from the people concerned and once I write, I am very scrupulous to make sure what I write is accurate. For most of the people mentioned in the story, I use anonyms instead of real names, which does not interfere with the storytelling.

As to some controversial information I have collected, I weigh the advantages and disadvantages of presenting it. Sometimes I make small editing without changing the basic facts or stop where necessary before going into details. If there are any negatives impacts on the person who is being portrayed or quoted, I would rather not present the story in case courting troubles to them. This is the

reason I do not touch on political and some racial topics in the long-form. Excluding them from the writing is indeed a loss. Fortunately, it does not impair the articulation of the main theme of this long-form.

8.2 Subjectivity and Representation

Much content in this long-form is narrated from the first-person point of view, namely “I”. I am the narrator and I only write what I see, what I hear, what I feel and what I want to present to the readers, which is, inevitably, subjective. What the readers will be reading is not all the facts but part of them, which has been chosen and filtered by me, consciously or unconsciously. This is, in fact, a kind of representation, which is unavoidable in narrative nonfiction writing. Since I have been aware of this tendency, I make a conscious effort to be as objective as possible in choosing what to write and what not to, with the intention to balance all the aspects and to retell the stories as what they are.

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THE NARRATIVE LONG-FORM

SECTION I

ONCE UPON A TIME IN PORT ELIZABETH

---Stories of a Chinese South African Family in Port Elizabeth

When Ah Yuen and Ah Lan left the small village Sar Liu of Shueng Wah town in Kwangtung province, southeast China in 1934 and set foot on the vast land of "Namfeichou"⁵ in the Southern tip of African continent with a dream to start a new and prosperous life, what they did not think of was that, they would never have the chance to go back to their hometown again.

This was the beginning of all the stories.

1. The House at 37 Evatt Street

It was an ordinary Tuesday in October 1940, the Toms Family living at 37 Evatt Street, central Port Elizabeth was basking in the joy of having a new family member. Mrs. Toms just gave birth to a boy in the provincial hospital, a public one whose charges that the Toms family could afford and was just 2 kilometres away from home.

The baby was named Bryant Toms. Mr. and Mrs. Toms also gave him a Chinese name, Chi Kwan Wong, similar to his elder brother's, Chung Kwan Wong to conform to the old Chinese tradition of siblings sharing a word in their first names, especially for the males. Before this boy, the family had already got one boy and two girls, Stephen (Chung Kwan), Cassie and Kelly and soon after, Bryant would have a younger sister Diana. All the children were born within seven years, an intensive fertility which was commonly seen among Chinese people in those days.

The 37 Evatt Street house was a two-story Cape Dutch style white building with a round wavy gable top end, carved in the middle of which were two characters "AD 1901", most probably the year of construction. Having had gone through more than a century of strong sunlight and heavy wind and rain, the characters still sunk deeply into the gable and were clearly visible. Even seeing it for the first time, one might think "Wow, this one-hundred year old 'fellow' must have many stories to tell.

The building housed two families, Mr. Toms' and his 5th uncle's, twelve people in total. Mr. and Mrs. Toms and their five children once cramped in one small bedroom on the first floor.

The ground floor of the house was partitioned into three parts. In the middle was the front room, which was used to store hessian bags of grain for 5th uncle's

⁵ Namfeichou is South Africa in Cantonese.

grocery shop. There were maize, flour, rice, beans and poultry food, all neatly stacked on a wooden rack.

On the left was a foyer where a wooden stair leading up to the first floor that consisted of a landing and three bedrooms and on the right was a door leading to the kitchen outside. In this small double-story wooden building on an old black cast iron stove, Mrs. Toms used to make Siu Mai, Steamed Pork Dumplings, Stir Fry...all the hometown flavours, as well as baked cake and bread for the family. After supper, Mrs. Toms would boil water in a copper cistern and put a large galvanized basin on the kitchen floor for the children to bathe. Little Bryant used to bathe every night and when he finished, Mrs. Toms would always remind him, "make sure to dry your belly button, otherwise it would rot away". The little boy would be obedient and wipe the belly button carefully for an extra time.

Next to the kitchen was a big yard where there was a fowl run, which was rarely seen in local South Africans' houses. Mr. Toms once bought a pig and kept it in one of the cages originally reserved for ducks and he also stacked several wooden crates to keep pigeons. The toilet was at the far right corner of the yard. To use the toilet in the evenings was the most excruciating thing for the little kids like Bryant, as they were so scared to go outside to the dark yard without a single light. When they had to, they used a torch but still could not help imagining that the bogeyman was in the darkness and after they finished, they would run like a rabbit to get back into the room.

The distance from the building to the seaside was just no more than 500 meters. Later when Bryant and his brother moved out from the cramped room the whole family shared into another one, also on the first floor facing the sea, he inadvertently got a great panoramic view of Algoa Bay of India Ocean, with its semi-circular harbour and long beach that would turn golden at sunset. It was extremely beautiful on every fifteenth day of the month of lunar calendar, when the full moon shone on the calm water at night and made the sea a sparkling galaxy.

Little Bryant could hear clearly sometimes when the Castle Line Ship ploughed through the waters to make a sweeping U-turn before entering the harbour, especially at the quiet late night. Most of the time, he would fall asleep in the soft sound of the rippling sea waves and, with sweet dreams.

The larger room behind the entrance hall was the dining room where the two families had supper together. Bryant remembered that, his 5th grand uncle always enjoyed a small glass of homemade Commando Brandy with his meals.

A corrugated iron fence separated the building from the neighbours. On the left were Mr. Toy Quanson and his family. Adjacent to them lived Mr. Matty Toughy and his wife who gave piano lessons, with a coloured family living next door. On the right of the building was a small single room that housed a carpentry workshop, next to which was a Chinese eating house called Silver Lantern run by Sik Pak.

Mr. Pak's eating house had a yard covered by a corrugated iron roof, where there was a brick-lined pit for roasting pig and duck and a wood-burning stove to place the woks for stir-frying.

Friday afternoon was Mr. Pak's preparation day when he received the delivery of slaughtered pigs. He would lay the pig on a table, use a mallet and cleaver to slit it down the middle and spread out the carcass by tying steel rods to the four legs, after which, he would smear some Chinese five spices onto the carcass. Some time would be left for the meat to be marinated before it was lowered into the pit for roasting. During the several hours' roasting, Mr. Pak would periodically lift the carcass out of the pit to baste it in order to hold the flavour. When it was done and cut into small slices, it would be the famous Chinese dish, Cha Siu.

Apart from the roast pork, the deli also sold roast ducks, mouth-watering chicken fried in flour batter, steamed dumplings, stir-fries...all kinds of authentic Chinese food. Most of Mr. Pak's customers were the Chinese families in Port Elizabeth, making up a tiny community of around 2000 people back then.

For some years, members of the Wong clan from Uitenhage and Grahamstown would come to Port Elizabeth to gather with their fellow clan members to celebrate the Spring Harvest Festival every October, at which time they would sweep the Wong ancestors' graves, present flowers, offer food and white wines as well as burn incenses.

For the kids, the most exciting part of the clan get-together was the supper at Sik Pak's after all the commemoration activities. Years passed, the hearty and scrumptious Chinese dishes still hardly elude Bryant's memory: roast duck, roasted or boiled chicken, abalone on a bed of lettuce, steamed mushrooms filled with pork mince, chow mein, soup with vegetables in season and the important monk's vegetable stir-fry dish "Chai" all cooked to perfection.

In the old, cramped and not fully functional building at 37 Evatt Street, Bryant spent his carefree childhood. Several decades later in his seventies when he wrote about his past life, he still remembered holding the double bed and sofa in the small bedroom to learn to walk; playing table tennis on the dining table which was always extended to its maximum, and going to Mrs. Mariam Davids, a Moslem lady's house to play with her son after school. It was from all these trivial life scenes and all kinds of people living around that this first-generation South Africa-born Chinese boy's initial perception of the world came.

2. Ah Yuen and Mr. Toms

Mr. Toms came to South Africa for the first time as an eleven-year-old Chinese teenager called Ah Yuen in 1923, at which time his 5th uncle had already started a business in the then "gold country" and helped Mr. Toms to settle on the foreign land.

In October 1931, he borrowed money from 5th uncle to pay for a ship ticket to go back to China, mainly to search for a woman to marry, in consideration of the

scarcity of Chinese women in South Africa then. Marrying a woman of the same race and nationality meant that the blood lineage could be kept pure, which was deemed as a right thing traditionally and ethically in Chinese culture at that time.

Having stayed in the home village for more than two years, it was time for Ah Yuen to leave for South Africa again, a place where he thought the future lay, as he could not see any hope in his home country where cruel exploitation and successive years of tangled warfare among warlords threw people in utter poverty.

He waved goodbye to his parents and hometown Shueng Wah, a village of Shun Tuk county, Kwang Tung (in mandarin, the place pronounces as Shanghua, Shunde county, Guangdong) province in southern China and arrived at the port in Hong Kong on the first day of 1934. Other than hurrying on the way, nothing happened on that New Year's Day, let alone any celebrations. However, Ah Yuen felt happy and satisfied, for he was not alone sailing to the foreign country this time but was accompanied by his wife Ah Lan and their baby son, Chung Kwan (Stephen).

The next day on 2 Jan 1934, the young Chinese couple boarded the ship s/s Tjisondari of the JAVA-CHINA-JAPAN LIJN N.V. Company with their second-class passenger tickets. Setting sail from Hong Kong, the ship would transship at Batavia before reaching its destination, Port Elizabeth, a city on the south-east coast of South Africa.

In fact, the then Cape government in charge of Port Elizabeth did not welcome the foreigners, especially Asians and stated that only immediate family members of the people who had already settled in Port Elizabeth could gain entry into the city. Fortunately, Ah Yuen had already arranged with a fellow-villager, Lauson Toms, who owned a general dealer shop called Lauson Toms & Co. in Port Elizabeth to adopt him as a foster son. Lauson must have claimed he had more than two children when he first registered in the country, although actually he only had two sons and did not intend to produce more. Thus after bringing in both his sons, he still had an extra "paper"⁶, with which Ah Yuen claimed that he was another son of Lauson. It was also at that time, Ah Yuen changed his surname from Wong to Toms, to be consistent with the name on his paper.

We will never know what the second-class passengers' cabin in which Ah Yuen and his family stayed was like and how they spent the long boring time sailing on the sea. There might be some seasick time; there might be some homesick time, as they were getting further and further away from hometown; there might also be some time when Ah Yuen stood on the deck in the sea wind and dreamed of

⁶ A person with a "paper" means that he/she was the immediate family member of someone who had already settled in the host place and was allowed to get entry into the place. Under all the restrictions, it was difficult for ordinary Chinese people to enter the country and buying a paper became a way out. A lot of people had to give up their authentic names; some men were claimed as their brothers' sons; some women as their husbands' daughters. Those people who bought a paper to gain the entry qualification were called "paper sons" and "paper daughters".

the upcoming future in the country they called “Nam Fee Chow”.

After nearly 50 days voyage, they finally disembarked at the port of Port Elizabeth and successfully went through the customs inspection, with his new name, Ming Yuen Toms.

Then we got Mr. Toms, a young Chinese man who would start his new life with his dear wife and son, in the so-called gold country, also a place with dreadful discrimination towards non-white people. However, Ah Yuen did not concern much about the possible tribulations he and his young wife would have to face in this foreign country, believing that the flower of hope would surely blossom as long as they worked hard.

Ah Yuen set foot at the southern tip of the African continent for the second time on the day of 19 Feb 1934, at which time, he was 22 years old and Ah Lan was only 19. What Ah Yuen did not expect was that, he would never return to China again.

3. New Life Started

Upon arriving at Port Elizabeth, Ah Yuen and Ah Lan moved into the building at 37 Evatt Street to live with Ah Yuen’s 5th uncle. After a few days of rest, Ah Yuen went to help his 4th uncle in the shop at Korsten while Ah Lan began to work for 5th uncle in his general dealer shop, Lauson Toms & Co, which 5th uncle took over from Lauson Toms. The shop was situated at 58 Evatt Street, just diagonally opposite the house. When Bryant was a baby, Ah Lan would bring him to the shop and place him in a large cardboard carton in the shop office.

Evatt Street in the city central was also known as China Town of Port Elizabeth. Apart from many Chinese shops, the Moi Yean Commercial Association was also situated there.⁷ The ground floor of the Association building was a large hall with a wooden stage and was used as a cinema on Sunday afternoons and evenings playing latest films. The lounge on the first floor was furnished with Chinese black wood, which was not commonly seen in South Africa. In the first half of the century, the building served as the centre for community social activities such as festival get together, weddings, parties. Further down the street was a two-storey building where Mr. Ah Quat had his business on the first floor selling Chinese medicine and the ground floor was divided into two rooms for the Chinese men to gather on weekends to relax, playing Mah-jong or gambling.

Most of the commodities in 5th uncle’s shop were the necessities of daily life such as sugar, milk, bread, oil, flour, salt, rice, all kinds of fruits and vegetables, most of which were stocked in large bags. Ah Lan would re-package them into small portions in 1kg or 5kg before putting them on the shelves to sell.

⁷ As to the Chinese immigrants in South Africa in the early days, Moiyeaneese (Hakka people) predominated in the coastal areas such as Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and East London while most Cantonese resided in inland cities including Johannesburg, Pretoria and Kimberly (Yap and Man, 1996).

It was not strange that the shop also stocked some Chinese herbs as 5th uncle was one of the only two Chinese in Port Elizabeth who had extensive knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine. Unfortunately, years later after 5th uncle died, all the medicines were dumped as no one knew how to apply them. As the younger generation all used western medicine and no longer called for Chinese therapy, Chinese herbs gradually disappeared in Port Elizabeth.

5th uncle was well-educated. Apart from applying Chinese medicine, he could also write Chinese calligraphy. He used to teach his little son Rainly, who was at the similar age as Bryant, to write Chinese with a brush pen. They would sit at the rear of the shop so that 5th uncle could assist the customer when necessary. Bryant also tried to learn it together with Rainly for a short time before he found it too difficult to follow the Cantonese instructions and gave up. As Ah Lan was learning English, she usually talked with her children in English for practice, which partly explained why Bryant was not good at Cantonese.

Language barrier did afflict Ah Lan for quite some time. "Initially I intended to go to school to learn English. Before I left for South Africa, my father also told me that I would better go to school to learn something. However, I had not a penny in my pocket. What can I do?" When I read Ah Lan's diary written in Chinese in the Croxley notebook that already yellowed after more than eighty years, I could still feel her frustration in her words. Ah Lan learnt English mainly by talking to customers when working in the shop. "After supper, uncle, aunt and the children all go upstairs for rest, I would learn English alone in the dining room downstairs. As no one guides me, I can only learn how to write. When Ah Yuen came back from work at around 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening, he would teach me to read English words⁸". Gradually, Ah Lan learned more and more vocabulary and even acquired some Afrikaans from the Afrikaan customers.

Some Chinese people especially the old Chinese women worked in the shop for nearly all their life without saying a single English word. When a customer came, they used a stick to point the goods on the shelves to communicate. Meanwhile, they would always leave one piece of all articles on the shelves until they could restock.

Most early Chinese immigrants in South Africa made a living by running grocery shops in coloured or black areas. Some shopkeepers who had Muslim customers (most of them were carpenters, masons or tailors) would stock hardware, hand tools, brushes and paint. As the customers were mainly those who were not rich, the Chinese shopkeepers also did business on credit, which helped a lot in encouraging and maintaining customers.

After paying for board and lodging in 5th uncle's place and the money Ah Yuen borrowed for their passage, not much money was left from Ah Lan's meagre wage working in the shop. She saved hard for quite a long time and finally

⁸ Ah Yuen had learnt some English when he first arrived in Port Elizabeth from 1923 to 1931.

bought a “Singer” sewing machine, with which she made Chinese cheongsam (long coat that looks like a dress) out of silk material and knitted jerseys for a few Chinese women customers to supplement the income.

She practiced sewing by making clothes for herself out of the cotton sacks that the milling companies used for bagging cake or bread flour. She would first undo the stitching of the bag before washing it in ammonia to remove the brand name on it, be it S. A. Milling or Sasko.

Little Bryant used to spend hours watching Ah Lan measuring and drawing patterns on the grease paper, transferring the pattern onto the cloth and then cutting out the patterns. Years later when old Bryant closed his eyes, he could still hear mom’s machine sewing together the pieces of cloth in the rhythmic sound of the working foot treadle, sometimes rapidly, sometime slowly and sometimes, it sounded like a symphony.

4. When Dad Was There

The Chinese man in the photo looked young, handsome and gentle in his white neat shirt and black suit jacket. The suit looked a little dated but matched well with the tie in light colour. His hair, short on the sides and long at the top with a bouffant hairstyle, must have been carefully groomed with hair spray. He showed no facial expressions, but you can read some fortitude in his black eyes. The photo was pasted on a Chinese passport issued in 1933, and the man was the 21-year-old Ming Yuen Wong.

In an era when most ordinary Chinese men wore cotton Chinese-style long gown and a few upper-class men sometimes were dressed in Sun Yat Sen suit, a fancy western style suit made Ah Yuen look especially decent. He came to South Africa with his uncles for the first time at an age of only 11 and when he went back to China to get married, he was already 19. Eight years’ time was enough for a little Chinese boy to grow up into a young man who had to some extent assimilated into western lifestyle. By the time he took the passport photo in a studio in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, he had learnt to greet the customers by saying “How can I help you?” in English, been used to drinking a cup of coffee in the morning as well as known how to wear a nice tie to match the suit.

People like Ah Yuen, who were born in Kwang Tung, where ports were opened to the outside world for trade as early as 1840 after the First Opium War, had more chances to go abroad compared to people in the hinterland.

Ah Yuen firstly helped his 4th uncle in a shop in Korsten and then worked for another Chinese shopkeeper, Mr. Lee Ching, at which time the family moved from Evatt Street to live in Lee Ching’s semi-detached wood and iron house in South End. This is all we know about Ah Yuen’s work after he arrived in Port Elizabeth in 1934.

Ah Yuen loved motorcycles and was interested in photography. He was in possession of a double-lens reflex Voigtlander⁹ camera and liked taking pictures of the children when the family were out for fun. He had all the equipment to process the films and develop the prints but Bryant dose not recall seeing dad used them ever.

The children followed Ah Yuen in his footsteps, though to a lesser extent due to financial restraints. Stephen (Chung Kwan) tried to use the photography equipment after dad passed away. Years later, Bryant also bought himself a single-lens reflex Voigtlander camera with a filter lens, view finder and flashlight attachments and used it for many years.

Ah Yuen must have been strict to the children when concerning study. When Bryant was enrolled in the Chinese Primary School on Queen Street, Ah Yuen accompanied him to school on the first day. Bryant remembered clearly his father telling one of the teachers to beat him if he was naughty, firmly and pitilessly. Being strict, not approachable and wanting their children to be obedient was a typical image of a Chinese father. One of Bryant's friends, Jerry Ah Wah also recalled that he and the siblings must sit by the table at the same time at meal time, eat whatever was on the table with no grumble and not a word can be uttered. "If you did not behave as the parents told you, you would get knuckled stoutly on the forehead by your father's fingers, or a whipping with a feather duster, or your ears pulled, which was really sore."

During the balmy summer months, Ah Yuen used to take the family to the beach in his second-hand Studebaker sedan on Sundays after the shop was closed at 1:00pm. The so-called "beach" allocated to the Chinese people was in fact a seaside area which was mostly rocks and stones while the quality beaches with fine sands were all reserved for the white. Yet this did not dampen the family's good mood of enjoying the weekend. There bathed in the sun, played with the sand and went sea fishing. Armed with a reel of mom's white cotton thread and a bent pin, little Bryant would follow his father to fish after Ah Yuen cracked the shell of a small periwinkle and bait up for him. There was a diversity of fish in the Indian Ocean: tuna, red steenbras, snoek, yellow tail and so on. For Bryant, it was a both exciting and scary experience when catching a goby. The fish, with its large head, elongated tapering body and the ventral fins modified as a sucker, would struggle violently in its attempt to escape when hooked, which often scared Bryant and his siblings from touching the wet and slippery creature. It was also at that time when Bryant developed a fondness for the sea and fishing which he enjoys for most of his life.

As time went by, father's image got more and more blurred but the memories of the hot and dry sea breeze, the poor little struggling fish and the laughter of the

⁹ Voigtlander was a significant long-established company within the optics and photographic industry, headquartered in Braunschweig, Germany, and today continues as a trademark for a range of photographic products. (Source: Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voigt%C3%A4nder>)

family always find their places in Bryant's mind.

This was all Bryant remembered about his father, Ah Yuen. Then came the news of father's death. It was a Thursday afternoon. School was over and Bryant was in the shop with his mother, who was talking with a travelling salesman when the landlord Mr. Lee Ching phoned and broke the news. Before then, Ah Yuen had been coughing for a long time and did not regain his health after therapy.

The salesman was kind enough to drive Ah Lan and Bryant home. Ah Lan rushed into the house and found Ah Yuen on the bed, dead. Not knowing what to do, she hurriedly found the Tiger Balm and smeared onto Ah Yuen's forehead, frantically trying to revive his husband's life, which was obviously, in a vain attempt. It was 9 October 1950, just a few days before Bryant's 10th birthday.

Bryant never mentioned how sad, overwhelmed or even frightened when the little boy saw his father dead. Years and years later, when he was writing his life memory as an old man, he wrote down the words "Even at that a tender age I had developed a sense of responsibility after my father's death", "I had to be strong of character to survive in South Africa without a father's support and guidance".

Ah Yuen's funeral took place at Jones & Rice funeral parlour on Russel Road instead of a church, as he was not a Christian. Then he was buried in the North End Cemetery, where most of his Chinese compatriots were laid to rest.

Ah Yuen did not see the day when the flower of hope blossomed and left the world forever, at an age of 38. When this young man set foot on the continent of Africa, this episode was surely not in his anticipation. Not in Ah Lan's, either.

