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**Navigating In-Betweenness: Transnational Practices and
Identity Formation Among Second-Generation Chinese
Youth in Britain**

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract

This thesis examines how second-generation Chinese youth in Britain negotiate transnational identity across everyday sites in London and Glasgow. Using multi-sited ethnography (comprising 36 in-depth interviews and participant observation in Chinese schools and family-run takeaways/restaurants, March-September 2023) along with reflexive thematic and sensory analysis, five mechanisms were identified that organise practices across settings: boundary work, positioning, embodiment/senses, digital mediation, and capital conversion. Boundary work appears in school lunch management (sandwiches, sealed containers, no reheating) and front-of-house/back-of-house language splits. Positioning is evident in English replies to racialised hailing in public and Mandarin with elders