All of a sudden, Ah Lan became a widow, with 5 minor children. We had no idea how heart-stricken this young Chinese lady was when she lost her beloved life companion or how she went through the long dark nights. Tears might have overwhelmed her; distress might have afflicted her; despair might have besieged her. Nevertheless, life was continuing. She had no choice but to take whatever life had given her. She must become even stronger than before as she had 5 children to bring up.

Before Ah Yuen died, he and Ah Lan had taken over the 58 Evatt Street business from 5th uncle, who bought another two businesses in South End and North End and could not run 3 shops simultaneously. Here at 58 Evatt Street, Ah Lan started the rest of her life as a woman shopkeeper to support the family.

5. The Woman Shopkeeper

Like other Chinese shopkeepers, Ah Lan worked very hard from 7 o'clock in the morning to 5 o'clock in the afternoon for six and a half days a week. As the family could not afford the tuition fees for all the children, the eldest son Stephen had to drop out of school to help in the shop as a teenager. Bryant often felt sorry for Stephen. In Bryant's eyes, Stephen had dexterous hands and was able to make model airplanes out of balsa wood, which was very delicate.

Ah Lan's shop sold daily necessities, mainly foodstuff and a grey-and-white fat cat was kept in the shop to protect the food from being destroyed. Bryant often left an opening in one of the double door leading to the yard, so that the cat could move freely from the shop to the yard to enjoy some sunshine when the door were bolted closed.

Ah Lan used to import Chinese goods such as crockery, porcelain ornaments as well as some canned Chinese food to diversify commodities in the shop with the aid of an agent in Hong Kong who did the purchasing and arranged the shipping. As the porcelain was too easy to be broken during the transportation while the assurance agent was loath to provide insurance, Ah Lan faced high risk of a loss. This attempt of diversification in business ended before lasting for a long time.

The shop was flooded several times as the old building was in disrepair and one retaining wall was not waterproof. When it rained particularly hard, water flowing down the hill against which the building was built would seep through the wall and flow onto the concrete floor of the shop. Ah Lan had to leave the front doors open to drain off the water. Fortunately for her, most of the stock was on the shelves and there was not too much damage.

It was a rainy season and the rainwater leaked through the roof, causing a short circuit. Bryant went to Ernie, a young white apprentice electrician living nearby and asked him to help repair the circuit, but was told the white was not allowed to serve Chinese people according to law, which made him feel quite helpless and humiliated. Do not forget, it was a time called Apartheid.

Nearly seventy years later when Bryant recalled this, he said, "I felt so helpless at that stage of my life that I vowed that given an opportunity one day I would make sure that I work and learn as much as humanly possible. I think that experience gave me a lot of incentives."

Coming to Port Elizabeth as a young bride with only few clothes on her back, Ah Lan was "a very determined and resourceful woman" in Bryant's eyes.

During the short period of time when the family had taken over Lauson Toms & Co. but still lived on Walmer Road in South End, Ah Lan had to take the children to the shop by tram in the morning and back home in the evening. Shortly after, she realized that the travelling was both time and money consuming and decided to take out a loan to buy the 60 Evatt Street premise which was just opposite Lauson Toms & Co. on the other side of the road.

Once housing a butcher shop, the premise had a large window facing both Evatt Street and Hartman Road and was easily accessible by passers-by, an ideal place for business. Later, Ah Lan moved out from the dilapidated 58 Evatt Street building when the lease expired and re-opened Lauson Toms&Co on the ground floor of 60 Evatt Street building where shelves, partitions and other necessary alterations had already done by a carpenter with the help of a friend of Ah Lan and the first floor of housed the bedrooms where the family lived.

A small grocery shop was not enough to support a family of five children. Soon after, Ah Lan rented the building nextdoor, renovated it and used it as a café. According to law, the cafe could only trade after 5:00 p.m. Ah Lan would walk back home to prepare meals for the children, has her supper and come back to the cafe to relieve Stephen and Bryant for supper. Then the two boys would come back to the cafe to help until it was closed at 8:00pm while the girls stayed at home writing homework and reading books.

Recalling this period of time years later, Bryant said, "I used to feel very jealous of my classmates because they could go out in the evenings to enjoy themselves but I had to stay at home as I could only start doing my homework from 8:00 pm after I came back from the cafe", at which time, he was only 13 to 14 years old.

Later he got some time off on Monday nights. He went to practice table tennis to play at the league matches for a Chinese table tennis club called Blue Stars. Occasionally, he also accompanied his eldest brother Stephen to train weightlifting at Milo Pillay's gym on Parliament Street.

Without father in his teens, Bryant often went fishing with his buddies or by himself, usually during summer months on a breakwater wall. From the shop, it was an easy 15 minutes' walk down Hartman Road, Alice Street and crossing two streets before going over the railway lines to reach the wall, where there were lots of shads, one of South Africa's most popular angling fish.

Ah Lan did not approve of Bryant going out for fishing, worrying that he might drown or have an accident. Bryant did not obey his mother as he thought she just wanted him to work in the shop instead of wasting time trying to catch a fish.

On windy days, Bryant and his siblings would fly kites on the playground of Dagbreak School which was just behind the shop on a hill. The kites were not from a shop but made by themselves. Newspapers were used as the kite body; a hessian bag was stripped to make a ball of string; the kite tails were actually old rags. The homemade kites were commonly seen among Chinese kids who could not afford to buy one.

Another community member Jerry Ah Wah still remembers how to make a kite: "The first step is to get some reed, which we split into narrow strips. Next, we tie string around the tips of the reed to form a kite shape and then we mix bread flour with water to make a paste to act as glue. We then cut a newspaper just larger than the kite form to fold it around and paste it with the flour glue, and that is our kite."

The kites were simple, but the joy they brought to those kids seemed no less than that of any delicate ones sold in shops. "We had a lot of fun flying the kites. They were quite steady and easy to fly..." Jerry recalled with smile rippling on his wrinkled face, unwittingly.

At that time, Christianity had already spread in the Chinese community. Bryant remembers when he was about 11 to 13 years old, he used to lie in bed reluctant

to go to church when Charles Ah Kee and Rainlly Warson came on their bicycles knocking on the door on Sunday mornings. The two rode from their homes in Walmer Road and Forest Hill Road respectively. Rainlly had to ride further as his home was on the top of the steep hill, with his white Raleigh road bike. Ah Lan later bought this bike after Rainlly got a new one, ending Bryant's struggle with an old girl's bike that had lost its pedals.

Bryant went to church regularly and was baptized into Anglicanism¹⁰ when he was 16 years old at St. Francis Xavier Church in Brassel Street, North End, which the Chinese community raised funds and built for themselves. Later, a hall was built next to the church for functions and for members to play table tennis. After the introduction of the Group Area Act of 1950, the church was abandoned since the Chinese were forced to move to the designated area of Kabega Park, where they built a new church, still called St. Francis Xavier.

6. School Times

"When my father and mother took over the shop on Evatt Street and the Warson moved to a shop in Forest Hill Road, I then lost the companionship of Rainlly, who was my first playmate."

5th uncle's youngest child Rainlly Warson was a childhood friend of Bryant. The two, who were at the same age, grew up together since they were babies and had established deep friendship. The Warson family moved when Bryant was 7 to 8 years old. Before he was too sad and disappointed on Rainlly's move, it was already time to attend the Chinese Primary School with his two sisters Cassie and Kelly.

The school was built and funded by the Moi Yean¹¹ Commercial Association and only pupils whose parents were both Chinese could be accepted. It was not easy to find a teacher from China to teach in South Africa, but the school tried hard and finally employed one to give a two-hour Chinese lesson each afternoon, in order to guarantee the younger generation could maintain the Chinese identity by mastering their mother tongue. However, it turned out this plan did not work well.

The teacher would write down the Chinese characters on the blackboard and taught the pupils to pronounce, without using any phonetic symbols to help denote the pronunciation. Bryant had to write English phonetics next to the Chinese in an effort to memorize the pronunciation, however, not understanding the meanings most of the time. Since his mother could only speak Cantonese and

¹⁰ Anglicanism is a Western Christian tradition which developed from the practices, liturgy and identity of the Church of England following the English Reformation.(Source: Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglicanism>)

¹¹ Moiyeaneese, also known as Hakka people, were in the majority in Port Elizabeth compared to Cantonese. Hakka and Cantonese came from different areas of a same province, Guangdong, China.

was unable to practice with or help him, all he could do was mechanically writing the Chinese characters repetitively, not absorbing them though. It was not only Bryant, but all the other Chinese pupils had a struggling time “learning Mandarin by rote like a parrot”, as is said by one of them years later. After years of learning and self-studying after retiring, Bryant knew that China only got official phonetic symbols in late 1950s and their Mandarin teacher was apparently handicapped without this tool at his disposal. Bryant guessed that “he must have felt as frustrated as we were that we could not make any progress no matter how hard we all tried.”

After graduating from school, this generation seldom had a chance to speak Chinese, the pitiful knowledge of their mother tongue they had learnt with great endeavour, was soon given back to the teachers. Most of them lost the language, not to mention teaching their children or grandchildren to speak.

The school also hired several white teachers to teach the pupils English. As the teachers were mission sisters, the school education was interwoven with the spread of Christianity.

On Sundays, Bryant and his schoolmates would have religious classes in a classroom called the “Upper Room” and on every third Sundays, the schoolmates who were baptized would engage in religious activities such as singing church songs and making prayers, as what was done in a church. Bryant remembered that the altar had to be enclosed in a cupboard when the room was changed from a “church” back to an ordinary classroom.

Bryant was once put into a class in which the other students were about 3 years older than him as there were not enough younger pupils to form a separate grade, during which time, he did not learn anything because the teacher had no time to teach him. When he was finally sitting in a classroom of children of his own age several months later, he was very happy and enjoyed a lot playing marbles, hopscotch, pole to pole, rope skipping, cops and robbers, and hide-and-seek during the breaks with his little buddies.

When Bryant was around 9 years old, the family rented and moved to a house in South End. Bryant and his sisters attended a coloured school there and learnt to read, write and speak Afrikaans with his coloured, Indian and Muslim classmates. Had grown up among the coloured people on Evatt Street, Bryant did not feel out of place being the only Chinese student in class and spent a quite a happy year there.

In the following year, the family moved back to Evatt Street after taking over Lauson Toms & Co. Cassie was admitted to the Roman Catholic Assumption College in Gelvandale while Bryant, Kelly and Diana returned to the Chinese Primary School and reunited with their Chinese classmates. Located on Queen Street (now called Main Street), the school was around 1 kilometre from home and Bryant was able to walked containedly to and back from school every day.

However, for his friends Jerry Ah Wah, Laura and Andrian Wong and all other

pupils who lived in Uitenhage, where the small number of Chinese people did not warrant its own Chinese school, the way to the one in Port Elizabeth was nothing easy.

Every school day, they would catch the train from Uitenhage at 7:00am in the morning to the North End train station at 7:50am, where they had to walk another 4 to 5 kilometres before arriving at school, be it hot sunny days or rainy days. Jerry recalled that one day it was raining hard and he was soaked to the bone without a raincoat or an umbrella. One of his classmates Zoe Ah Ling borrowed his jersey to him and they became good friends ever since.

When they went to Chinese high school, the way was even longer. They would repeat the same route to Chinese Primary School first where they would transfer to Mr. Forley's bus to go to Chinese High School, about 12 kilometres away on Cape Road. Laura remembers that there was a very steep slope on Caywood Street and the old bus they took sometimes would fail to climb up. Then some of the pupils, mostly boys, had to get out of the bus to lighten the load and walked up the hill.

For Bryant, high school time were days learning a richer variety of courses, including English, arithmetic, math, history, chemistry and science...some of which were new, interesting and even novel.

He was intrigued by the interesting knowledge taught in the chemistry classes and was especially fascinated by the experiments conducted in the science laboratory. The surprises brought by the magic moments when charcoal was added into the copper oxide and turned the black powder into shiny red while the clear limewater became turbid in an instant, was nothing less than having a birthday party and receiving lots of gifts. Though, the latter never happened. He also enjoyed Mrs. Rous' history classes in which the well-travelled teacher would share the interesting stories during her numerous journeys, all the pupils sitting enraptured and listening to her carefully.

After school, Bryant had to help her mother in the grocery shop and did not have much time to study. However, in one academic year he made a decision to defeat all the others in his class and studied very late into night every day. Finally, only he and Lowman Ah Chong scored 100 in the year-end arithmetic test and even the "brains" of the class-Robert Wong did not get full marks. He wrote about this in his late seventy's: "The teacher, Mrs. Stear was surprised with joy to see me laugh out aloud with delight for the first time in a whole year. I must have been a pretty miserable person". He also wrote, "I always had a healthy respect for Lowman for he was a clever and determined person who always wants to excel in everything that he undertakes".

Bryant became interested in rugby and joined a coloured rugby club. On Saturday mornings, he would play matches with his teammates at the Adcock Sports Playground in Korsten, a mixed area where many Chinese and coloured people lived. He enjoyed the moment very much when breaking a super sweat with the ball in hand. During the Easter school holidays he and Rainlly would go

and stay at Charles' parent's country home in a town called Fairview, where the three teenagers would spend some time playing table tennis or cycling around the town after finishing the homework. Charles' mother, a beautiful and good-natured Chinese woman, would prepare delicious food and wait them back for supper.

Now he still remembered the English teacher Mr. Tyler Smith, who was harsh on the boys and would beat them with his cane if they spelt more than 3 words wrong in the spelling assignments; he never forgot Mrs. Rich, the mathematics teacher who was very kind that she drove Bryant home in her dark green Morris Minor one day when he was ill; he wanted to go back to the playground in Korsten which was now called Adcock Stadium and the lawn was much lusher and better-cut to play rugby again; he missed the food baked in the oven by Charles' mother, especially a dish which was tomato macaroni covered with cheese, mushroom and black pepper.

Day after day, the carefree and fulfilling high school time went fast and soon came the end of 1956, time for the Junior Certificate Examination. Bryant did quite well in the exam and by the time his results "First-class Pass" came out in January next year, he had already started learning Cantonese with a private tutor in Hong Kong, China.

7. Sailing on the Sea Which Father and Mother Came Across

It was 7 December, 1956 when Bryant went aboard the giant M/V Ruys of the Royal Interocean Lines¹² Company at the harbour of Port Elizabeth. It was his first sea trip of life and his destination was, China.

He did not remember saying "Goodbye" to the family, nor did he recall what mom told him before embarking at the dock. Soon he was in the ship and along with him were 5th uncle, Mr. Ah Kom, Mr. Manyan and his two younger sons and Mr. Ho Kee also with his two sons, who made up of a 9-person group of Chinese travellers from Port Elizabeth. For 5th uncle and Mr. Ah Kom, it was a journey back home and visiting the family while the two fathers were sending their sons to China to learn Chinese. In those days, when the Chinese people could afford the passage, many would take their children, precisely saying, sons, back to China usually for 3 to 5 years in order to learn the hometown language and cultures.

After several years of hard work in the shop, Ah Lan saved some money, which,

¹² Royal Interocean Lines, a company who had three ships sailing the line from South Africa to the east coast of South America and stopped at some ports in Asia on midway, including Hong Kong, was transformed from Java-China-Japan Lijn in 1947, to which company the ship Ah Yuen and An Lan boarded in 1934 to come to South Africa. All the three ships were broken up in 1968.

(Source: <http://www.timetableimages.com/maritime/images/ril.htm>
<http://www.timetableimages.com/maritime/images/ril62b.htm>)

however, could only afford one child to go back. As Stephen had already grown up having his own shop and was not able to leave, Bryant was the one.

The giant white M/V Ruys was in a slender shape when looking from a distance and in fact it had a spacious open-air upper deck for the first-class passengers. Others like Bryant with tourist class tickets, were obviously not allowed to go there and most of the time, they stayed in the cabin chatting, playing cards, sleeping while counting days.

When Bryant was lying on bed wearily in the ship that was sailing eastward to its first port of call East London, his Standard 8 classmates were enjoying the farewell party specifically held for them matric students at the Chinese High School.

How he wished he was there, eating, dancing and cheering, not having to endure the violent seasick as the ship just took a sharp turn out of the bay. He thought of the leather writing case, the farewell gift the classmates bought for him and Colin Ah Ling and Lawrence Yen Fook came a long way to the shop in Colin's father's Ford truck to give to him before the day he set off. He soon fell asleep in the mixed emotions of being touched by the classmates, missing mom and feeling dizzy and ill.

The leather writing case was packed into Bryant's luggage and is still with Bryant at home, after travelling tens of thousands of miles with him to Hong Kong and back.

The sea had its temper, sometimes calm while sometimes very surgy. When the ship left the East London harbour on its voyage to Durban, it was pounded and buffeted severely by the choppy sea, which brought Bryant another bout of seasickness in the rocking and rolling cabin. He even felt a little miserable at the thought of leaving home while having to tough the terrible ordeal for a whole month before arriving at the destination. Fortunately, as the ship was approaching the equator, the sea became lovely again and when Bryant regained his health, he played table tennis with Mr. Ho Kee's two younger sons in the ship's playroom.

When the ship docked and stayed at the port to unload and load freight as well as refuel, sometimes for half a day and sometimes for as long as 3 to 4 days, Bryant would get off the ship to breathe some land air, eat some local food and he even bought a leather wallet in Durban at the Indian market.

However, when the ship docked into Manila in the Philippines, Bryant and his fellows were not allowed to go ashore as they were of Chinese origin. Feeling a little sad, Bryant was not surprised and he knew it was a far-reaching consequence of the Apartheid policy of the South Africa government. Over the years, the Chinese in South Africa had already gotten used to being unwelcomed by the white people and restricted and discriminated in all aspects of life including transportation, education, employment, housing and travelling.

From Manila, the ship would sail the last stretch of sea before arriving at the destination. After around one month's, it finally disembarked at Hong Kong, in a cloudy morning at the beginning of January 1957.

Ah Lan's sister Sherine was already waiting at the harbour. Checking through the British Immigration Customs, aunty Shrine took Bryant to an apartment at 21 Apliu Street Shamshuipo, where Bryant would stay for the next two and a half years.

8. Wong Chi Kwan and Bryant Toms

When Bryant was going through the customs, he heard the British officers all speaking fluently in Cantonese, which was really to his surprise. Thinking of himself, being a Chinese descendant but could only speak several single words of village Cantonese taught by his mother, he suddenly felt a sense frustration, and even shame, which intensified when several naughty boys he encountered making fun of him by calling him Fan Gwai Lo (which means white man) as he could only speak in English. For a moment, he seemed to understand mother's insistence of sending him here in China.

Ah Lan had planned with her sister Sherine on Bryant's study in China for a long time through the continual exchange of letters: Bryant would learn Cantonese¹³, Chinese history and Chinese culture by attending a Chinese school in Hong Kong for at least three years.

Bryant had to wait until September, he school opening time, to be enrolled into a primary school to learn the language from the start, before which, aunty Sherine hired a young university student to teach Bryant the rudiments of Cantonese. It was "a slow ponderous period" under his pen when he had to sit in the room for several hours to learn the simplest daily used Cantonese such as "Hello" "Thank you" "Please sit down"...and the different tones of each character which were really not easy to remember. Sometimes he also helped aunty Sherine in her cloth business and gradually increased his vocabulary by talking with the employees. Another thing was re-orientating himself to the new environment where he had not a single friend, where a fish and chips take-away shop was not commonly seen, and not a word of English could be heard by people around.

Soon came September with the results that Bryant was denied enrolment to both schools he applied, one principal not welcoming the idea of a 16-year-old boy in his primary class while the other one stating further that he would be laughed at by other students, which would probably disrupt the normal teaching order.

He then managed to gain a try at a middle school called Diocesan Boys School but failed in the entrance examination. At last, he was admitted by Tak Ming English School, a bilingual school where the English-spoken students were taught

¹³ Cantonese is a dialect of Chinese spoken mostly in Guangdong province.

Chinese classics and Chinese history apart from six regular courses such as math and physics.

During the day in class, Bryant studied extremely hard to learn Cantonese as quickly as possible and after school in the evenings he was assisted by the private tutor to go through the Chinese classics lessons as well as the various intonations of Cantonese.

On weekends, he would go to the beach to swim in the warm water of the low-latitude area with Aunt Sherine's friend's litter brother or stay at home learning how to play a guitar by himself. He loved the guitar so much that he asked aunt Sherine to sew a cover with zip for it. Somehow, when he took the guitar a long way back to Port Elizabeth, he had already lost the desire to continue learning.

For most of the time, he lived in Hong Kong like a local young man with the name of Wong Chi Kwan, eating Cha siu, Wonton and chow mein, going out by bus or taxi instead of driving a car like his buddies in Port Elizabeth and communicating with people in Cantonese. It seemed that he had become an authentic "Leng zaai"¹⁴.

One time in his second year at school, when he was filling an application form for the School Leaving Certificate Exam, he wrote Bryant Toms instead of Wong Chi Kwan unconsciously. When the teacher found, saying "You made a mistake of your name" and went berserk as the form was very important. Bryant took his passport out and said, "I did not make a mistake. I am Bryant Toms."

In fact, he was Bryant all the time. When he was lying on the bed, he would miss his home on Evatt Street where the family ate dinner together on Sunday evenings; when he was strolling on the narrow streets of the small island of Hong Kong, he would think of the days cycling with Rainlly and Charles in the vast grassland in Fairview; when he was sitting at a table repeating the Cantonese words in a daze, the name "Bryant" would sometimes jumped out into his mind.

9. The Way Back to Parents' Villages

Aunt Sherine had applied Bryant a visa to enter mainland China. As soon as the summer vacation came, he was ready to set off for the long-planned trip of visiting his parents' villages in Canton, Guangdong province.

In an early morning they departed. Bryant travelled very light with only a few clothes and some bare essentials as Aunt Sherine warned him it that it was a long trek while herself carried a big bag of a bundle of old clothes for the relatives in the village.

To get to Canton they ferried to Macau first, where they boarded an old and slow

¹⁴ A Cantonese words which usually used to refer to young handsome man.

boat to sail across a very muddy yellow river before they could reach Canton. While the boat was passing through the countryside, Bryant saw a few farmers sitting and talking with each other on a wooden fence bordering the river and some other ones paddling water pumps to irrigate the paddy land, a typical picture of southern China farm life which he vaguely remembered that his father used to talk about when the family were on the way out to the beach in a car.

Sailing up the river for about two days and one night, they finally reached Canton. When landing on a concourse by the train station, Bryant saw a crowd of people, among whom some girls wearing money bags were jostling their way through the crowd to attract the new arrivals from Macau to exchange money with them, even though the official money exchange station was just in the nearby building.

From Canton the trip was really a trek. They first got on a steam-engine bus, followed by crossing a river in a small boat, and again by bus and a boat. Bryant was quite interested in the rowing method of the small wooden boat, which simply consisted of an enclosed roof over the mid part, a fore deck, a rear deck and two long oars. The oar-lady stood straight on the rear deck facing forward, pushing the oars to propel the boat as well as controlling the direction, different from that in South Africa where people always sat facing the rear. Bryant happily had a try to grab the oars and propel the boat during the lady's recovery stroke.

It was several hours of rowing before reaching a mud path where they had to travel on foot. The path led to another mud narrow lane and after walking another several kilometres, they finally arrived at a brick building.

It was grandfather's house in Sar Liu village of Shueng Wah town, father's hometown.

The house consisted of two separate buildings in an L-shape and an open yard in front on the right side. One building was the living quarter while the other was used as a worship place, in which a large shrine was hung on the wall opposite the front door and grandparents' framed black-and-white photo was placed on a small wooden table, a traditional way of honouring the dead ancestors in rural China.

They first went into the room to meet a lady, a distant relative who moved into and looked after the house after Ah Yuen's parents passed away as the old couple has no other child. Bryant was then led to the worship room by aunty who burnt some incense sticks and muttered some prayer in front of the Buddhist shrine.

After taking a quick stroll in the village, they wended their way back to the wooden boat where the oar-lady was waiting for them to row to the next stop. It took another several hours of walking on a gravel road before reaching granny's house in mother and aunty's hometown Lo Chao village, where Bryant stayed for a dozen of days.

Life in the village was both light-hearted and novel. Bryant was surprised to find a well in the kitchen because of a lack of public water supply. He saw his cousin

removing the cement cover, dropping the wooden bucket into the well to fill it up and then pulling it out. Then they got a full bucket of cold well water. Having tried and failed a couple of times, Bryant realized he must hold the bucket at a specific angle before dropping it down or he would get an empty bucket flow straight on the water. He became more and more skilful and every time when he got a full bucket of water for his cousin to cook their meals, he was so satisfied.

Years later, the memories of this period of life have turned very vague and hazy. But he still remembered rowing a young relative's small canoe and making sweeping U-turns in the river; he remembered catching shrimps with a boy called Francis Ah Wai from pond to pond; he also remembered the time he spent in the back yard gorging himself on the small yellow fruits from the large Dragon eye (Longan) tree.

Sometimes he thought to himself that dad might have also had the same delight in the village as a child. He deemed it as a shared memory between him and father, which was also the meaning of coming all that long way back home.

After his third summer in Hong Kong, it was time for Bryant to go back to South Africa before his passport expired towards the end of August 1959.

10. To Find a Way Out

It was of great joy and excitement to see mom, Rainlly and Charles again on the dock.

When talking with his two buddies, Bryant found his slowness in speaking English. Talking to mother was also a bit queer as he would speak unconsciously in Cantonese but mother would reply in English. You know, two years and eight months had passed since he left Port Elizabeth.

Changes also happened within the family. Stephen's grocery shop had established its own customer base quite; Cassie was preparing to go to London to learn nursing; Kelly was looking for a job while Diana was going to graduate from Chinese High School.

Bryant felt a bit daunting coming back to Port Elizabeth for he was already at an age of 19 and had to face the real world as an adult. The Apartheid government allocated a small quota to the Chinese students and Bryant, who was not the top student as well as not able to afford the tuition fee, would not have the chance to go to universities. He tried to look for a job but it was also very difficult as he had no working skills, which made him rather worried. As a delaying tactic, he worked in mother's shop for the first several months after coming back.

As there were too many similar shops in the area, he realized that the shop would not grow and prosper without changes and suggested mother to either diversify by changing the shop from "call and delivery" to "cash and carry" or convert it into a fast food shop. However, Ah Lan had her own way of running the business and was not interested in these ideas at all. Bryant finally lost the

incentive to work in the shop and decided to leave.

When Bryant turned 21, he owned his first motorcar in life which mother bought him. His brother Stephen taught him to drive and he was soon able to move around independently in the grey white Fiat 1000 he chose for himself, a very popular style of the time. He used to drive this car and travelled far north to Johannesburg for travelling with Rainilly; later on, this car made it possible for him to take his loved girl out for a movie; it was also in this car that he drove through the streets across the city looking for a job.

In those days, Chinese people were discriminated against and were not allowed to learn to be skilled workers such as electricians, bench workers, building workers and so on by the Apartheid government, as those jobs were reserved for white people only. It was also not easy for Chinese to find a work in big factories for few would like to invest money to build separate dining room and toilet for the Chinese, which was necessary because the Chinese were forbidden to share ones with the white. Under such circumstances, many young Chinese people had to make a living as a grocery shopkeeper; some ran take-away shops or small Chinese restaurants to support the family; there were also a few people who decided to leave these traditional livelihood of their parents and grandparents and tried to find a way out in the small job market reserved for the Chinese, among whom was Bryant.

Bryant started his career as a sales representative at a wholesaler called M. Pamensky selling general merchandise. He regarded this job as a stopgap to gain some preliminary work experience. While doing his rounds for Pamensky, he also sold Chinese goods for his mother. It was also during this period that he met Claire, a Hakka girl who became his life companion later. He then replaced a coloured man about to retire to work at J. Kemsley, a men's outfitter, collecting mails and parcels, printing price tags for the garments and helping with deliveries. When passing the heavy duty driver's license test after practicing time after time with Mr. King Lin's 8-ton tip truck which was used for transporting sands and stones, he got a job at Wall's Ice Cream to transport those children's favourite from the factory to shops, cafes and supermarkets scattered in Port Elizabeth, the nearby town Grahamstown and as far as Eastern Cape's country areas where he had to sleep overnight at Leetion's Self-catering midway. This was his way of life for six months until he resigned the job to take care of his mother, who was very ill and went through a heart surgery.

Fortunately mother gradually recovered from the operation. Before he became at a loose end for a long time, he heard the news that a few young Chinese guys were indentured as apprentices at Tonk's Electrical.

11. The 29-Year-Old Apprentice

As a fruit of the long endeavours of the Chinese fighting for concessions in the country, the government began to ease off on some restrictions upon Chinese from the late 1960s. The skilled-worker training system for the first time opened

its door to Chinese.

When the surprising news came to Bryant's ears, he was already 29, much older than the age limit of 18 for apprenticeship because of the low wages stipulated by the Labour Department. Nevertheless, Bryant was determined to try his luck until he found a contractor who was willing to indenture him. He knew, this precious chance might change his life and he must catch it.

He was fortunate enough to knock on the door of Mr. L.J Willet, an electrician contractor as well as the then chairman of Port Elizabeth Electrical Contractors Association who was willing to give the not young but determined Chinese man a chance by employing Bryant promptly as an electrical wireman. This happy ending also benefited from the good reputation of the Chinese as law-abiding, well-behaved and hard-working people, established through all the years in South Africa.

Not long after the New Year's Day of 1970, Bryant signed the official five-year "Contract of Apprenticeship" with L.J. Willet and his career life as an electrician, officially began.

The first two years of apprenticeship was at the University of Port Elizabeth working at the dormitories, dining hall and the director's residence. Bryant's job was to assist the workers with the material they needed for installation as well as observe and learn how they worked. There he got to know switchgear, socket outlets, light fittings... all the electrotechnical devices from a professional perspective; he learnt that all the devices to be installed and everything pulled into the distribution boards must be clearly labelled at the boards; he also bore in mind that the whole installation must be tested before power was connected.

At the same time, he was enrolled at a technical school called Bethelsdorp Beroep Skool (in Afrikaans) to learn electricity theory basics, practical science, mathematics. In the building drawing class, he pictured a three-dimensional drawing in his mind for the first time. As a traditional Afrikaans school, it also offered language course, which gave Bryant the opportunity to learn more Afrikaans.

Always believing that progress and success could only happen via education and diligence, he studied extremely hard when he had this chance to be back into the classroom again. He not only passed all the courses successfully with two distinctions, but also won the Best Academy Achievement of the High Grade competition in the building industry for apprentices. After the competition, the 3 students and the teacher Mr. Blignault took a photo together. In the photo, there were people from several ethnicities, white, black and Chinese, all seemed happily with the shiny metallic trophy and a wooden framed medal in their arms. Bryant was standing on the far right in a black suit and white shirt, a shy smile on his lips.

In the third year he did installation work at Woodridge School in Van Stadens Pass and other business premises before he went to work for Corrie van

Rensburg in a factory called General Tire, where he firstly worked on lighting and power installation by himself. Then he became a member of the maintenance team and was responsible for repairing the production machines.

During the last two years of apprenticeship, he worked in a tire factory while continuing his studies at PE Technikon in Summerstrand. He also went for his Trade Test, which was in no way an easy thing. After three times' trying, he passed all the manual subjects, which marked the end of his apprenticeship.

He then worked for Lionel Steels Trading and installed the electrical installation at all the new Wimpy Bar and Golden Egg Restaurant outlets in the Eastern Cape, starting with the first bar next to Pelos Café in Newton Park, then one in Quick Street, North End...Later he shifted to a factory in Uitenhage which produced headlamps and hooters for motor industry and his next job was at Eveready Battery in Sidwell.

With all the professional theories in electricity and several years' working experiences, Bryant was able to provide clients with quality service. He decided to make a move to establish his own business, a dream planted in his mind from the early days when he entered the trade.

Towards the end of the 1970s, he realized his dream as an independent electrical contractor. He would not have the worries of depending on others for employment or having to change jobs from time to time. However, life was much harder than he anticipated.

What ensued was the most disheartening, afflictive and hopeless one year and nine months in his life as an artisan as a result of the down-turn in economy. Even his former employer Lionel Steele, a big electrical contractor was losing business when Wimpy putting its expansion plans on hold. How could his small start-up company stand up to the recession. He spent nearly every morning walking on the streets of the north end business area canvassing for business. It turned that the factories he visited either had their own incumbent electricians or had already got a contractor and the advertisements he posted on the newspapers did not result in any responses.

When he was not looking for work, he would help his wife Claire and her younger brother in the take-away lunch bar on Robertson Street serving the customers and maintaining the equipment.

It was when purchasing spare parts for the lunch bar at Vulcan that Bryant became acquainted with Mr Isrealite, who later helped him get his first deal to install the electric wires at the newly built Checkers Hyper Market in Greenacres, formerly the Fairview Race Course. The unfavourable career trough was finally over.

When talking about these old days, he often says, "Life has its up and downs. You just keep going and you know, every dog has its day."

When the Chinese people in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage moved to Kabega Park

and started to build their new church closer to 'home' on the allocated site in the year of 1981, Bryant volunteered to undertake the task of installing the electrical system of the church and spent lots of his weekends working in the church with another two Chinese electricians in order to keep up with the building contractor's construction schedule.

While his business went onto the right track bit by bit, life was also moving on at its own pace.

12. A Husband, A Father

Bryant met Claire, a Hakka girl at a friend's party and they soon fell in love. When Claire turned 21, the minimum age for marriage by law in 1964, the two became husband and wife in the St. Francis Xavier Church which belonged to the Chinese community.

Soon after, their two daughters, Oliva and Elaine were born one after another. As the daily expenditure was increasing, Bryant had to work even harder to get more contracts to support the family while Claire was still working in the take-away lunch bar to supplement the incomes.

When the Chinese in Port Elizabeth moved to Kabega Park, plots on Colin Road, Petersvale Avenue, Velco Avenue, Peking, Mandarin and Yokohama Streets were made available for those who wanted to build their own houses. At the same time, a block of 14 buildings called Hedgerow Apartments were also built to cater to those who could not afford a house. Bryant's family was among the first batch of residents in the apartments. They lived there for almost twelve years before purchasing a house next to the apartments when the original owner migrated to Australia.

Talking about the Group Area Act, which aimed to segregate different races and was totally based on discrimination and racism, everyone would say it is a notorious policy. Some people did bear losses and suffering when forced to move from their original houses, usually situated in good areas such as city centre as the houses as the houses were to be demolished for white people to build new ones.

However, according to some community members, at the implementation level of the act, the government officials in Port Elizabeth did make a thorough survey among the Chinese by questionnaires to ask whether or not they would like to move to Kabega Park and some answered yes, as the area was just beside the original Chinese High School¹⁵ on Cape Road, which meant it would be convenient for their children to attend school. Bryant's children, Oliva and Elaine both studied in that school and it was only 4 minutes' walk from their home.

¹⁵ Later the Chinese High School merged with Chinese Primary School and moved into a new campus newly built on Topaz Road in Kabega Park. The school had large playing fields and the Chinese parents also raised funds to build a swimming pool inside.

As the Chinese lived together in one area and the population was small, it was easy for them to form a close community. In the spare time, Bryant would go to Rainlly's place, which was within walking distance and the two would have a chat as well as a cup of tea. At that time, Rainlly was running a Chinese Take-away shop called Panda Snacks. When Rainlly retired years ago, his son took over the shop and it is still running today, at its original site on Cape Road, Kabega Park.

There was a time Bryant went fishing almost every weekend to get out of the stress of work with his brother-in-law or other friends. They often fished from the beach in Humewood and Summerstrand along the Marine Drive further to a very rocky area called Skoenmakerskop. During long weekends when there was a public holiday, they would travel west along the coast to Jefferies Bay, Cape St. Francis or even Plettenberg Bay to fish. Along the east coast, they would sometimes go as far as Kowie River just for a day's outing without really fishing and camp out on the beach for a night.

On weekends or during summer holidays when the children were off school, he would take the family out for a drive in his white Volkswagen or drive to the beach to enjoy the sunshine, just like his father taking the five of them sibling to play on the beach in his childhood.

Time was moving forward while the world was changing all the time. When driving on the street, Bryant found most of the Wimpy Bar outlets where he once did the installation work were no longer in existence, replaced by shopping centres and malls; the South End, an area where all races of people including his family, once lived in, had turned into a residential zone of the white during Apartheid period; the central business district which was not far from his mother's shop on Evatt Street had decayed as a dangerous place where criminals often haunted; more and more of his relatives and friends emigrated overseas to Australia, Canada, UK, United States and so on. In the 1960s, Bryant and Claire also went to London with the intention to apply for permanent residence, but finally decided to come back to Port Elizabeth due to complex reasons. As they were getting older and had been used to the climate and life in South Africa, they have never thought about emigration anymore.

When Bryant found he was getting slower, blunt, easily tired and no longer able to offer his clients the service that matched the money paid, he decided to retire. Several years after his mother passed away, he sold the house at 41 Petersvale Avenue which he painted the roof green and the walls white himself decades of years ago and moved to Cape Town, where the two daughters and their families were living, though about which he knew nothing.

It was in an early morning that he finally packed all these years' life into the three car boots of his and his daughters' and left Port Elizabeth in a hurry quietly, without giving a hug to any relatives, without saying "see you again" to the old friends, even without taking a second look at the beautiful seaside city where he was born, raised and lived for most of his life, with all the past sealed into

memory and all those affections kept in the heart.

This was happening at the very beginning of the new century of twenty-first, at which time, 60 years had already passed, since the new baby's arrival of the young Chinese couple living in the old building at 37 Evatt Street.

Notes

The content of this section was based on Bryant's written life memories, the author's email exchanges with him, face-to-face interviews with him and other community members, as well as historical background information of the Chinese South Africans from literatures. The stories told in this section are all real with only a little bit reasonable imagination in describing some details for the purpose of the smooth flow and the readability of the storytelling.

SECTION II

THE SEA WIND IS STILL BLOWING

-Stories of a Chinese South African Community in Port Elizabeth

1. Meet Bryant in Cape Town

Hello Dan ,

Thank you for your letter.

Claire and I are both trying to stay healthy, but it is a struggle.

When you reach our age you will realise that old father time has caught up with you.

We are no longer so sprightly, but we continue doing our normal daily chores around the house. If you have something to do every then it will motivate you to get up in the morning and meet the day with joy.

Spring is also the time to clean the house, but the gale-force south-easterly trade winds are hampering and delaying the outside work.

Our vegetable garden looks like the beach with white sand and the wind has blown all the light particles of dry black compost over the boundary wall into our neighbour's swimming pool.

I have connected lengths of garden hose to the water-tank to make it more convenient for Claire to water the plants, because carrying water by the bucket is wearing her out.

...

Keep in touch and let us know when you decide to go to Port Elizabeth.

Kind regards,

Bryant

This is the thirty-second letter I receive from Bryant, on 19 November 2019. We have been in intensive email contact with each other since we met for the first time at his house in Cape Town, South Africa.

It was in a morning of a sunny windy day in February 2019, right in the hot summer season in the southern hemisphere that I arrived at the brick red house in Table View on the west coast of Cape Town, according to the direction Bryant sent to me the night before. The house is in a predominantly white residential area that is around 10 minutes' drive to the beach, where one can get a clear

panoramic view of Table Mountain from its north side. Since moving out from Port Elizabeth in 2000, Bryant and Claire had been living here for almost 20 years.

Soon after I rang the bell, the old couple quickly came out and welcomed me. “You must be Dan. Come in, come in.” The petite old Chinese lady in a light-coloured dress invited me into the house. She looked quite agile with her black short hair.

“Yes, I am Dan. Nice to meet you.” I replied as we walked into the living room where Bryant invited me to sit down and introduced Claire to me, “This is Claire, my wife.”

I nodded and extended greetings again to them before Claire went quickly into the kitchen.

Bryant, with a fair complexion, is about 1.75 meters tall and is not thin at all. It seemed to me that he had a serious temperament at first sight, though he was dressed quite casually in a loose grey cotton T-shirt and a Polyester khaki short. The wrinkles did not accentuate on his round plump face, but the age spots on the foreheads and cheeks, the thin eyebrows, and a nearly bald head that were all-white kept sending out signals: this is a man who was already 79.

The house was spacious, tidy and simply furnished. There were no superfluous decorations in the living room except for the basic furniture like TV bench, TV, end table and sofa.

We chatted for a while and most of the time I was answering questions like “why do you come to South Africa” “What do you study in Wits”...before he asked me, “In the text message you said you were doing a research and were collecting information on the Chinese South Africans.”

“Yes, yes.” I nodded while quickly took the notebook and pen from my bag.

“How about coming into my study? I will show you something.”

The small study was about 6 square meters but was fully equipped with a window opposite the door, a book cabinet at the corner, a desk against the wall with a computer on it and another desk against the opposite wall, on which was a printer.

Claire came into the room holding a tray, on which were a cup of English tea and some biscuits. The white porcelain tea set had light gold rim and a beautiful pattern of yellow flowers and light green leaves, which looked very exquisite.

Born and growing up in Port Elizabeth, Cape, once the colony of England, they had assimilated to the local culture and developed a western lifestyle, such as drinking coffee, baking bread and cakes and having English afternoon tea and biscuits.

“He always sits in this room studying Chinese or writing on the computer for a long time, in order to avoid the household chores, I know. Sometimes he uses the

computer late into night. I said it was bad to your eyes, but he just didn't listen to me." It seemed that Claire did not regard me as a stranger and said jokingly.

"Eh.." The moment Bryant was going to respond, he stopped and handed me the teacup. "Dan, please have a cup of English tea and homemade biscuits. I am sorry we do not have Chinese tea at the moment."

"Thank you very much. English tea is very nice," I also turned to Claire, "Thank you aunty."

"You two just go on." She smiled and left the study.

Bryant then showed me some old family documents and photos on his computer, as he had already scanned and saved them in electronic copies. It was at that moment when I first saw his father Ah Yuen's passport, the tickets of the ship Tjisondari which his parents Ah Yuen and Ah Lan boarded, Ah Lan and Ah Yuen's marriage certificate, Ah Lan's Chinese diary, his Enrolment Certificate of the Tak Ming English School in Hong Kong, his Contract of Apprenticeship issued in 1970...

He talked about the old house at 37 Evatt Street from where he enjoyed a panoramic view of Algoa Bay; he mentioned his father who died at a young age; he recalled his school life in the Chinese Primary school when he was struggling with learning Mandarin; he also spoke of the apprentice time when he installed electric wires and switches in one factory then another...

When he was telling all these past stories, either a happy one or a sad one, he was quite so calm that it was like he was talking about someone else's life.

"Bryant, you are talking all the time. You see, Dan did not even have time to eat the biscuits." I was so intrigued that I did not notice it was already 1:00pm until Claire came in and spoke to Bryant before she said to me, "Dan, lunch is ready. Come and eat."

"Um...thank you very much." I accepted but I never expected.

It was a bit moved at the same time as I had never thought they would be so nice and hospitable to me the first time we met. Most importantly, I felt no strangeness or separation between us, although we were strangers the day before and we came from two countries.

"But we are all Chinese descendants. Maybe this can explain what is happening." I thought to myself.

On the round wooden dining table covered with a floral tablecloth, the food was already there: a full plate of Cha Siu Baau, steamed buns stuffed with barbecued

roast pork and another full plate of Siu Maai¹⁶, a kind of steamed dumpling with fillings made up of rice, soy sauce, pork and mushroom, three tiny saucers filled with soy sauce, and three pairs of chopsticks set aside.

"Don't be shy, Dan. Make yourself at home." Bryant removed the chairs from the table and had me sit down.

"Do you often eat these Chinese foods yourselves, or only because I am here?" I asked. In fact, I was a little surprised when I saw all these authentic Chinese food. This was my first time eating at a Chinese South African's home and I had no idea what they ate at all.

"No, no. Actually, we eat both Chinese food and western food," Bryant replied in no time, "Both we Cantonese people and Hakka people are very good at cooking. Claire was taught to make Chinese food by her mother and grandmother."

"We usually make a good deal of Bau and Siu Maai every once in a while. Our daughters don't know how to make Chinese food and we will give some to them and freeze the rest in the refrigerator. When we eat we just take out and heat them in the steamer and it will be soft again. Just like these on the table. Very convenient." Claire said.

"Why don't you teach your daughters?" I asked.

"I tried but they were not interested in learning. And you know they are too busy. Too much work. They would rather buy or eat outside." Talking about this topic, Claire had much to say. "They know I will make for them. They are too lazy, either."

"They young generation has their own way of life." Bryant added.

After lunch, Bryant offered to show me around the house.

The one storey house had a lawn in the front, a garden at the back and to the right a separate small wooden cabin with a pointed roof, which Bryant showed me first.

"Wow, it's a kitchen." The first thing I saw was a double aluminium steamer, which was almost the same as the one my mother used for cooking in China. Under the steamer was a cast iron wok big enough to hold the steamer, both placed on a gas cooktop which was made into the shape of a desk.

"Yes, these are what Claire used to make Baau (Steamed Pork Dumplings) and Siu Maai. This cabin is also a storeroom." While Bryant was introducing, I had taken my glance elsewhere in the cabin. There were boxes, washbasins, handcart, wooden ladder, old chairs, electronic appliances, garden tools, paint

¹⁶ Cha Siu Baau is Cha Shao Bao in Mandarin and Siu Maai is Shao Mai in Mandarin, both are typical Cantonese cuisine.

brushes.....all kinds of life groceries.

"Sorry, it is in a mess". Bryant said as he closed the door.

"Oh, no. This is all too familiar to me. We also have one like this at my parents' old house. Most families have such a storeroom, at least in China." I said.

"Yes, I think I must have copied my mother. She tended to hoard things as she thinks she may find a use for the items later. Claire always says, 'When there is no need for an item and you throw it away. The day you need that particular item you scratch high and low for it.'"

As we were chatting, Bryant led me into the garden at the rear of the house. Rather than a typical garden, I would say it was a vegetable plot as there was no lawn, no neatly arranged small pine trees or various kinds of flowers but a scattering of vegetable plants.

"We have got Siu Pak Choi, See Kwa, Ku Kwa, spinach, spring onion, Tung Kwa...various Chinese vegetables. But they did not grow well, as you can see. We tried to plant other vegetables, like Chinese cabbage. It just doesn't grow here. I really don't know why."

"Maybe it's because the soil and weather differ too much from those in China." I guessed.

"And Cape Town is too dry. You know, there is always a shortage of water. I put this bucket here to collect the rain to water the vegetables." he pointed to a nearly two meters high water-tank in the garden and led me to the plot by the wall.

"This is See Kwa. We just got several small ones a few days ago, though they did not grow well," he said and pointed to several green plants nearby, "Tung Kwa and Fu Kwa. I just planted the seeds last spring and they need a trellis for the vine to ring on..." he went on, "At one time, I spent too much time in the garden and got a mild heat stroke. Another time, I rushed to fertilise the soil and sow Choi seeds before the rain..."

The last thing we talked about that day was on learning Mandarin.

All these years, Bryant spent a lot of time learning the language by himself. He learnt Chinese phonetic alphabets and listened to tapes again and again to learn the pronunciation; he used an e-dictionary, which was a birthday gift that one of his nephews bought him in Hong Kong, to look up the unknown Chinese words; he even installed a Chinese input method in his computer. In our email exchanges, he once wrote my name Dan Wang in Chinese in an email.

He said he was now the only one who could read and write Chinese in his family. "Our daughters learnt Mandarin in the Chinese High School but after graduating, they had no chance to use it and soon lost the language. Claire even couldn't write her own Chinese name. My grandson, he likes animation a lot and has been

learning Japanese for a few years. But he doesn't have any interest in learning Chinese."

I could see a bit disappointment in the tone when he was saying, so did I. It is a sad thing when people lose their own language. But for the descendants of the emigrants, like his daughters and his wife, and even himself, who were born and raised in South Africa, which language was their "own language"?

In the small garden in front of the house, Bryant and Clair maintained a lawn and planted some flowers. When I left, I noticed that the rosebushes were blossoming quietly, under the sun glare of the southern hemisphere.

This was my first meeting with Bryant.

Afterwards, we kept close contact with each other via email, from which I learnt bit by bit about his life in Cape Town.

He used to go fishing every once for a while with his friend Trevor in a boat called "Muggsy" on the Langebaan Lagoon in the West Coast National Park, which is about 70 kilometres away from his home and stay there for a whole morning or day.

He did most of the house maintenance by himself. He re-paved the plot in front of the small wooden house in the yard using new bricks and made a beautiful formation. He climbed a ladder and painted the patio roof with the paint made by himself by mixing enamel paint with turpentine. He regarded the heavy work as a way of keeping physically active and warding off boredom.

He also wrote down the fragments of his past every now and then to leave a record of his existence for his grandchildren to read in case someday in the future they would like to know more about their lineage.

During festival seasons, he and Claire used to travel to Pretoria to get together with Claire's sister and enjoyed their holiday in a resort in Gauteng Province. They would in turn entertain the couple in Western Cape during another festival season when the couple came to visit them in Cape Town. One year, they went to Protea Farm in the Burger's Pass where they enjoyed an interesting tractor ride and a special Potjiekos lunch. Sometimes they would go back to Port Elizabeth to have a big family gathering with his brother and sisters as well as close friends during Christmas.

Recent years as time went by, life had changed a bit.

He seldom goes fishing now. He had been suffering from hyper-tension and exposure to sun for a long time would cause him a lot of giddiness and sometimes nausea; his catch of the targeted fish had fallen drastically over the past few years; Trevor had sold his boat "Muggsy" as it cost too much time and money for maintaining. Going to Langebaan Lagoon for fishing was out of the

question. Instead, he would go to a park or a nature reserve nearby to swim and have a barbecue with the family on the weekend.

He was not as good at the manual work as before. The work took a heavy toll on his body and it often took a long time for him to recover from all the stress when exerting himself to get the job finished. He now only did some light work such as making a shed by shade-cloth to protect the vegetable plants from the scorching sun and strong wind.

When he was writing, he found his vocabulary was experiencing a big shrinking. His memory was no longer strong and he sometimes had to write down sentences like “Here Rainlly must continue with the story as my memory is very scratchy and vague” when he was writing his life stories. In May 2019, he had a cataract surgery and had to take Acetazolamide tablets to reduce the eye pressure, which meant that he could not stare at a computer screen for too long time to write.

The way to celebrate the festival also changed. After Claire’s sister emigrated to Australia, they stopped travelling to Gauteng during the festival season, nor would they go back to PE for Christmas. The 750 kilometres drive was not easy for him any longer. The only occasions that he would go back was to attend funerals. In the past year of 2019, he and Claire celebrated Christmas by attending the Mid-night Christmas Mass service at the church, singing hymns and Christmas carols with the leading of the organist, guitarist, drummer and three ladies in the choir.

In fact, going to the church and attending the various church activities played an important role in enriching their daily life. Bryant used to go to the “Men’s Breakfast” in the church where he listened to two lectures. One was on the requirements for a Last Will & Testament to be valid given by an attorney while in another one, a doctor, who was also a church parishioner, gave some advice on men’s health.

In November 2019, I received an email from Bryant saying that he and Claire were looking forward to attending their church bazaar to be held at the end of the month, at which time, Claire would make a big pot of Chinese Chow Mein (stir-fried noodles) to sell at the food stall.

Now, Bryant has also got himself a new ‘work’, he was trying to translate his mother’s diary written in Chinese into English.

2. A Man Called Jerry Shu Shing Wan Man Ah Wah

It was Jerry Ah Wah who introduced Bryant to me.

The Ah Wah family was the first Chinese South African family I knew. It was a sunny Saturday morning in December 2018, I was strolling in Emmarentia Park after finishing a parkrun nearby when I suddenly saw a Chinese man walking his dogs. I was so excited encountering a compatriot that I went straight to him to

say “ni hao” before he told me he was born in South Africa and could not speak any mandarin.

When we were introducing ourselves to each other, I was immediately attracted by the words “Port Elizabeth”, “grandfather”, “the beginning of the twentieth century”...Finding that I was interested in the topic, he (Jonathan) said that if I wanted to know more, I could talk to his father, a first-generation South Africa-born Chinese. It was at this moment when I became aware that some stories might be there.

A few days later, I showed up in a retirement village in Randburg, Johannesburg, where his father Jerry lived.

When I arrived, Jerry was standing at the door waiting for me.

“Hi uncle Jerry, nice to meet you.” I trotted to him.

Jerry is a midsize man at around 1.7 meters high, wearing a pair of metal frame presbyopic glasses on his skinny face and his sparse short hair is all white. Born in 1938 and in his eighties, I have to say, Jerry still looks very healthy and energetic in the dark blue polo style shirt, black sport trousers and a pair of grey athleisure shoes.

“Hi Dan, nice to meet you too.” he gave me a hug before we went into the house, which had a garden in the front and at the rear separately, beautifully decorated with green lawns and various kinds of blooming flowers in different shapes, heights and colours.

“So beautiful. I like the garden.” I could not help praising.

“Thank you. When I bought the house, the garden was very nice. Then I keep buying and planting flowers and they grow quite well.” Jerry said while we were entering the room.

The moment I walked into the hallway, my attention was caught by a glass display cabinet standing against the wall, inside were various kinds of shells and corals. Even more spectacular were what on the six-layer wooden shelf above the cabinet: hundreds of tiny soldier models with the same size as big as a thumb but all in different postures

“Wow. This is so cool! How many of them are there?” I could not imagine this was an 81-year-old man’s home.

“Nearly three hundred. I collected them when I was a kid and I painted them in the same colour...” He said happily.

“Dan, please sit down, I will make you a cup of tea”.

“Thank you, uncle.” I sat by the round table in the tidy, clean and warmly

furnished living room, which was not big and used as a multi-functional space. When entering the room through the hallway, on the left are the doors leading to the bedrooms and on the right are a wooden round table and several chairs, which is the dining area. Next to the table against the wall is a desk, neatly arranged with a computer, several books and some stationery and by the desk at the corner is a printer, all of which form a small working area. The rest space of the living room was placed with all the furniture including a low wooden cabinet for the TV, two high ones, a coffee table and two sofas.

When Jerry came back from the kitchen with two cups of tea and some biscuits, I was attracted by the photo wall in the living room. There were nearly 60 frames with more than 100 photos. Large ones, small ones, some in a shape of circle, some a square...one could easily see the deliberation and dedication the owner had put in designing the display. Most are family photos: Jerry's father's portrait, Jerry's wedding picture, his wife's photo as a young lady, the three children's University degree photos, the grandchildren's birthday party photos...

"Is that young man you?" I pointed to a big portrait in black and white above the sofa in the middle of the wall.

"No, that is my father. It used to be a very small photo. I went to a studio and got it enlarged. I think my father took the picture in China. You see, it seems that he was wearing a Chinese gown."

Jerry vaguely remembered that his father came to South Africa at the beginning of the 1930s. As to why he came, Jerry only knew it was to "seek a better life as the village was very poor and most people made a living by farming were quite suffering."

"You know, as our parents were busy in the shop all day long. They had no time chatting with us children. Even when they had the time, they would not share their stories to us like friends because they were adults and we were kids. All we must do was to obey our father, or we will get a beat. He was very strict." Jerry said.

He remembered the days when he and his elder brother Justin had to do the grocery deliveries by foot and if they refused to do it, they would get a clap from their father. He recalled, "Mum would put the goods, flour, rice, sugar, milk, bread, anything into the basket and we would walk up the very steep hill of Cannon Street in front of the shop to deliver to the nearby customers. Normally, the basket was very heavy."

Beneath his father's portrait was a photo of a young Chinese lady in a floral blouse with short black hair.

"This is my mother, a very good-tempered woman. She was very hard-working, and spent most of the day in the shop. And she was a wonderful cook and baker."

"Saturday was mother's bakery time," Jerry said, "She baked bread, cake and biscuits, as well as make Baau and Siu Maai. When the bread came out of the

wooden oven, all of us four siblings would gather around the kitchen table for a slice, spread it with thick butter and gobbled it down.” he said with involuntary smiles as if he was enjoying the delicious scent of the bread.

“That beautiful lady must be your wife.” I turned to another wall where there were three photos of a same lady. The two on the left were portraits in which the lady was in a dark-colour Chinese cheongsam while in the one on the right, she was wearing a long white wedding dress.

“Yes. She is really a good wife but unfortunately, she passed away in 2011 because of cancer.”

“I am sorry to hear that.”

“It was a big blow to the family. But I am fine now. That photo was taken on our wedding day. The other two portraits, I took them for her before we got married.”

“Oh, really? You took the photos. Very professional and very nice.” I said.

“Thanks, Dan.” He said happily.

There was a set of Chinese decorations on the wall, which consisted of an embroidery picture of peony flowers in the middle and two piece of Chinese calligraphy on both sides. . “This is a wedding present from a Chinese friend. I took it from Port Elizabeth when I moved here. However, I don’t exactly what the words mean.” Jerry said.

“It says, the flowers are in full bloom and the moon is full while the lute and psaltery are in harmony. It is commonly used to bless a new couple.” I explained, “You see, the words were all in red. You know red represents festivity and joy in Chinese culture.”

There were quite a few Chinese elements in the room: a Chinese painting of bamboo; a porcelain decoration plate on which was a painting of a mountain and a river; a desktop decor of a painting of a Chinese pavilion; two big porcelain vases with a picture of palace ladies...What impressed me most was a small piece of Chinese calligraphy, which was written in black ink with a brush pen on a red paper and was well framed and placed on the wall near his desk. There are only three words in the calligraphy, Leung Shu Shing.

“This is my Chinese name” Jerry said, “I also added to it to my name on the ID card.” He then took out his ID and I saw his official name: Jerry Shu Shing Wan Man Ah Wah. Shu Shing is his first name in Chinese, Wan Man is his mother’s name and Ah Wah is his surname. In fact, Ah Wah was the first name of his father whose Chinese name was Leung Chong Wah. Ah Wah was in short.

Just like Bryant, Jerry was also sent back to China for study when he was 9 years old. His father took all the four children back in 1947 and put them in a school in Canton (Guang Zhou, the capital city of Guangdong province) to learn

Cantonese¹⁷. They stayed for more than two years and during the stay in China, Jerry was even able to write his father a letter in Chinese. Back in South Africa, he had no one to speak the language with, except for his parents and gradually forgot what he had learnt. After his parents passed away, he had no chance to speak Cantonese anymore. Now he was only able to use some simple sentences and almost lost the ability of writing, except for his name. (As I am writing here, I suddenly understand why he framed his name calligraphy and hung it on the wall.)

Jerry was born in his uncle's home in Fairview, Port Elizabeth in November 1938. When he was about one year old, his parents moved to Uitenhage to open a grocery business. He then grew up and lived in the small town 35 kilometres northwest to Port Elizabeth until late 1960s, when he moved to Kabega Park as required by the Apartheid government while still ran his shop in Uitenhage.

The Chinese¹⁸ population in Uitenhage was very small and Jerry's family lived in a mixed community. Next door to them was an Afrikaner family, the van der Mesh. Opposite their house was an Indian family with five boys, who were all Jerry's childhood playmates. He remembered going to the Indian friends' house seeing them roasting peanuts in a drum over a warm flame and was invited to enjoy the tasty snacks together; he also played a lot of rugby with a few Afrikaner peers at a grassy island near the train station which was not far from his home.

However, in a country of discrimination and racism, not all people were friendly to Chinese. Jerry was pushed away when walking on the street many times because he did not move to the side when some Afrikaners came along; one time when he and his brother were on the way back home, some white boys passing by kept reciting "Ching Chong Chinaman¹⁹, one a penny, two a penny, Ching Chong Chinaman" to insult them and even threw stones to them. So angry they were that they had a fight with the white boys.

Except for these trivial matters, Apartheid also affected the family and their life in more significant ways.

When Jerry was a little kid, the family lived on the first floor of their grocery shop and the children were growing up, it became more and more crowded. Jerry's father then borrowed money from relatives and bought a house for 500 pounds, which was a lot of money in those days. The house was just opposite the shop on another street. However, they were not allowed to move in as the government

¹⁷ Cantonese is a dialect. The pronunciation of a same word in Cantonese and Mandarin is different, but the writing is the same.

¹⁸ There was no official statistic of the Chinese population in Uitenhage. According to the Chinese community members, there were around 30 Chinese families living in Uitenhage even at its maximum.

¹⁹ Ching Chong Chinaman is a pejorative term used by some white people to mock or play on the Chinese.

claimed that the house was in a white area and Chinese could not live in it without a permit. It took about 4 years for the family to get a permit to live in their own house.

“If you take a train, you need a permit. If you go to certain hotels, restaurants, hairdressers, post offices and theatres and so on, they will not serve you. If you use the toilet in a public place, you must use the one specifically for the Chinese which was often in poor condition compared to the one reserved for the whites. In some cities like Johannesburg and Pretoria, Chinese were not admitted to provincial hospitals or municipal clinics.” Jerry said.

Nevertheless, “life was still good”, Jerry said. Apart from working in the shop, he spent a lot of time on his hobbies.

When he was young, he was an active member of several sports clubs and leagues including the martial club of the Uitenhage Chinese Youth Society (UCYS), the Basketball League of UCYS, the Chinese Cricket league and the Eastern Province Table Tennis League and had taken part in many matches and tournaments.

Jerry kept all his team photos and compiled them in a word document on his computer. There were two photos he liked most. In the first one, he was playing cricket as a pin bowler in his white team uniform and looked strong and vigorous; in the other one, he was jumping to shoot the basketball while another player was trying to stop him.

Jerry dropped out before he finished high school as the family could not afford to support all the children. He then started running a small grocery shop in Uitenhage on his own, at which time, he was only 16 years old and the shop lasted for 10 years. Before he finally shifted to take-away business, he once ran another grocery shop for 2 years and then a clothing shop for 5 years.

He became interested in photography as a teenager when his father bought two second-hand 35mm cameras. Besides a short photography corresponding course, he learnt mostly by himself. One of his friends, Petrick, taught him how to print with a Box contact printer and he experimented a lot in the darkroom to try various printing techniques. He started taking wedding photos for others when becoming semi-professional and the money earned was paid for most expenditure of his devices, lens, film enlarger and so on.

He then joined the Uitenhage Photography Club located at Market street at the old railway building. As the first Chinese in the club, he initially did not know how others would treat him and was very nervous. But it turned out he was very welcomed. There he met Robert Clooney and they became very good friends ever since. For one time, they two even opened a photography studio which did not last long as Jerry was too busy with his grocery shop. When he was running a

take-away shop, Robert was kind to be the sleeping partner²⁰.

After moving to Kabega Park, Jerry joined the Chinese Photography Society of Port Elizabeth, where Jerry served as the last executive chairman until it was disbanded in later years.

He was also keen on collecting stamps, coins and comics and building aeroplane and warship models. He was immediately attracted by music after his father bought a record player.

When Springbok Radio started broadcasting on 1 May 1950, he became a loyal audience of a music programme Spring Radio Top 20, where he listened to a lot of music. He also loved the weekly top songs played at the Lourenco Marques Radio based in Mozambique, which broadcasted to South Africa from 1936 to 1975 and many South African youngsters used to glue to its music programme as it made many changes to cater to the young people.

He bought a Garrard turntable before he got his first LP (vinyl record), a Frank Sinatra monologue record. His favourite ones were "Freddy Gardener and his Golden Tone Saxophone" which had many Jazz and Pop songs, and "Let There be Love" by Joni James, released in 1953. He still has these records in his possession.

Jerry dropped out from school before he finished high school as the family could not afford to support all the children. He then started running a small grocery shop in Uitenhage on his own, at which time, he was only 16 years old and the shop lasted for 10 years. After another grocery shop and a cloth shop, he finally a take-away shop called Pagoda Inn at 120 Caledon Street, Uitenhage and ran it for 37 years until he retired in 2010.

Jerry and his wife Kate had two daughters and a son, all of whom did well in school and went to universities, the daughters graduating from University of Port Elizabeth and the son from University of the Witwatersrand. As the children all live in Johannesburg, Jerry finally sold his house in Port Elizabeth in 2016, five years after his wife's death and moved to Johannesburg.

I visited and talked to Jerry several times after our first meeting and we kept in touch thereafter. He still plays cricket and badminton with his neighbours almost every week at an age of 81. In April 2019, he took part in the pistol shooting match of the 60th SACSA²¹ Easter Tournament held in Johannesburg, an annual

²⁰ During Apartheid, as the Chinese were not allowed to own property in specific areas, they would use a white person's name to buy a property and ran a business. Then this white person would be regarded as a sleeping partner of the business.

²¹ SACSA is the abbreviation of Southern Africa Chinese Sports Association.

sports event for all the Chinese in southern African countries and was awarded the “Sportsmanship Award” as the eldest participant.

Sometimes he will have dinner or a braai with his children and grandchildren, who all live not far from him. During the Christmas in 2019, he took a trip back to Port Elizabeth with all the family before they went to his second daughter’s holiday house, which was near the beach in Plettenberg Bay, to enjoy the holiday together.

Now he has a girlfriend Carla, a white lady he met in the retirement village he lives. They fell in love and decided to accompany each other in their senectitude. On ordinary days, they spend their time cooking, gardening, doing sports or getting physical therapy, chatting with the neighbours, taking part in the various activities held by the retirement village, or just staying at home watching TV. One time I went to visit them and saw a new photo on an A4 paper on the wall, in which Jerry was holding a small cake with a burning candle. Carla told me it was the neighbours celebrating Jerry’s birthday. “He is very popular in our village. When the neighbours need a plier, they come to Jerry; when their computer cannot start, they come to Jerry; when there is something wrong with their WhatsApp, they also come to Jerry...He can do everything and he is so helpful. You can always see that a neighbour comes with a chocolate today, tomorrow another one brings some cookies and another day there are flowers on the table...They come to thank Jerry”

“We all like Jerry.” She said.

The time when I visit Jerry for the first time, he gave me the book *Colour, Confusion and Concessions* by Melanie Yap and Dianne Leong Man, an indispensable book on researching the topic of Chinese South Africans. It is not easy to get the book now as it has not been republished since its first publication in 1997. It was also Jerry who offered to introduce other Chinese South Africans of Port Elizabeth whom he knew well to me, including Bryant.

Through the books and all the contacts with some Chinese South Africans, I got to know more and more about the small Chinese community in Port Elizabeth and in December 2018, I went to PE for the first time.

3. A Hakka Family

When I walked out of the Port Elizabeth International Airport, Hasson had already waited there.

I got in touch with Hasson under the help of other Chinese South Africans in Johannesburg. Hasson, a local man of Port Elizabeth in his early seventies, was once the chairman of the Eastern Cape Chinese Association. He and his family would assist me in setting up interviews and taking me around Port Elizabeth.

“Nice to meet you, Hasson!” I said in English, but to my surprise he responded with “ni hao” and tried to communicate with me in Mandarin. Later I knew that he and his wife Mira once learnt Mandarin in Taiwan for one year. Inevitably however, their Mandarin proficiency had been declining all these years as they seldom had a chance to speak it.

The car was driving out of the airport and little by little, the real Port Elizabeth²² was coming into my vision. Out of the window was a spacious road with big trees, not knowing what kind they were, on both sides. Occasionally, you could see several pedestrians passing by. All the houses, shops and trees were skimming before my eyes like shadows, as the car was accelerating and heading towards northwest.

Soon we arrived at Hasson’s house in Newton Park, which was about 7 kilometres from Kabega Park. The house was located by a main road and was separated by a large lawn.

We entered the house from a small side gate leading to a small back yard where daily sundries were stocked and a watchdog was kept, who rushed to us and barked loudly at the sight of a stranger—me.

Hasson’s wife Mira had prepared a bedroom for me. The room was simply but cosily furnished with a bed, a wardrobe, a desk, a chair and a clothes hanger. Different from some local families who like to put many throw pillows on the bed, here on the cotton floral sheet were only two pillows and a thin quilt, which was not spread over the bed but folded up into a square shape at the head of the bed. For a moment, I felt I was back in my bedroom at my parent’s home in China, if it was not for the spacious garden with a blue swimming pool that came into my sight when I was looking outside the window.

Born in the early 1950s, Hasson and Mira were both third-generation Chinese South Africans whose forefathers came to South Africa at an earlier time than Bryant’s family, around the beginning of the 20th century. Hasson was a Port Elizabeth native whose parents were both Hakka²³ and Mira was Cantonese from Johannesburg, which was in line with the general distribution of the Chinese in South Africa, Hakka predominating in the coastal areas such as Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and East London while most Cantonese residing in inland cities including Johannesburg, Pretoria and Kimberly.

²² Port Elizabeth is the sixth most-populous city in South Africa and is an important seaport and industrial city of the country, whose economy primarily oriented towards automotive assembly, manufacturing and export. (Source: Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_Elizabeth)

²³ The Chinese South Africans can be divided into two ethnic groups: Hakka, also known as Moiyeane from the northeast region of Guangdong province while Cantonese come from the southern part of Guangdong. Ethnic differences added by bonds of kinship and clan resulted in the two groups settling in different parts of South Africa. (Yap and Man, 1996)

Due to various reasons, Hakka and Cantonese have historically been at odds and the two groups inherited this tradition in the early days after arriving in South Africa, keeping away from each other and intermarriage once being strongly opposed. Later they began to unite under the ever-stricter discrimination upon the Chinese and marriage between young people was more and more commonly seen as the Chinese community was too small. Within this Chinese community in Port Elizabeth, there were many Cantonese women from Johannesburg, Pretoria, Kimberly and other places coming to Port Elizabeth because of marriage.

Hasson and Mira had three children who all had grown up, two daughters working in Johannesburg and the son, a mechatronic engineer working in the United States. They adopted their eldest daughter when they were in Taiwan, China. The younger daughter and the little son had also learnt Mandarin in China; thus, the whole family could speak Mandarin more or less, which was really a rare case among the Chinese South Africans. Hasson, a pharmaceutical professional who retired several years ago but then got bored staying at home all day, was re-employed by the pharmaceutical wholesaler he used to work for. The job kept him busy and left him little time to the family, which was much complained by Mira, who was a competent housekeeper and a keyboard player in the church.

The pork belly roasted in the oven, which Mira had taken out for basting for several times, was giving off a delicious smell. Late in the afternoon, we would take it to visit Hasson's mother and sisters and a big dinner was waiting for us.

We set off at around 5:00pm. As it was the end of April, just several days before the 2019 South African general election on 8 May, the utility poles and light poles on both sides of the roads were full of campaign advertisements of different political parties. The most eye-catching EFF red ads wrote "Our Land and Jobs Now"; the blue ones of "Keep the Lights On" and "Jobs, not Corruption" were from DA, and the slogan "One South Africa for All" of ANC was in its typical party colour of yellow and green²⁴. As the ads kept passing by one after another, I originally thought they would more or less talk about the election, which was obviously the hot topic back then. It turned out they did not even bother to take a look at the ads and showed little interest when I mentioned it, which made me think of their apolitical forefathers, who endeavoured to establish an image of "a respectable, law-abiding, quiet, civilised, conscientious, apolitical and middle-class community", as described by Yoon Jung Park, a scholar who dedicating to studies on the Chinese South Africans. Decades passed, it seemed that they were still who they were and now you could still hardly find many community members who were involved in politics in the country.

²⁴ EFF is the abbreviation of Economic Freedom Fighters, a far-left and radical political party of South Africa and DA means Democratic Alliance which is the second-largest political party of the country, and ANC is the ruling party, whose full name is African National Congress.

We drove west along R102 for about a quarter before we turned into a farm by the road. "Here we are," Mira said.

In the two-storey farmhouse, I was warmly welcomed by the big family, Hasson's mother, Hasson's elder sister Wendy and her husband Alex and the younger sister Bella.

Inside the main entrance was a small lounge with a fireplace in the middle and behind the lounge separated by a one-meter high section was a very big western-style open kitchen with a big kitchen island, besides which was a long rectangle dining-table. To my surprise, there was also a big steel noodle maker placed at the corner.

Next to the dining room in the Chinese-style kitchen, Alex was busying making chow mein (stir-fried noodles). The thin long noodles mixed with sliced carrots, cabbage and beef was cooked in a big black iron woks on the open fire from the gas stove. Alex kept stir-frying it to give every thread some flavour while Wendy and Bella were making other dishes.

In no time, the dishes were all served, there were Tung Kwa and pork ribs soup, braised pork in soy sauce, meatball, Wonton, stir fry and chow mein and so on, all kinds of Chinese food as authentic as what I ate in China.

As all the family members were Christian, there was a routine prayer before the meal. Everyone joined hands in a circle with heads down and eyes closing when Hasson said in a low voice, "Father, we have gathered to share a meal in your honour. Thank you for putting us together as family and thank you for this food. We thank you for all the gifts you've given to those around this table. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Then the dinner began. All the dishes came in large containers on the kitchen island and everyone helped themselves with their own plates and came back to the table to eat, just like eating a buffet. It was different from a typical Chinese dinner when people shared food on the dining table.

We talked a lot about Chinese food and my long-form project on the Chinese South Africans when we were eating. After the dinner, they showed me a lot of their family archives including family photos, pamphlets of the former Moiyeane Association, old personal documents, and so on while enjoying the delicious after-dinner desserts and tea Wendy and Bella served. I started getting to know more and more of this big family, in the sweetness of the vanilla pudding and the aroma of the hot Rooibos tea.

Hasson's mother, a 91-year-old Hakka woman who was born and grew up in China, came to South Africa in her early twenties after marrying Hasson's father while his father, born in South Africa but was sent back to China as a kid, only came to South Africa again after finishing high school. They retained a Chinese

way of life, especially for cooking and eating.

Years ago, when Hasson's father was still alive, he planted various kinds of Chinese vegetables in the farm. The old photos witnessed the once fruitful vegetable plot divided into lots of rectangular pieces of land by soil ridges where Donggua (white gourd), Kugua (balsam pear), Sigua (loofah), Chinese cabbage...were exuberantly growing; the photos also captured the moment when Hasson's mother was watering the vegetables with a yellow plastic bucket; in another picture, Hasson's father was showing to the camera two Kugua in his right hand which was picked fresh from the garden, with a full box of the white green guards in his left hand, the smile on his face indicating a good harvest season. Once they also set up a small "fair" in the farm to sell the vegetables to the community members. There were no big farms specializing in Chinese vegetables in those days in Port Elizabeth and Hasson's parents' vegetable garden greatly enriched local Chinese people's tables with hometown flavour.

Later, as Hasson's father passed away and his mother became older and older, the fair was never opened again as no other person in the family was proficient in planting Chinese vegetables. Hasson's mother, who did not need to take care of the garden, then moved out of the farm and lived with Bella in Kabega Park. Now Wendy and her husband Alex, who were still in the farm kept a few kinds of Chinese vegetables and yield could only meet their own needs.

Wendy and Bella were the chefs of the dinner, who had inherited the cooking skills and recipes from their mother and could make all kinds of delicious Chinese cuisines. They once ran a Chinese restaurant upstairs in the farmhouse but later shut it down because of the farm's disadvantageous location. Now they were running one of the only two Chinese caterings in Port Elizabeth and had served many community activities such as the National Day celebration, Christmas Eve celebration and some church service buffets. Remember the kitchen where there were a noodle maker and a long dining table? It would turn into a working space when the two sisters were preparing for the caterings or making noodles, steamed buns, wontons for selling. What I never thought was that, Hasson's mother (I called her Porpor which means grandmother in Chinese) who was already in her early nineties, was still working as a steamed buns maker.

Cutting a large piece of dough into many slices, Porpor kneaded every slice into round strips before dividing them evenly into small balls as big as a ping-pong. After weighing them on a scale to ensure the same weight, she then masterly rolled them into round bun wrappers with a diameter of 10 cm. Putting a spoon of filling into the wrapper and kneading it firmly, we got a Cha Siu Baau.

Before steaming the baaus, Porpor put them into a large bamboo steamer for fermentation, with a piece of square wax paper under each baau in case it would stick to the bottom of the steamer.

Porpor was not a talkative person and every time I tried to ask her questions, she just smiled without really answering. But this time when it came to cha siu baau, the typical Cantonese cuisine, she talked a little more than usual. She said the meat was already stir fried with dark soy sauce, oyster sauce, sugar and salt in advance before put into the refrigerator for a whole night for the meat to absorb all the flavour from the seasoning. She said, to get authentic and excellent cha siu baau filling, it would better to use pork belly, which would be cut into tiny cubes instead of mince to get a better taste.

The baaus was steamed for about 15 minutes and the distinct delicious smell of kept spreading into our noses from the two-layer steamer in the kitchen while we were chatting. Porpor turned off the fire and left the baaus inside for another 3 minutes before we finally took them out.

Porpor put several baaus on a plate and invited me to have a taste. The hot baaus looked white and soft and its skin smelled of a sweet aroma of wheat flour and the moment I took a bite of it, the yummy salty sweet of the filling immediately filled my mouth.

Porpor had a big figure and remained hale in her nineties. The day after making more than 100 baaus, she seemed not tired at all. When Porpor packed all the baaus in groups of nine into transparent plastic bags before putting them into the large refrigerator, Mira told me that other community members who did not bother to make baaus themselves would buy from Porpor. Then I got to know that in the community, many people have their own home business: this person makes spring rolls, that person makes cookies and maybe another one specializes in shrimp dumplings, thus people can buy from each other. There might be several people who all made the same kind of food but everyone have their own customers who preferred the specific flavour.

There is also a regular market for people to sell and buy Chinese food. The market started from 2012 and was held on every Sundays of the first week of each month at the Port Elizabeth Chinese Association in Kabega Park. Not only Chinese but also other ethnic groups would come, taste and buy the various kinds of authentic Chinese food, such as fried wonton, pot sticker, sweet potato balls, noodles, fish balls, shrimp dumplings. The community even created a public page called “Chinese food market PE” on Facebook... Sometimes the market also acted as a means of raising money when funds were needed for community activities such as renovating the church.

Let us go back to Porpor. In China, you could hardly relate “working” with a woman who is 90 years old, which was an age for enjoying life. I was very surprised when I realized that she was still working. Though the four children (two sons and two daughters) were all very filial and supported her with money, Porpor still tried to support herself by her own hands instead of relying on her children.

Porpor, as well as Wendy and Bella who were always busy working in the kitchen, these three Hakka women reminded me of an old Chinese saying, “If you

want to find a wife, marry a Hakka woman". It was said that, Hakka women were among the most praiseworthy women in the world, who were hard-working, thrifty and tenacious in managing family affairs and making a living.

Hakka means "guest people" in Chinese. There are different opinions on how the name of Hakka comes about in literatures and no conclusion has been reached so far. A widely acknowledged explanation is that the Hakka people who went through five great migrations before they finally arrived in southern China from the north, only found they were unwelcomed, unaccepted and excluded by local people, so they called themselves "guest people".

In the early days, Chinese people, be it Hakka or Cantonese, travelled thousands of miles across seas from China to South Africa for a better life but found that they had to endure endless discrimination and separation in order to settle down in the foreign land. What a similar scene! In this sense, are the Chinese people in South Africa also, "guest people"?

At 0:00 Beijing time on July 1, 1997 when the handover ceremony of Hong Kong's return to China was underway in Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, a celebration was also held at the same moment, 6:00pm local time in Port Elizabeth, a city which was about 10,000 kilometres away from China.

Some Chinese people in Port Elizabeth gathered on the grassland in front of a Chinese South African's house and raised a national flag of PRC while singing the national anthem. Then a brief speech on the history of China was given, followed by a banquet. Nearly 100 Chinese South Africans celebrated the big day with tasty Chinese food, champagne and a big birthday cake specially made for the celebration, on which there were a pattern of the Five-Starred Red Flag (the national flag of PRC) and several words in red "HONG KONG, 1ST JULY 1997".

The organizer of this event was, Hasson's father.

An article on Meizhou Overseas Chinese Hometown Weekly (a newspaper circulated in Meizhou, Guangdong province, China) in July 1997, recorded that small celebration event. At the bottom of the news wrote two lines, "A reader from South Africa" and "Li Jiarong sent from Port Elizabeth". Li Jiarong was the name of Hasson's father and Meizhou was his hometown. Now a clipping of this article was kept in the study of Hasson's mother's house in Kabega Park, Port Elizabeth.

The clipping was pasted on a clipping notebook and was only one of the many news clippings Hasson's father had collected. There were news such as "People's Republic of China turns 50", "South African Chinese bid farewell to Ambassador Wang", "Chinese warships docks for first visit to South Africa" "Long-lost brother reunited with PE family" and so on, all of which were about China or Chinese people, some in English and some in Chinese. All of the English articles were accompanied by annotations of the name of the event, the time and the

newspaper's name.

Lots of photos recorded the many celebrations held in the community and some big China-related events Hasson's father once attended, such as the anniversary celebrations of the founding of PRC, the celebrations of Macau's return to China, a New Year celebration of the community, the opening ceremony of the Consulate General in Cape Town. All of photos were well classified by events in different albums and each one was carefully pasted with scrip on the album cover or spine, a briefly introduction note of the album.

I could not tell what this Chinese South African was thinking about or how he was feeling when he was sitting by the table and carefully cutting the news from the newspaper little by little, one by one, in the bright daytime or under the light of the table lamp in the evening. Yet I could feel his deep love for his home country when I read a letter he wrote in 1997 to his Alma Mater, Mei Xian Dong Shan High School, in which he said, "Having graduated from the school and left China for more than 50 years, I have gone through all the ups and downs abroad and now in my seventies, my Chinese heart has never changed."

The letter was published in one issue of the school magazine called Dong Shan High, which is still kept on the bookshelf in his study today.

As is written before, Hasson's father was born in South Africa in 1920s but was sent back to his parents' hometown Meixian as a kid. Raised and educated in China for most of his teen years, a critical period in the formation of one's views and values, it was not hard to understand why he had such a deep affection for the country.

For a long time in history, as the South African government did not recognize People's Republic of China, it was difficult for the Chinese South Africans to go back to their hometown in mainland China. Before December 30, 1997, when the two countries established a formal diplomatic relation, Chinese South Africans must go to Hong Kong first to apply for a visa before entering mainland China. As early as the 1980s, Hasson's father broke through the resistance from all aspects and for the first time organized a group of 30 Chinese South Africans to go to China, visiting home villages, meeting family members, discovering roots as well as touring around.

I saw lots of Chinese books in his study, including famous Chinese literary works such as *A Dream in Red Mansion*, *Water Margin*, biographies of most Chinese political leaders such as Sun Yat-sen and Deng Xiaoping, Chinese dictionaries, overseas Chinese magazines, books on Hakka people...He must like photography a lot as on the bookshelf were also many Chinese photography books. I even found a set of CDs of the Spring Festival Gala of China Central Television.

After Hasson's father passed away, his mother kept all these clippings, photos, books and videos in the study. I once asked Hasson, "How will you deal with all these collections many years later when porpor is not here?"

"I would keep them", he replied without hesitation.

"What about aftermath? Will the younger generation also care about them?"

He was silent for a moment and spoke slowly, "Not necessarily, I suppose."

We both nodded and looked at each other for a while, without saying a word.

Within the community, there were few Chinese who lived in China for as long as Hasson's father did. People as patriotic and nostalgic as him were also in the minority. For most Chinese emigrants and their descendants, the moment when leaving their hometown, the connection between them and the home country was inevitably waning and as they gradually settled down in South Africa, assimilation and adaptation were bound to happen, especially in an era when China was undeveloped and there was a lack of transportation.

In this sense, possibilities are that not only the physical collections, but also the emotional connection between the Chinese South Africans and their country of origin, may all disappear as the old generation all pass away.

4. Here, is Kabega Park

The car turned south at the crossing of Cape Road and Woltemade Road and soon we arrived at a church. It was midday and the church service was just over. Many old people were walking out, most of whom were Chinese.

"We are in Kabega Park." Hasson told me.

Hasson guided me around Kabega. "This one used to house the Leong family and they emigrated to Canada years ago", "This was Uncle Moon Tong's house and now a white family lives here"...When we got to Petersvale Avenue, Hasson showed to me where Bryant used to live. It was a one-story house with light green roof, white walls and a sliding iron gate. One of the walls was hollowed out with some rectangular hollow outs, through which one could see a garden with a lawn and a big tree, which was so tall that its branches grew out of the wall. Hasson said, the house did not change much since Bryant moved out. Not far on the same avenue was Jerry's old house, all white with a small lawn outside the gate.

Kabega Park, now called Morningside, is located 12 kilometres west to Port Elizabeth city centre. It is a small residential suburb of about two square kilometres, nestling between two white residential areas with vast fields to the east.

Most of the houses are one-storey. Built in the 1970s, they are simply decorated on the surface and look plain, clean and unpretentious. Neatly arranged in rows by the smooth cement roads, the houses were mainly in the colour of brick-red, earthy yellow or white, with narrow lawns outside along the roads.

As was said before, Kabega Park was the area the government allocated to the Chinese community in Port Elizabeth during the Apartheid according to the Group Area Act promulgated in 1950, aiming to exclude non-Whites from living in the most developed areas and separate different race groups by setting aside specific areas for each race. Due to various reasons including the inconsistent implementation standards and dissimilar responses of the Chinese community in different regions, Kabega Park was the only Chinese group area which was finally developed.

Apart from residential purposes, a block of small shops was also built between Opal and Cape Road, and plots were allocated for the Chinese to build their school and church. As more and more Chinese people's properties in relatively developed areas were expropriated and demolished by the government, they had to move to Kabega Park, since when the small Chinese community became much closer-knit.

Hasson's family was among the minority Chinese families who were not forced to move because the area Korsten, where their two story house used both as a business premise and a living quarter was located, remained designated as a coloured area and Chinese people were allowed to stay in. This did not hinder them from integrating into the Chinese community at all, as they also went to the Chinese school and the Chinese church as well as attended the community activities held by the Chinese Association in Kabega Park.

According to literatures and my interviews with some community members, the reason why the Chinese accepted to move to Kabega Park was that the area was just next to the original Chinese High School on Cape road and obviously it would be convenient for their children to go to school.

Later when the government built a new Chinese School in Kabega which could accommodate both the high school and primary school, the original Chinese High School became the base of the Port Elizabeth Chinese Association, which was my next stop.

With a touch of Cape Dutch Style, the monolithic grey building has a wavy round gable in the middle and symmetrical rooms on both sides with flat roofs, facing a big lawn. In the front of the building was a one-meter wide corridor supported by 16 red pillars with all the rooms painted in light-yellow behind.

In the main room were a large conference table and several chairs in the middle and a low bookshelf placed by one of the walls with many books and newspaper, among which a notable one was a piece of "Qiao Sheng Pao"²⁵ published on April

²⁵ According to "Colour, Confusion and Concessions" by Melanie Yap and Dianne Leong Man, Chiao Sheng Pao (Qiao Sheng Bao in mandarin) is a Chinese newspaper launched by the first generation of Chinese settlers in South Africa in June 1, 1931 in Johannesburg in order to provide information to the Chinese, as most of whom had little education in English thus could not read local newspapers. The newspaper mainly covered local and international news of interest to the Chinese. From the 1940s, it appeared both in Chinese and English with an English name called "Chinese Consular Gazette" (Yap and Leong Man, 1997, P240).

2, 1963, with news including “Congress of Overseas Chinese Associations in South Africa was held” “The Chinese South Africans protested against discriminations and requested equal rights”... The newspaper also had an advertisement column where you could see an ad of the shipping company JAVA-CHINA-JAPAN LIJN N.V, an ad of Sui Hing Hong, a time-honoured Chinese shop in Johannesburg, and another one of a Chinese medicine “Tuo Ku Hai”, literally meaning taking one out of pains, a kind of analgesic.

An old wooden drawer at the corner stored many association files, meeting minutes and letters. I skimmed through some of them with permission. There must be a Chinese shopkeeper called David Yew Siong, who intended to transfer his general dealer’s license to his sister and applied to the City Council via the Chinese Association, however, was refused, which was recorded in a document as at April 13, 1951. A document of March 28, 1962 expounded the rules of the election of the Chinese Primary School committee; there was one document listing the regulations of awarding excellent young Chinese South Africans dated back to 1961; another one was from Kabega United Football Club, applying for using the old Chinese High School facilities for training; there were also lots of minutes of association meetings and letters between the association and the Chinese consulates-general and other Chinese associations in South Africa.

During the early time when the Chinese immigrated to South Africa, the Chinese Associations played an important role in helping the Chinese settling down and fighting for rights, as well as uniting community members by “providing a full social calendar, from dances and sports tournaments to Chinese New year and other big event celebrations”, as was written in the book *“Colour, Confusion and Concessions”*. Now as the Chinese gradually assimilated and integrated into the local society, the role of the Chinese Associations was no longer as big as it used to be, but still functioned in holding various activities to retain a fair level of social and cultural cohesiveness of the community. Now the Chinese costumes and dragon and lion dance props were stored in a room of the association. When festivals like the Chinese New Year or National Day come, the Chinese, young and old, men and women, can all enjoy watching traditional Chinese performances.

As for the new Chinese school mentioned before, it changed from a community school for Chinese students only to a public secondary school for all groups of students when the Apartheid regime was over and now, the new name is Morningside High School.

Hasson and Mira’s eldest daughter graduated from this Chinese High School. Mira told me, most Chinese children studied very hard and did well in University applications and many of them were admitted to top Universities in South Africa, such as Wits University, University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University...When the government eased off on the restrictions on Chinese children’s access to education later on, many Chinese parents who could afford the tuitions fees sent their children to private schools for better education and Mira said, “Chinese people have always attached great importance and considerable value to education, which they regard as a way to change one’s life”.

When the racist Apartheid went to an end and the Group Area Act stepped down from the historical arena in June 1991, people of all races could finally freely choose where to live. With some people moving in while some moving out, Kabega Park gradually became a mixed place where all groups of people live and was renamed as Morningside.

I once talked to the then chairman of Port Elizabeth Chinese Association Ross Taylor and he said, the number of the Chinese in Port Elizabeth now was approximately 1000. When it comes to Kabega Park, there was no official statistics on how many Chinese still lived there but it remained the most concentrated place of Chinese people in Port Elizabeth and, most of whom were the old.

It was a Saturday when I was walking on the street in Kabega Park. There were few people outside and it was very quiet. All I could hear was the occasional sounds of wheels rolling slowly on the ground when one or two cars passed by. I had no idea how lively and busy it used to be when most Chinese people congregated to reside here, voluntarily or involuntarily. What I knew was, from the inception of Kabega Park in the 1970s to its decline in 1991, it changed so much and so fast, from all the hustle and bustle to the deep silence. For the Chinese people living here, the 20 years and all the changes they had experienced seemed like all happened in a moment, like a dream.

5. The Chinese and St Francis Xavier Church

The priest, a white man in his white Christian robe was reading and interpreting a section of the Book of Revelation behind the altar. Around a hundred people, most of whom were the old with Chinese appearances, were sitting on the wooden benches and listening carefully.

What followed were a series of Christian rituals, of which was all people in the chapel singing the soothing worship songs together, with the lyrics on the projection screen hanging on the wall in front.

“You are beautiful beyond description, too marvellous for words, too wonderful for comprehension, like nothing ever seen or heard. Who can grasp your infinite wisdom? Who can fathom the depth of your love? You are beautiful beyond description. Majesty, enthroned above. And I stand, I stand in awe of you. Holy God, to whom all praise is due, I stand in awe of you.”

They were singing while clapping hands merrily and looking at each other with bright smiles accompanied by the melodies of guitar, keyboard and piano played by the church band. You could easily be infected by and immersed in the cheerful and relaxed atmosphere. Joyfulness was flowing among people and happiness was spreading in every corner of the room. Even me myself, not a Christian at all, was feeling quite grateful and content.

After praying for the sick and frail parishioners, while most gathered in the dining area connected to the chapel and sat by the long tables, some people hurried to the kitchen and came out to serve everyone with a small piece of cake.

It happened to be one old lady's birthday that day. "Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday my dear friend..." when the familiar melody started, everyone began to sing together and clapped hands to send their best wishes before they enjoyed the delicious strawberry cake and chatted with each other closely. The lady who received all these wishes was grinning from ear to ear, the smiles sweet and happy.

This was a normal Sunday service in St Francis Xavier Church, a major gathering and social place for the Chinese community in Port Elizabeth.

The church was not a magnificent one like those with a Romanesque or Gothic style. It had no towering spires, tall arched domes, colourful stained glassed or complicated embossed decoration but was a simple and low house built of rufous bricks. When looking from outside, it was just like a private house and seemed very accessible. With a big garden in the front and a circle of green lawns surrounding the other sides, the monolithic building consisted of the chapel, a hall with grey triangular roof and other lower spaces with flat cement roofs divided into different functional spaces including a locker room, a kitchen, and a passage.

In the front of the chapel was a rostrum, on which stood the altar and a two-and-a-half-meter high wooden cross draped over with white Holy shroud. Behind was the brick wall, a white tapestry with a cross and a pigeon motif in red hanging on the left and a projection screen on the right.

The chapel was mostly occupied by the reddish-brown wooden desks and benches set in two rows with an aisle in between. On the right side was the stall of the choir. The floor was all carpeted, the aisle and the rostrum in red and the rest in light brown.

On the white cloth covering the altar, there were two vertical lines of Chinese words embroidered in black threads, saying "Jesus blesses me" and "Pray to Virgin Mary" respectively; on the wall of the dining room was a slogan of "Jesus loves you" in red, which was also written in Chinese; when it came to the statue, standing at the rear corner in the chapel, Virgin Mary who was holding Jesus in her arms had a Chinese appearance...Though the church was no longer for the Chinese people only, the Chinese elements scattered everywhere indicated its special history.

When Kabega Park was designated as a Chinese group area, a plot at the corner of Jade and Agate Roads was allocated to the Chinese to build a new church closer to their new "home". The Chinese parishioners raised funds by holding Chinese food fairs and built this St. Francis Xavier Anglican Church in 1981, with a

same name as the original one at Brassel Street, North End. Now, it was one of the only two buildings (the other one was the old Chinese High School) in Port Elizabeth that were built both by and for the Chinese people, and were still mainly used by the Chinese to this day.

The St. Francis Xavier Church was closely related with the spread of Christianity in the community during the earlier days, which gained momentum when Anglicanism began to interweave with the education of Chinese kids. As was written in the book *Colour, Confusion and Concessions*, “the Chinese parents eager to obtain the service of the sisters to teach their children English while the church was equally keen to establish a Chinese mission” and it resulted in a growth in the number of the Chinese baptized, both students and their parents.

There were statements that as the Chinese were not welcomed by the local government and always faced the risk of being excluded in the early days, thought a baptism certificate would help strengthen the children’s claims of remaining in South Africa.

Another argument was that some Chinese pupils were baptized in order to be admitted to private Christian schools to get better education. A community member once told me, her sister was born deaf but was lucky enough to attend a Christian school that provided special education, after she was baptized.

Later the number of Chinese especially the second- and third- generation who became Christian was on the rise while most of the elder who believed in Buddhism or Guan Gong passed away, Christianity became the dominant religion among the community, till today.

Nowadays for the Chinese in Port Elizabeth, going to church was both a thing of faith and a way of socializing. Besides routine services, the church hold various activities, such as Bingo game, Christmas Eve celebration, Holy Eucharist, Morning Prayer, Ladies Group, Men’s Group. By attending the activities, the community members had more chances to get together and communicate with each other. Going to church has become an indispensable part of daily life, especially for the old.

Several years ago, a middle-aged couple from Hong Kong came to settle in Port Elizabeth and organized the PE Cantonese Study Group as well as the St Francis Xavier Choir featured in Cantonese songs, which was very welcomed by a few old Chinese South Africans who still had some Cantonese basics. Now the small group of around 10 people would get together in the church periodically to learn and practice Cantonese songs. In an afternoon when Hasson took me to the church, I happened to see them singing, accompanied by a man in his sixties playing electronic organ.

When the music started and the old people standing in a circle, white-haired men and old women in presbyopic glasses, with the lyric books in their hands, all sang absorbedly in broken Cantonese in the pleasant rhythm. If you were there, you would be like me, not able to move a step, but sitting in the corner quietly and

enjoying the harmonious picture, in the dulcet Chinese melodies.

All the activities were over. People went out of the church successively, some in twos or threes, some walking and chatting quietly, some in a wheelchair pushed by their families.

It was a sunny day in May, the late Autumn of the southern hemisphere, where the weather was still warm in the beautiful coastal city with mild ocean climate. These old Chinese South Africans in their nineties, eighties or seventies... hugged and said goodbye to each other, got into their cars respectively, started the engines expertly but no longer as deftly as when they were young and, left for home one after another, at which moment, the bright and warm midday sunshine was just falling on every corner of the church garden, the palm and pine trees with big needles still green and the bougainvillea scrambling over the iron fences in blossom with its small magenta flowers, all beautiful and peaceful.

It reminded me of a poem by a famous Chinese poet of Song Dynasty, Shi Su, "where my heart settles, where my home is."

Years past, these second and third generation South Africans were no longer "guest people" like their parents and grandparents who were not welcomed in the foreign land. Having rooted in this country, they were South Africans and for them, South Africa is nothing else but, home.

6. Aimee and Her 101-Year Old Mother

The woman in her gold rimmed glasses was less than 1.5 meters, slightly plump and always spoke in a silky tone. Approachable and easy-going, even when you met her for the first time, you would feel very relaxed talking to her. This is Aimee, an 80-year old lady who has been single all the time.

I was introduced to her by Mira in a church service before Mira took me to meet her mother, who was living with Aimee and was the eldest one in the community then at an age of 101 years old.

The small living room was crowded with sofas, tables, chairs, large and small cabinets, an old black DVD, a globe, candle holders, artificial flowers, tea sets, various desktop decors and numerous framed photos of the family on the wall, glass framed ones, metal ones, wooden ones...all kinds you could think of.

Among all these odds and ends, a piece of Chinese calligraphy work hanging on the wall stood out to catch your eyes, on which were four big Chinese words "Fu Run Bai Ling" in the vertical direction, meaning "Wish blessings accompany you for all your lifetime" and another vertical line of tiny words saying what this calligraphy was for, "to celebrate the centenary of Ms. Zheng Shufen's longevity".

"This is a gift from a friend for her 100-year old birthday last year. Mom likes it very much." Aimee said.

Mira already told me that Aimee's mother got sick about a year ago but it was only when Aimee wheeled her mother from the bedroom to the living room that we knew Ms. Zheng's health rapidly deteriorated in the last few weeks and now lay in bed nearly all day long.

Ms. Zheng was very weak and almost paralyzed in the wheelchair with her head down and eyes half closed. Due to the illness, she was pitifully so thin that her arms were left with only bones and wrinkled skins.

"Hi Porpor, I am Dan. Nice to meet you." I said hello to her while Mira was trying to introduce me, "Aunty, she was Dan from China. Your hometown, China..."

She did not reply. We saw she was trying hard to lift her head and opened her eyes but failed. It was too difficult for her.

"Mom can hear us, but she is just not able to speak." Aimee said. We suggested Aimee to send Ms. Zheng back to the bedroom for a rest.

Ms. Zheng was born in 1918 in China and came to South Africa with her parents in 1939. Like many other Chinese families in South Africa, she and her husband made a living by running a grocery shop in South End, a mixed area in central Port Elizabeth. As her husband died at a young age, she took on the responsibility of supporting the family on her own for a long time.

"Mom has a business brain and she was a very capable woman", Aimee said, "My father taught her to drive and she was the first woman of the community who was able to drive a truck. She always drove the truck to deliver goods to the customers."

When she arrived in South Africa, she was already a young lady and did not have the chance to go to school to learn English. She worked in the shop with a wooden stick and when people came to buy groceries, she pointed to the goods instead of asking "How could I help you?", which lasted for quite many years until she gradually picked up a little English and Afrikaans from the customers. She worked hard and often stayed in the shop for over 10 hours a day. Relying on herself, she ran the business well while raised all her six children up, the three sons all university graduates.

Looking backward, all vicissitudes of life happened like in a flash and the time past seemed long enough for the seas to change into fields. When you saw the frail old lady in the wheelchair that had lost almost all her glories, you might hardly relate her with the once strong and independent businesswoman. Nevertheless, all the ups and downs of life, all the kindness and mercilessness of time, had all melted into the 100 years she had lived.

Two month later in July, I went to Port Elizabeth again and when I met Aimee in the church, the first thing she told me was "Mom has passed away".

I decided to visit Aimee the same evening.

Aimee's home was in a small complex located by the Cape Road in Kabega, where she and her mother had lived for years since they sold the original bigger house.

I rang the gate bell and sent her a WhatsApp message "Hi Aimee, I am at the gate of the complex now". Soon she came out with a remote to open the sliding iron gate for me. Like most complexes in South Africa, the main gate would always keep locked for safety.

Her house was protected by two main doors, one iron security door outside and a wooden door inside. Upon we stepped into the room, she closed and locked the two doors quickly. It seemed that even living in a complex which was safer than a separate house, she was still very cautious. In fact, Port Elizabeth was relatively less dangerous than other cities in South Africa such as Johannesburg and Cape Town, where most houses and residential complexes were equipped with electric fences on the top of the high walls.

"There were no absolute safe places in South Africa. Once a woman was walking on the street in Kabega late afternoon, suddenly a guy popped up, grabbed her necklace and ran away. Nobody else was on the street then to help her. Fortunately, she was not hurt. Danger may happen anytime so we must be very careful, especially at night." Aimee said seriously while she was preparing tea in the kitchen which was an open one connected to the living room.

I saw the calligraphy, the 100-year birthday gift for her mother. It was still there hanging on the wall, though the person had gone. Even its red colour seemed doleful. I sighed a little involuntarily.

A teabag of rooibos²⁶ was brewing in the boiling water and soon made the water into a colour of light reddish brown. Aimee and I sat on the high stool by the kitchen bar counter and chatted, in the warm steam and the special herbal smell of the South African rooibos.

"I am the second eldest of the six siblings. My eldest sister got married and lived in Kabega. My youngest sister was 26 years younger than me. She went to a college in Johannesburg and stayed there ever since. All of my three younger brothers emigrated abroad", while saying, she led me in front of a photo, "This one is an electrical engineer and he was in Canada. This one is in Australia and he is an architectural engineer and this one," she pointed to another degree photo in which a young man was in a graduation gown and hood, "he is the youngest boy and he is a civil engineer in Los Angeles...This girl is his daughter, she is doing her PhD now..." Aimee introduced to me intently and satisfied smiles were on her face all the time.

²⁶ Rooibos means 'red bush', a plant growing exclusively in the southwestern mountain area of the country. It is the most typical and famous kind of herbal tea of South Africa and is popularly drunk by local people.

Unlike the brothers, Aimee and her eldest sister both dropped out from school from an early age to help their mother with the grocery business, "All the boys go to school and we girls work in the shop. But Sandra also went to school. She is 26 years younger than me, I told you. Mom was able to afford the money when Sandra had grown up."

"There was too much work in the shop. Someone must help the parents to support the family and it was always the girls. It was very common among our Chinese community at that time." she continued.

Aimee said that they six siblings were very close. She remembered going to the beach with the brothers to catch abalones when they lived in South End, which was just no more than one kilometre from the sea. "Sometimes we caught a lot and mom would cook them for us, stir fry or steam. There were quite many abalones in the sea in those days. Now they are endangered and so expensive." She remembered the whole family celebrating Christmas together when all the siblings and their families would come back to Port Elizabeth. "Mom likes turkey very much. Every Christmas we would buy and roast a big turkey. We would also have some Chinese dishes, like Cha Siu Pork, chow mein..." She remembered her youngest sister Sandra, who used to play like a boy and always followed the brothers to climb trees. "The brothers took Sandra everywhere. They sometimes were very naughty. But they all helped in the shop when they finished their homework..." When talking about the younger brothers and sister, she became very motherly. It seemed like she was talking about her own children and you could feel the love in her voice.

"Come here Dan, I will show you something." Aimee walked to the round wooden table by the sofa and pointed to the dozen of plush toys on it. There was a brown dog holding a small red heart, a white bear wearing a striped knitted scarf, a snowman with a red nose and gloves, a green giraffe wearing a rosy bow...When Aimee pressed the buttons on the toys, they all began to sing or dance, the snowman spinning in circles; the Donald duck walking in a wiggle and the little horse shaking its head... which were all adorable.

"Wow, cute. Whose toys are these? Are there any kid living here before?" I was quite curious and Aimee's answer really surprised me.

"They were all mom's. My brother, the civil engineer in the United States bought for her." Aimee said and pointed to the degree photo, "When mom was alive, he came back every Christmas. He knew mom liked these lovely stuffs and every year before Christmas he would go specially to a specific supermarket to buy these electronic toys for mom."

"The brothers would not come to Port Elizabeth this Christmas, because they were just back for mom's funeral not long ago." she said with a touch of sadness.

Aimee herself had made a plan to fly to Johannesburg to celebrate the festival with her youngest sister, Sandra's family. For her, this Christmas of 2019 would be the first one without mom and she knew clearly that it would continue to be

like this for all the following years.

Now this 80-year old woman lived alone in the small house, driving to supermarkets buying food at intervals in her compact white Ford, going to church for services or other activities several times a week, most of the time she would stay at home doing house chores and reading Bible and every now and then, she would receive telephone calls from the brothers and sisters. She now found herself another thing to do, "I will go through all her mother's belongings. Books, clothes, documents...there are so many of them."

With the company of all the family photos, the cute plush toys and the various church and community activities, I hope she would not feel too lonely.

I told her to take good care of herself when we were embracing each other for goodbye and at a moment, I felt she was hugging me very tightly. When I was back in the car, I received a WhatsApp message from Aimee, "Dan, thanks for coming to visit me."

7. Little Swallow

Sitting in an upholstered white bench with light brown leather saddle, I poured myself a cup of tea which was just served by a young Chinese waiter and began to enjoy the refreshing aroma of Jasmine when waiting for my food. I ordered golden corn chicken soup, pineapple pork and chop suey, which was a blend of stir-fried veggies.

The moment when stepping into this restaurant, your eyes could hardly escape from the Chinese elements everywhere. A large China artwork occupied nearly the whole wall on the right of the lobby, which consisted of four golden characters "Fu, Lu, Shou and Xi" meaning "luckiness, wealth, a long life and eternal happiness" at the top, and in the middle a traditional Chinese paper-cut picture of red fishes and lotuses meaning luck and fortune. When looking up, two beautiful palace lanterns with pictures of magpies and peach blossoms would come into your sight. Going through the arched doorway decorated with a string of small red lanterns, you would reach reach the dining area, where on the wall next to every table hung a Chinese ink painting and on the table were Chinese blue and white porcelain bowls and plates and bamboo chopsticks.

The restaurant was also tastefully furnished with a lot of vintage woodwork including a cupboard, a cabinet and a counter as well as wood floor and ceiling. It was an evening and the whole dining areas was bathed in the warm yellow lights of the quaint pendant lamps. Eating the classic Cantonese dishes while the tender Cantonese melodies and the sweet love longs of Teresa Teng kept coming into ears, I felt as if I was in a restaurant that often appeared in the 1990s' Hong Kong movies where young lovers liked to date.

This small restaurant named "Little Swallow" located by Opal Road was the only Chinese restaurant in Kabega and here I met Monciya, who was the owner as well as the chef of the restaurant.

Although a Hakka woman, Monciya became a lover of the sweet and light Cantonese cuisine after marrying her Cantonese husband. She had spent a lot of time learning traditional recipes and developing new ones before opening this restaurant in 1986. Now the restaurant served both Chinese food and Western food to cater to various customers, a lot of whom were non-Chinese who came specially for Chinese cuisine.

"Hi Dan, is it possible that you wait for a moment after you finish?" Knowing I come from China, Monciya trotted out of the kitchen and said, "I am almost done, will come soon".

"Of course, take your time." I replied.

Different from most Chinese women who generally did not wear much makeup, Monciya was the best-presented lady I met in the community. Her eyebrows were drawn in the shape of salix leaf, the lips were painted red and her hair was carefully tied up into a bun at the back of the head. Though in her plain work apron, she looked so charming that one might not realize that she was already in her seventies.

She came in a while and sat on the bench opposite me. "Dan, I am always wondering about the meaning of my name, but nobody could tell me. When I asked my parents, they said one of my relatives gave me the name and they also had no idea of the meaning."

She then told me her name in Cantonese, but I could not discern the corresponding characters.

"Could you write it?" I asked. A same Chinese word was pronounced differently in Mandarin and Cantonese but was written in the same way.

Coming back from the counter with a pen and a piece of paper, she was writing her Chinese name carefully stroke by stroke, but awkwardly. Sometimes she had to stop and think for a while.

Now most of the Chinese in the community were not able to speak or write Chinese anymore, but a common phenomenon was that they always tried to remember their own Chinese names.

"Cen Caiying", I read out her name unwittingly the moment when I saw it on the paper, "I must say your name is really beautiful!"

"Wow, Really? Tell me, tell me more." She became a little excited.

"Caiying is the first name. Cai is a verb and it means "pick". "Ying" have many meanings and one of them is flower. It is used a lot in Chinese ancient idioms, for example, "Luo Ying Bin Fen."

She listened carefully but obviously did not understand. I went on explaining

before she questioned, "Luo is used both as a verb and an adjective. It means 'fall' or 'fallen'. And 'Ying'..."

"The flowers!" I saw the happiness on her face. She was like a student who was answering the teacher's question, actively and cheerfully. "Oh, sorry Dan, I did not mean to interrupt you."

"No problem". I said, "Yes, it is the same word as your name, Ying. And now you have remembered its meaning, ha-ha."

We continued in our laughter. "Bin Fen, these two words describe the scene when the flowers are falling. So, the meaning of the word 'Luo Ying Bin Fen' shows a picture of the falling flowers and petals flying from the trees into the air in Spring."

"Wow, it's really beautiful", she nodded the head unconsciously as if she just returned to reality from the scene of Luo Ying Bin Fen.

"There are a lot of phrases that contain four characters in Chinese language. We call it Cheng Yu".

"Dan, you must stay in Port Elizabeth and teach us. I really like it." She smiled even more, "What about my surname?"

"You are saying Cen. It refers to small but high mountains or a cliff by the shore. It is not a commonly seen surname. But there was a famous poet of Tang Dynasty who shared the same surname with you. His name is Cen Shen."

"What kind of poems did he write?"

Then a very well-known one came into my mind and I decided to introduce it to Monciya.

"It is a poem telling the story of farewell to a friend. It is a long one of nine lines and the most famous are the first two lines: Bei feng juan di bai cao she, hu tian ba yue ji fei xue. Hu ru yi ye chun feng lai, qian shu wan shu li hua kai."

I took a sip of tea and went on, "It says that the strong north wind swept the earth and broke the grass. Although it was only August, it had already begun to snow. After a whole night snowing, all of the trees were covered with snow, which looked like white pear flowers were blossoming after the Spring breeze blew overnight."

"Flower, it is the meaning of my name, Ying."

"You are a good student, ha-ha."

"I like the Chinese poem and idiom you just taught me; you can open a Chinese class in PE. I am serious..."

We chatted for a long time that night with lots of laughter and discussions. For me, it is really a happy and unforgettable encounter. Years ago when I was a high

school student reciting this poem for exams, I never thought that one day I would explain it to a Chinese lady in South Africa. I must say, life is really interesting, and miraculous.

Several months later when I was in Port Elizabeth for the second time, I went to “Little Swallow” to visit Monciya again.

Some new decorations had been added in the restaurant. On the wooden cabinet behind the counter was a porcelain vase with Chinese ink pictures and two Qing Dynasty style embroidered hat were also used as ornaments in the lobby. Monciya said, most of the Chinese artworks and ornaments in the restaurant were bought from the old China Town²⁷ decades ago when she visited Johannesburg, especially Sui Hing Hong, a time-honoured Chinese shop which sold all kinds of Chinese goods and some were gifts from friends.

The day she was well dressed in black skinny trousers and a purple mohair long sweater, her eyebrows carefully trimmed and her lips delicately smeared in pink. The big blue flower pinned to the bosom of the sweater was especially eye-catching and made her even prettier.

“Dan, I want to show you something.” She looked at me and led me upstairs, which was a dining area.

“This is it.” She pointed to the wall in front of us.

I was a little shocked.

A whole wall, about three meters high and twenty meters long, was painted into a huge landscape painting of the Great Wall, which consisted of four layers. The magnificent Great Wall at the bottom meandering across the wall took up a large part of the space. The other three layers from the bottom to top, also from close to far in painting, were in dark blue, light brown and dark orange respectively, which looked like trees, mountains and sky in Chinese ink painting. On the top dark orange layer, a red sun is rising from the brown mountains, which light up the whole picture.

“I want to make this space more Chinese so I decided to draw something Chinese on the wall. At first, I had no idea what to paint until I suddenly thought of the Great Wall one day. I then googled many pictures of the Great Wall and my daughter and I began to paint. It is not finished yet. Some details still need to be

²⁷ The China Town was located in Commissioner Street in Johannesburg Town and it used to be the only China Town in South Africa with many Chinese shops and restaurants. After the new China Town was developed in Cyrildene after the new immigrants from China came to South Africa after the 1990s, as well as the security problem in Johannesburg Town, the old China Town went on decline with most of the shops moving out. There are still some Chinese restaurants and shops running there, including Sui Hing Hong.

painted..." She promised to send me a picture when she finished the painting.

That time I also got to know how the name of the restaurant came from. Monciya said, the Little Swallow appealed to her because the bird would always migrate to stay in warm places and "When you see the swarm of swallows, you know that spring is coming".

I guess she must like spring very much, a season which is always full of hope when everything in the nature revives vigorously.

We have kept in touch with each other on WhatsApp since the first meeting in her restaurant.

I once recommended her a popular Chinese vlogger Li Ziqi, who made videos presenting the process of cooking various Chinese food. She said she loved the video series as well as the background music which was played in different kinds of Chinese instruments. When the festival season was coming, she sent me a message asking for links of traditional Chinese New Year songs. She wanted to play some in the restaurant during the Chinese Spring Festival. She also forwarded me interesting news and articles related to China and Chinese culture every now and then.

One day I received her message saying, "Dan, I have an idea for you. It would be so great for you to have a blog or channel, teaching the Chinese idioms to the world. I shall be your fervent supporter, I promise". Her kind words reminded me of the night in May 2019 when we sat face to face in her quaintly furnished "Little Swallow" and talked about Chinese idioms and poems, which, will always be set aside a corner in my memory.

8. Attending a Church Funeral

In front of a two-story house a car stopped. Bryant and several other Chinese men got out of the car when two women in labour suit were pushing an old man in a wheelchair out of the house.

It was about 10 o'clock in the morning. As the sun was obscured in the clouds, the sunlight was not harsh at all. The old man looked up into the sky and took a deep breath.

There was a gentle slope at the door and a young Chinese man rushed to help with the wheelchair, at which time, Bryant had opened the back door of the car. Then all the people worked together to transfer the old man into the car seat.

As there was no sign on the house, it was only later I knew it was a nursing home. The old man, Bryant's brother-in-law, his second elder sister Kelly's husband, was half paralyzed in his lower body and could hardly move a little. Kelly, more than 80 years old already, was unable to take care of his husband by herself and had to send her husband to this nursing home. As the only one in Kabega, this

nursing home at 16 Colin Road had become some old Chinese people's "second home" benefitting from its convenient location.

While Bryant was supporting the old man at the back, Rainlly got into the driver's seat and started the car. It was heading to the St Francis Xavier Church.

On July 13, 2019, I received an email from Bryant, titled "Bereavement in Family".

In the email he said, "I am afraid I have bad news. My elder sister, Kelly phoned me early on Thursday morning to inform me that my eldest sister, Cassie had passed away at 23:00 on Wednesday."

The funeral would be held at 11:00am at St Francis Xavier Church on Wednesday, July 17, 2019. He and Claire planned to leave for Port Elizabeth on Tuesday morning by car. The old couple were familiar with the 750 kilometres' drive from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth as every time they went to PE in the past years, mostly to attend funerals, they had to endure the exhausting and excruciating long trip. Usually they would start off in the early morning, stop to refuel and have a quick lunch break in a fast food bar like KFC at two thirds of the way in Knysna and arrive at PE before sunset. Knysna, a small town situated at the well-known "Garden Route" along the southeast coastal line of South Africa, is a wonderful holiday paradise and a beautiful sight-seeing spot. However, for most of the occasions when they passed by the town, they were in no mood to enjoy the sceneries.

The last time when he went back to Port Elizabeth, he bid farewell forever to his dear eldest brother Stephen. This time, he became "a mourning Bryant" again, to have a last look at and say goodbye to his sister.

In a minute, we arrived at the church. After helping his brother-in-law out of the car, Bryant stood at the door with other family members to greet the friends who came for Cassie's funeral.

Cassie, born in 1937, was afflicted by disease for a long time when she was alive. She developed a nervous disorder at a young age and had to receive medication constantly, which, however, did not bring complete cure but eventually result in Parkinson's disease. "So, it is a relief for her as she did not enjoy the quality of life for a very long time." Bryant wrote in the email.

People arrived at the church one by one. A car stopped at the gate and an old man, who seemed to be also in his eighties, stepped out with a walking stick in his right hand. I saw Bryant quickly walking to him and the two men hugged and patted each other on the shoulders. The two old friends had not seen each other for some years and this time they met again because of death and farewell. It did

sound a little sad.

Bryant was dressed all black and the old man with walking stick was in a white cardigan and black pants. I saw the two men both with grey hair supporting each other and walking slowly on the narrow cement road to the chapel. The sun had broken free from the clouds and the sunlight was shining softly on them.

The funeral was about to begin.

In the soothing music played by the church band, people were seated in the chapel and a piece of A4 paper of a brief profile of the dead was put on the table in front of everyone's seat.

At the top of the paper wrote, "In Celebration of the life of Cassie Toms", followed by "Wang Jialing" in brackets, Cassie's Chinese name. At the bottom were her dates of birth and death. A large space on the paper was occupied by a picture of Cassie with silver-grey short hair, a pair of silver-framed glasses and her eyes and cheeks deeply sunken. This was the first time I "met" Cassie, also the last time.

The funeral started on time at 11:00am with the "Welcome and Condolences" section under the officiation of Father Wil Wheaton. Then a six-person group, consisted of Bryant and other five males from the extended family, three on each sides, escorted and pushed the wooden coffin on wheels into the chapel slowly, followed by all the female family members²⁸. The coffin was invested by deep blue cloth cover with yellow purple, on which was a framed photo of Cassie and a bouquet of yellow and white fresh flowers interspersed with green leaves and branches, a framed photograph of Cassie.

After Father Wil Wheaton finished the opening prayer, all the people sang the hymn "Power of Your Love" together accompanied by the church band, including a pianist, a guitarist, a keyboard player (who was Mira) and a singer. Then it was Bryant's section to do the first reading of the Bible, followed by the St Francis Xavier Choir, most members of which were old ladies, singing a Cantonese song as a dedication for Cassie, who once was also a member. Although I did not know what the lyrics were about as I was not a Cantonese speaker, I could feel the deep emotion in the moving melodies.

Later with the help of a Cantonese friend, I was able to find out it was a church song and its name was "God Jehovah is Love". Now every time I listened to the song, I always thought of the scene of the old Chinese South Africans singing the

²⁸ It is the same situation as in China that only the males will touch or carry a coffin. In traditional Chinese philosophy, the males and females is deemed respectively as Yang and Yin, which are two opposing principles in nature, the former positive while the latter negative. And the dead, no matter male or female, was Yin. As too much Yin will harm ones health, so the females, who are already Yin, are not suitable for touching the coffin of a dead person.

song in disfluent Cantonese, the mother language of their parents or grandparents, to bid farewell to a fellow compatriot as well as an old friend, with whom they might once go to school or play games together when they were kids. Somehow, I would be moved in a mixture of emotions welling up into my mind.

Kelly, who was a short, thin and short-haired woman in a black suit did the eulogy, sketching Cassie's whole life with every word articulated unworriedly. Then I knew Cassie used to go to London to learn nursing after graduating from Roman Catholic Assumption College, however, the nervous disorder attacked her before she finished the courses and she had to come back to PE. Since then, her life was entangled by the disease, which she struggled against all her rest life time. Fortunately, Cassie faced all the sufferings positively and tried to live her life as colourfully as possible. She enjoyed knitting and joined in a charitable organization, making gowns especially for the poor; she was a member of the church choir and the guitar player at a gym music group; she learnt Cantonese for many years and kept learning new things...In Kelly's words, Cassie seldom complained and was a "quiet person and a good listener."

Following the eulogy session was a series of church services including Reading Bible, Sermon, Prayers and the last Hymn.

This was the first time I attended a church funeral. There were reading, prayers soothing music and no crying was heard, making the farewell ceremony not dismal or heavy, but solemn and warm at the same time.

The ceremony was over. The coffin was taken out and a minibus from the funeral company was already waiting outside. When the coffin was lifted up and carefully placed into the minibus, I saw Bryant taking out a small digital camera from his pocket and starting recording.

The door of the minibus was finally closed. On the screen of the camera, the bus carrying his dear eldest sister was leaving, farther and farther and at last, disappeared out of the lens...

9. Resting in Peace in the Soil of South Africa

Parking the car on the meadow, Bryant took out from the trunk a plastic bucket and a cloth bag with a small sickle and some rags inside while Claire was carrying a big bunch of white and yellow gerbera. After filling the bucket with water from a faucet nearby, they walked towards a mass of tombstones just in front of us.

Hundreds of tombstones were standing silently and when taking a closer look, one could found that almost all tombstones had both Chinese and English characters on them.

It was North End Cemetery on Paterson road about 3 kilometres to the north of the city centre and 10 kilometres away from Kabega, one of the two cemeteries where most of the Chinese in Port Elizabeth were laid to rest, with some White

and Jewish people occupying neighbouring plots. In recent years, as no more room was available, the dead were buried in South End Cemetery at Forest Hill Road, in which people of all colours and races lay.

The day after the funeral, I followed Bryant Claire to the North End Cemetery. Bryant's old friend Rainlly also came along for company. Since moving to Cape Town, the old couple would visit the cemetery where their dead relatives were buried every time they returned to Port Elizabeth.

"One, two, three...I remember it is in that row". Bryant said to Claire while walking towards the densely arranged tombstones and stopped in front of a rectangular granite light black one, which was about 1 meter high and half a meter in width with decorative patterns carved at the very top. At the foot of the tombstone laid a 15cm high rectangular cement enclosure, inside was another small tombstone reclined on the ground with the top slightly elevated so that one could easily see the characters on it.

Claire was making a small bunch of flowers and Bryant began to clear the weeds and fallen leaves stacked on the grave with the aid of the small sickle and then washed the tombstone with the rag soaked with water in the bucket.

In a while, the tombstones once covered in thick dust after being exposed outdoors day after day took on a new look and the content engraved onside could be seen clearly. The upright tombstone was for Bryant's father and the small one reclining on the ground was his mother's, with her ashes in an urn beneath.

The six big Chinese characters "Wang Gong Ming Yuan Zhi Mu" engraved in the middle of his father's tombstone in vertical order and KaiTi font, meant "This is Mingyuan Wang's grave". On the right were another vertical line of smaller characters "Shun De Shang Hua Xiang Ren" indicating the place he came from. The characters on the left of the tombstone showed that the tombstone was set up in April, 1952 by his two sons: Chung Kwan(Stephen) and Chi Kwan (Bryant). The two names were listed in an order from the old to the young and from right to left, which used to be the dominant writing style in China. The small character "male" engraved next to the two names was following the old Chinese tradition that only the male children would be engraved to the parent's tombstones, an embodiment of gender inequality. Fortunately, this tradition, a product of the feudal thought which had prevailed in China for more than 2000 years, had disappeared in most places nowadays. At the bottom of the tombstone were English characters showing the name, birth date and death date of the dead. As for Bryant's mother's tombstone, there were only English characters: "Toms, in Loving Memory of Our Dear Mother, Ah Lan, 5.5 1915-10.5 1992."

Getting rid of the weeds and leaves, the graves showed a little vitality with the

fresh white and yellow daisies that Claire had just put into the granite vase at the foot of the tombstone.

"Generally, we start from my parents or Claire's grandparents, then Claire's parents and my siblings. Sometimes it was not easy to find the specific one as the characters were obscured in the dust. And you know, my memory was not smart as before anymore." Bryant said to me and then went on with Claire to find the next one to clean.

I found they did not bow or kowtow to the tombstone like what we did in China when visiting ancestor's graves. As Bryant was busy, I talked about the "bow" thing with Rainlly. He said he used to do that when he was a little kid. "My parents would let me bow to the dead ancestors to show respect. We call it 'Bai'. They would also burn incenses, mutter prayers as well as talk to the dead."

"We still do it now" I said, "Did you ever offer food and drinks to the dead?"

"You mean...", he stopped for a little while as he was thinking something and continued "Yes. I think so. I remember my father brought wine when we visited the graves. He would spill some wine in the soil and it meant the dead was drinking it. Really interesting."

"And the food was displayed in front of the tombstone, so the dead could 'eat', right?" I asked.

"Same thing. The adults would also give the dead money to spend in another world by burning the paper money. I remember it was yellow paper, very thin one."

"Last time when I went back to China to visit my grandparents' tomb, we also burnt paper money." I said. Rainlly listened to me carefully and nodded his head.

"We used to celebrate the 'Tomb Sweeping Day' in April and the adults from the same family or extended family would visit the cemetery together. After all the rites in the cemetery, the whole family would have dinner together, usually in an old Chinese restaurant on Evatt Street. The restaurant made delicious Bai Zhan Ji (Boiled chicken served with sauce). I still remember the light salty flavour." His eyes lit up as if his mind was wandering back to the past. "The restaurant had closed for a long time, long time ago." He sighed.

"So now you don't celebrate the day anymore?"

"No. Not for many years. But I heard that some Chinese in Johannesburg still visit cemeteries together on a specific day. I'm not sure though. For me, it was just memory. You know, the old have all died, we don't know the traditions and rituals clearly and the younger generation are not interest in these things at all. Most of the old traditions have disappeared. It's inevitable." He said calmly, throwing up his hands.

We talked while strolling among the rows of tombstones, all in various sizes, heights, shapes and styles. As to the characters and information engraved, some were in Chinese, some in English and some in both Chinese and language; some were complete and detailed while some only included a name without even the birth and death date.

In the earliest days, most Chinese who came to South Africa were male teenagers or young adults. When they had saved enough money to afford the passage, they would go back to China to find a wife and bring her to South Africa. However, this was only part of the story. For those who could not afford the ship ticket back to hometown, it was difficult to find a wife in the foreign land as few Chinese women were in South Africa then, not alone single ones. So some men had to live all their life alone. It was understandable that some people's tombstones had only a name. Possibilities were that no one knew clearly when they were born or when they lost their breath.

Some graves were very small, usually half the size of a relatively larger one. When you took a look at these tombstones, you might find out that the person buried was a child or a baby.

Rainlly's little brother died as a baby but Rainlly could not remember where the baby was buried because when the baby died, Rainlly himself was only a kid who did not know much thing. He vaguely remembered that the grave was in this cemetery, but he had never found it, "it might be broken," he said.

It was not impossible.

On our way from the graveyard back to the car, we found on an open field a large tomb about three meters long and two meters wide, with many red and brown stones scattered around. What's special was that the tombstone was in the shape of a cross, which was totally different from the shape of all other tombstones, mostly rectangular ones. Who was buried here? Why was it in a shape of a cross? Was he or she a Christian? Was he/she a Chinese? If not, why was he/she here? As the characters on it were already illegible, we would never know.

Next to it we saw another tombstone, which had broken into several pieces. It lay on the ground with some pieces were half buried in the grasses and soil. The Chinese characters on it were so crooked that I would say they were not from a stonecutter but a DIY product. While some characters were fragmented, some were still clear. The first name must be "Isacc", which was like a male name. A line of Chinese characters was engraved vertically on the very left of the tombstone, saying "Year 1894", which, we guess, must be the year when the person died. As the Chinese free immigrants began to arrive in the country since the 1870s, this person was likely to be among the first wave of Chinese people in South Africa.

125 years had passed since 1894. Possibilities are that his descendants are no longer in Port Elizabeth or alive, or he even did not have any descendants. Otherwise, why nobody took care of his tombstone? Now as it was broken with

some parts missing, it was impossible for people to tell his full name. Years later, when the characters on the tombstone were eroded day-after-day by the sun, the wind and the rain, no information of him would be left in the world. Then this Chinese man and all his stories would disappear from the world, completely

Recent years as more and more community members chose to cremate their bodies, a “Garden of Remembrance” was built in the corner of the St. Francis Xavier Church to bury the ashes of the deceased. The ashes were sealed in urns placed tidily in the hollow space in the wall with small tombstones of the same size, shape and colour on the surface. Now less and less people would come to the cemetery any more as they could conveniently visit their deceased beloved in the church, where you thus could always see bunches of fresh flowers including lilies, eucalyptus leaves, all colours of daisies...at the foot of the wall.

The car started and moved farther and farther away from the graveyard. Looking back through the car window, several low but stout acacia trees, a most typical plant of the southern Africa, were standing in the graveyard with their branches spreading out like flat-topped umbrellas or bulging mushrooms, hiding some tombstones under their tiny but dense leaves, just like robust guards were protecting the dead’s lives. The dazzling sun was shining harshly on the earth and each tombstone casted a long shadow on the green lawn in the very bright graveyard.

It was a typical sunny day in South Africa which was dry and hot with strong ultraviolet radiation. I never knew whether or not these uprooted Chinese people often thought of or missed their hometown in southeast China, where the climate was warm and humid all year round with a lot of mild rainy days. Some of them, might just like Bryant’s father, had never thought that he would die in the once foreign country.

Now accompanied by the hot dry weather, the blue sky, the green grass and bright sunshine, they are resting in peace in this land of South Africa forever, all those glories and dreams lost in the long course of time.

10. The Sea Water Will Take Me Back

It was only on our way back home when we four people were chatting with each other that I got to know, Rainlly’s father was the first Chinese in Port Elizabeth to cremate his body, in 1965.

“Yes, he had no tomb. We scattered his ashes into the sea as he required. When he was at the end of his life, he said he could not go back to his hometown but if his ashes were in the sea, the sea water would probably take him back.”

When I heard what Rainlly was saying, a Chinese four-character idiom suddenly came to my mind: “Luo Ye Gui Gen”. It literally means “Fallen leaves return to its root”. It usually refers to people living in a foreign land who eventually return to

their hometown, which was apparently Rainlly's father's last wish.

Born in the 1880s, Rainlly's father²⁹ came to South Africa in early 20th century as a trader. Well-educated in China, he always wrote and read letters for his compatriots who were illiterate. Rainlly's mother was his father's second wife (his first wife was in China) and Rainlly was more than 50 years younger than his father. The huge age gap combined with a typical traditional Chinese father who was always serious resulted in that Rainlly and his father seldom communicated with each other.

However, Rainlly said, his father used to teach him to write Chinese calligraphy. "The shaft of the brush pen was very long, and I must keep my back upright by the desk to use the pen. We used to write in the shop and father would sit by me and instruct me in Cantonese. I could not remember what he said. It's too long ago. Now I also forgot how to write it, but I just remember he was very patient then. And we seldom sit and talk so close."

Clearly, his father was trying to pass on the traditional Chinese culture he mastered to the next generation. He had also put some thought into Rainlly's name.

Rainlly's full name is "Rainlly Warson" and his Chinese name is "Wong Renli". Wong is the surname and Renli is the first name. What is interesting is that, if you pronounce Renli in Cantonese, it is the same as "Rainlly" and "Warson" sounds similar to "Wong Sang", which means Mr. Wong in Cantonese.

In traditional Chinese culture, "Ren", which referred to benevolence, kindness, love and noble morality, was the core thought of Confucianism. His father must have placed good hope on his youngest son and expected him to be a person who was kind, full of love and had good moral character.

Rainlly is indeed such a person, who has a good reputation in the community. He and his wife Megan, who is a Hakka woman born and growing up in Johannesburg, ran a Chinese take-away shop in Kabega before they retired. They have two daughters and a son: the eldest daughter is a doctor and has immigrated to Canada; the second daughter majors in medicine and is a therapist in Johannesburg; the youngest son took over their business "Panda Snacks" several years ago and is still running it till today.

Rainlly fell in love with classical music since a young age and had collected and kept a full bookshelf of CDs, including several Chinese folk music ones he bought in Hong Kong. Years ago, he, Jerry and a friend started a music-listening group and every Monday night, they would get together at a member's home to appreciate music, usually a specific CD they had chosen in advance. Later, as Jerry moved to Johannesburg and another member passed away, the group had to be disbanded.

²⁹ Rainlly's father was the "5th uncle" in Section 1, who was the fifth uncle of Ah Yuen (Bryant's father).

Rainlly developed an interest in Chinese history a long time ago. At present he is reading biographies of Chinese political leaders, such as Sun Yat Sen, Mao Zedong, Chiang Kai-shek. Now a 79-year-old man, for most of the time he stays at home reading books and listening to music while Megan, several years younger than him, is interested in Yoga and goes to yoga classes every week.

In June 2019, the old couple made a trip to Canada and enjoyed a month's time with their eldest daughter, son in law and the two granddaughters. In December the same year, when they and their youngest son's family all came to their second daughter's place in Johannesburg to celebrate Christmas, I was also invited to the Christmas dinner with the big family. After feasting on the traditional Christmas food of a big turkey, roasted gammon and so on, we chatted with each other with cold drinks and deserts in the happy and harmonious family reunion atmosphere. It was at that time when Rainlly came to me to ask if I could give Chinese names to his twin grandchildren, a boy and a girl, who were both 8 years old.

"I have thought about the names for a long time, but I haven't come up with satisfying ones now." he said.

It was the first time I gave names to others. Finally I named the girl "Mei li" and the boy "Sheng li", which mean "beauty" and "victory" respectively while the pronunciations of the last word of their names were the same, commonly seen in siblings' names in China, especially for twins.

"Now the twins finally have their Chinese names." Rainlly was very happy. He had gave his son's youngest daughter Eywa a Chinese name, Ai hua.

"Literally it means 'love flowers', right?"

"Yes, yes". I agreed while nodding my head.

"And its pronunciation in Cantonese is like Eywa in English. You see?" Rainlly said.

It suddenly dawned to me when he pronounced Aihua in Cantonese. Rainlly was still talking about the Chinese name, excitedly. In an instance I remembered his father, the man who had given him the ingenious Chinese name. What he was doing then was so much like his father.

Now I still remember the twins bringing a notebook and a pen to let me write down their Chinese names in case they would forget them. I also remember they sitting by the swimming pool in the garden, holding the notebook to practice reading the names again and again, in the light of the colourful Christmas lights decorated on the walls of the garden.

The twins were half Chinese and half white. I have no idea what China and Chinese mean to them and I think they may not know either as they were just kids. But I know that their grandfather Rainlly, who is a second generation Chinese South African, is trying hard to leave some Chinese marks on his

grandchildren, just as what his father had done to him decades ago.

11. The Sea Wind is Still Blowing

Before leaving Kabega Park, I made a visit to the port, with a purpose of taking a look at the very place where the forefathers of the Chinese South Africans came ashore to Port Elizabeth.

Now Port Elizabeth is still an important harbour city of South Africa as in the old days. It is via this port that the numerous motorcars assembled in Uitenhage³⁰ are loaded onto the cargo ships before transported to places all over the world. The running port is busy all day long and do not allow visitors like me to enter. Fortunately, a gatekeeper of the port on duty the day told me that a marine area nearby was open and once it was also part of the old port of Port Elizabeth.

The area was segregated from the running port by high thick iron fences, through which I saw that many cargo ships anchoring at the shore one by one and the cranes were loading or offloading large containers.

This area worked as a small harbour where many small vessels anchored, each having its name painted on the ship, be it “MARIGOLD, PEA456D” or “SANT JOANA, PEA 229CF” or “GURU SAM, PEA 481”. Some were industrial ships severely rusted; some were vintage-style pleasure ships with square red and brown bows and wooden windows that looked like a locomotive; most were modern yachts, moored densely on both sides of the long iron ramp stretching from the bank into the sea. It was no longer the same port as it was more than 100 years ago when the Chinese people disembarked from the ship which had sailed in the sea for months from the other side of the earth.

For more than a century, it has witnessed countless departures and returns, farewells and reunions, when the parents sent their children back to China to learn Chinese, when the wives who left hometown finally arrived to reunite with their husbands, when the Chinese men came alone with hopes and dreams of starting a new life...When I closed my eyes, the images all came to me.

There I ran into a yacht owner in his seventies who is a native of Port Elizabeth. His father used to work at the port and once told the family what he had seen at the port: A ship was bringing in a lot of Chinese people who were put in big cane buckets to get off the ship just like cargoes, with luggage which was only cloth-wrappers that could not be simpler, which, happened at the beginning of the 20th century.

I am not able to check whether his father’s description was a general situation or

³⁰ Uitenhage is the place where the Volkswagen factory located, which is the biggest car factory on the African continent. (Source: Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uitenhage>)

a special case, as all the elder-generation Chinese had passed away. Anyway, I know it is never easy for the Chinese or any group of people to leave their hometown for a foreign country to make a living, especially in the old days. Most Chinese men initially came alone and left their wives and children behind, with the intention to go back after making some fortune. However, things did not always happen as people had planned.

Some arrived but never returned to China again; some came as a young man and came back as a grandfather; some never made it possible to go back hometown when he was alive but asked his son to take the ashes back to be buried in the home village. He was Alex's father.

I would never forget the story Alex once told me. "When dad was alive, he often told us an interesting thing happening to him. When he was a teenager, he always played with his cousins on a small hill behind the house. One time, they took out a bottle of white wine from home, obviously on the sly, sat on the hill and drank up the wine. Then it was getting dark and he had to go back home though he was still drunk then. He said there was a muddy road leading to grandparents' house with two ponds on both sides, so he must be very careful so as not to fall into the ponds. He walked on the short road but found it was so long. He said the whole world was rotating then and he could not reach home no matter how he tried to walk forward. That was the first time he drank wine. Several years ago, when I took his ashes back to China, the relatives guided me to visit grandparents' old house. You guess what? Sure enough, there was a muddy road and two small ponds there. The moment I saw them, I thought of the scene of dad walking on the road with a rolling gait. And I just couldn't help crying."

When the Chinese had just arrived in South Africa, most of them kept close contact with their families in China, through letters, telegraphs, remittance as well as irregular home visiting. They would send money to support the family and when they went back to find a wife or visit relatives, they would build houses for themselves or their parents to live in. People who had made some fortunes would even donate money to the village or the county to construct roads, found schools and build ancestral temples. Their hard work not only changed their own lives but also improved the living conditions of the whole family or even the whole village. When the Sino-Japanese War broke, some of them raised money all around and donated to the government of China through the consulate in South Africa. As the first-generation Chinese gradually passed away, the connection between their descendants and China is still there, but inevitably is also waning.

Their descendants, the second- and third-generation Chinese South Africans, who were born, grew up and educated in South Africa and lived all their lifetime in a society of western lifestyle and western culture, were much different from their parents and grandparents. They are not able to speak Cantonese or Hakka anymore but were fluent in English, Afrikaans or even Zulu; they no longer believed in Buddhism or Guan Gong but many are Christian; they do not celebrate traditional Chinese festivals but always enjoy Christmas, Easter and

Halloween; they are awkward with chopsticks but use knives and forks skilfully even when they are having Chinese food.

Also as South Africa was much more developed than China in the 20th century, the life they live was totally different from that of their peers in China. When they began to learn to drive in the 1950s, most of their peers in China had even never had a bicycle. Now in their late seventies or eighties they still go out by driving a car themselves, which rarely happens among the old in China. They had the chance to develop lots of hobbies in sports, music, movies, photography and so on since they were children when most of their Chinese peers might be struggling with food and clothing and had to worked hard from farmland to farmland. Now some of them still work in the shop or restaurant to support the family when their Chinese peers are enjoying the late days with grandchildren. From my point of view, the lifestyles of these two groups of Chinese are, no exaggeration to say, unimaginable to each other.

Now, some of these second- and third generation Chinese South Africans still keep in touch with the relatives in China while some have lost track of the homeland. More generally, many would like to go to China for at least once in their lifetime for a look especially to visit their parents' or grandparents' villages when they can afford the trip.

Rainlly and Megan was the first family of the community to go to China, in the early 1980s when it was still cumbersome for the South Africans to enter mainland China as the two counties had not established diplomatic relations. It was also their first trip abroad and Megan said, "Though China was still poor then and might not be the best choice for travel, you have this connection with that country, and you just want to go". They even wanted to go for another time in the future, "China has changed so much in the past decades and we want to have another look." Megan told me.

Some went to China specifically to meet the relatives. In those days, many Chinese immigrants did not bring all their children out for various reasons, such as gender, finance or a lack of paper (identity certificate). Lucas said, "I have an eldest sister in China. When my father came to South Africa, he just brought out all the sons and left my sister in the village with my grandparents. A dozen years ago I went to China for the first time to visit her and other relatives. When I saw her at the first sight, I reached out my hands to take hers, unconsciously. You know, she was so much like my mom. She was already more than 90 years old then and she passed away several years ago."

China was undeveloped in the last century and people were very poor. The living conditions were much worse than that in South Africa. In most villages, there was no electricity, no tap water, and those dirt roads walked out of by people were narrow, winding and rough. Aimee told me, when she went back to her father's village for the first time in the 1980s, she cried upon arriving at grandparents' shabby mud house. She said, "I just feel sorry for the relatives. We live in a nice house and so many delicious to eat. But they had nothing. They lived

so hard. It's really sad." Mira remembered bringing a lot of stuff to give to the relatives in China when her family went back, "There were clothes, food, small life apparatus...all kinds of. We even bought a bicycle and a radio for the relatives when we were at Hong Kong airport because China had a limited supply then and they couldn't get the stuff at the mainland. Now China is much more developed and things have changed. Charles went to China to visit the relatives several years ago and he said, "The cousins have arranged the accommodation, meals and transportation...everything for us. They didn't let us to pay a penny. One cousin said, "In the past, it was the relatives in South Africa who sent money home. Now we live a better life and we must do something good for you."

As to the younger generation, not many are interested in visiting China. I once talked to some younger third-generation and fourth-generation Chinese South Africans and they said, China was just another foreign country for them, towards which they did not have any special affection. A third-generation Chinese in his forties who had been to China told me, "Before I went to China, I thought I was very Chinese, as here in South Africa, all your friends or colleagues around always call you 'the Chinese guy'. But when I was in China among the people who all had yellow skin and black hair, just the same as me, I, however, felt that I was so different. The different language, dietary habit, lifestyle...all these told me that, I'm a South African. I still feel I have some subtle connection with China. But this doesn't necessarily mean I will go to China or I will learn Mandarin, it's just an identity thing. I recognize myself as an authentic South African, South African first. But at the same time I'm also a Chinese, either from the ethnicity point of view, or anything else. That's the fact."

The language may be forgotten and the traditions may be lost, the DNA remains there. For the Chinese South Africans, it is certain that no matter what will change in the future, their identity will always be closely bound up with one word, "Chinese".

The high blue sky, cloudless and fair, looked like a flat canvas, under which, the waves kept rushing to the bank again and again and brought the salty smell of the sea lingering in the cool air. With the vast blue sea full filled my eyes, I could not help thinking of long time of the Chinese coming, settling and setting root in the once foreign land, with all the ups and downs, happiness and sufferings, laughter and tears. In those numerous days and nights, a lot of things remain the same but so many have changed.

The small Chinese community in Port Elizabeth itself is experiencing changes all the time. People keep passing away or moving out; community activities and clubs are on the decline; old traditions and cultures are gradually disappearing. Time is still ticking without stopping, and no one can predict what will happen in the future. But I know, the people in the small Chinese community in Port Elizabeth have lived and are still living with their full strength and heart in the world. Although they are not big names with spectacular life experiences, each of

them has their own stories, unique, beautiful and worth treasuring, which, I think, is where all the meanings of life lie in.

Every time when I think of the old days when the Chinese came a long way from China to South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, a scene flashes across my mind unconsciously: A ship carrying thousands of people was sailing lonely in the vast Indian Ocean, from sunrise to sunset, day after day. What accompanied it was the sea wind only, blowing sometimes mildly, sometimes wildly, taking the Chinese men on the ship back home in the poor villages in China, or to the uncertain future on the southern African continent they were sailing to, in daytime and midnight, in memories and dreams.

Standing by the sea my mind was wandering in the river of the long past and the infinite future, while at the right present, the strong sea wind kept coming into my ears, brushing my face and ruffling my hairs, time after time, 150 years after the Chinese forefathers came to the country.

The sea wind, is still blowing.

12. Epilogue

The new year of 2020 was there.

Jerry had just sent me a picture via WhatsApp of himself funnily putting a small bright blue plastic bucket on the head as a hat and his girlfriend wearing a colourful wreath on the neck, which was took in the carnival of their retirement village's 50th anniversary. The two stood closely with each other and smiled happily. Hasson and his family were still busy with their own work, going to the office, making steamed buns and preparing food for the caterings and so on. Some of the family members in Johannesburg, Cape Town or even abroad in the United States came back to Port Elizabeth for a visit and the big family had just gathered in the farm house for a New Year dinner, which made Porpor extremely happy. Aimee said in a phone call that she had sorted out some of her mother's clothes and gave them to the poor. Now she was busy cleaning the windows of the house to welcome the New Year. Monciya's daughter had come back from Macau to spend the festival season with the family. With the help of her daughter, Monciya had finally finished The Great Wall ink painting in the restaurant and sent me a picture of it, which was really amazing. On Jan 28, 2020, I received a new email from Bryant, who was just 80 years old this year.

Hello Dan,

Wish you a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year of the Rat.

My friend, Lee Mun Hing was kind enough to give me a copy of the new Lunar calendar and a copy of the Chinese horoscope. He read and explained my Dragon horoscope for the whole year and I am relieved that this year will not be too bad.

I have been trying to read and translate a couple of letters that my two grandmothers wrote in 1934 and 1937 to my parents after they arrived in Port

Elizabeth in 1934.

I have recently met Hadoram Ah King, a cousin of my mother from Madagascar who was now living in Cape Town too. He recently went to Mauritius for a holiday, where he lived originally before his parents moved to Madagascar. I have invited him and his family for a Sunday lunch so that we can exchange more information about our family.

The Easter Chinese Youth Sports Tournament is to be hosted by the Chinese Western Province Sport Association here in Cape Town area at the University of Stellenbosch as Port Elizabeth does not have enough participants to host the tournament. We will probably attend just to meet and greet some old friends from Port Elizabeth.

The weather is still hot and windy. Here at Cape Town the kite-surfers are out in force when the south-easterly wind blows strongly.

The water-restrictions have not been lifted yet and our water-tanks are just about empty. The municipality says that they will review the water situation at the end of our rainy season or when our water storage dams have reached above 80% full.

The Choi seeds that I sowed early this month have germinated. At present there is Pak Choi, Gou Gay Choi and Wu-ong Choi in the garden. I transplanted some lettuce seedlings late yesterday afternoon and this morning, I went to check the seedlings to see if they have settled in. When the leaves are standing upright then I sighed with relief, because I know that they will survive and continue to grow.

How is everything going with you and Felix? Will you go back to China to visit your family in the upcoming Chinese Spring Festival? ...

Until next time, take care.

Warm regards,

Bryant and Claire

WRITER'S WORDS

During the lunch time on April 27, 2019, flight BA6214 landed at Port Elizabeth International Airport from Johannesburg.

I walked out of the hall of arrival and at the gate I was surprised to see my name “Dan Wang” in Chinese on a picking card. The card was made of an A4 paper and was held high by a tall thin man.

The man was Hasson and that was the first time we met. In the following week, I would conduct my research in the Chinese community in Port Elizabeth, with the assistance of Hasson, who I even did not know ten days ago.

Before coming to Port Elizabeth, I made contact with Melanie Yap, one of the authors of the book *Colour, Confusion and Concessions: The history of the Chinese in South Africa* with the help of the Chinese South Africans in Johannesburg. Knowing that I was going to PE for interviews, Melanie kindly offered to introduce a man, who was once the chairman of the Eastern Cape Chinese Association to help me. The man was Hasson.

I then sent Hasson an email and received his reply soon, in which he wrote, “Hi Dan, I have spoken to my family about your research program and we are keen to assist you. You can stay at our home while you are in PE. I will be working during the day, but my wife Mira and my sisters will be able to assist in setting up meetings and taking you around PE...”

Later I went to live in Hasson’s house. It was also he and his wife Mira who drove me to different places and families in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage, no matter it whether it was close or far.

Laura, a second generation Chinese South African, who was in her eighties, once rejected to talk to me when Jerry phoned her to try to introduce me. However, later it was she, who gave all the Chinese books and magazines of the Chinese High School she kept for me for reference; it was she who specifically came to me after the funeral in the church to introduce me to the organizer of the PE Chinese study group; it was also she, offered to show me around in Uitenhage, where she was born and grew up and then on a rainy day in July, I paid my second visit to the town.

I remember the architect who warmly led me to a seat in a church service and left a service agenda for me specifically. He was Gray Wong around 80 years old. The day before we had just met at his house taking for some time and obviously he remembered that I was collecting information of the community, including the St Francis Xavier Church.

When I visited Irene, an old lady who helped his son in a Chinese take-away in Uitenhage, she spared quite some time to talk to me even though she was very busy serving the customers.

It cost Paul nearly a whole day to show me around central Port Elizabeth where the Chinese used to congregate and South End where he lived as a little kid. It was very hot and I saw him in the driver's seat sweating all the time, without any impatience. Later in the day he invited me to his place and showed me some of his family's documents, among which was an original copy of a passport issued in the early 1910s, very precious.

Every time I went to Hasson's family's farm house for a dinner, Alex would keep saying "Help yourself, Dan" and when he saw I just had a little food in my plate, he always joked mildly "You don't like our food". I know he was worrying that his guest was too shy to eat.

Mira is not talkative and seldom smile, which, however, does not prevent her from being a warm-hearted person. During my first stay in Port Elizabeth, it was she who drove and accompanied me to do most of the visiting and interviews. One time we had a tight schedule and were outside, either on the way or conducting researches almost the whole day. When we were at Laura's place, Mira fell asleep on the sofa when she was waiting for me. She was too tired.

Looking back at my experiences in the community, I am so moved. I have received so much help from so many people.

Porpor, Bryant, Claire, Jerry, Rainly, Megan, Aimee, Monciya, Laura, Alex, Kayla, Martin, Kevin, Mr. Wong, Edward, Wendy, Bella, the Song Siong family...selflessly shared their family photos, old documents or even their personal memoirs with me, driving me around to visit places in and out of the community in PE and Uitenhage, and spent a lot of time talking to and staying with me, which, provided lots of useful information for the long-form. Let alone the communication with Jonathan, Jerry, Bryant, Melanie and Erwin Pon and their help in introducing me to other potential interviewees, all led me to this topic at the very early stage.

When I was a broadcast journalist at Radio Beijing in China and did investigative news reporting, I always needed to collect information from strangers, such as a witness of an accident or an ordinary citizen and most of the time I would get positive responses. However, not all people would like to spend time talking to me. Sometimes I was rejected or treated coldly. A friend of mine, who was also an investigative journalist once said to me, "The interviews rely heavily on the kindness of strangers", which I could not agree with more.

What the people of the Chinese community in Port Elizabeth gave me was just the precious 'kindness'. Though we had never know each other before, I, as a stranger to them at the very beginning, however, received so much the friend welcome, warm entertainment and unselfish assistance from the community, by which, I was much more encouraged and inspired to write on this topic.

I did not count how many people I had interviewed as there were too many. Some I had visited for several times; some I talked to for a long time; some I just met in a hurry and chatted for a few minutes but whose information also

inspired me. In fact, every single person I had met and every single minute I spent there, together, lit up my mind and shaped the texture of this narrative long-form.

I have put into my heart all the kindness, which, I will appreciate and treasure for a whole lifetime.

When I was writing Bryant and his family's story, it was as if I had been involved in his life too, accompanying him in his every life stage from going to school and finding jobs to getting married and raising children. When I was approaching the ending, I just could not help crying. It was like you watched him growing from a little baby to an adult and then gradually getting older and older, but you could do nothing about it.

I will go back to China after finishing this degree later this year and I do not know when I will come back. Now in 2020, most of the community members I write about or communicate to are all in their late seventies, eighties and even nineties. I really have no idea if we will be able to meet again after I leave South Africa. Anyway, I will miss them from afar then and bless for them all the time.

Thank you. Thank you for coming into my life.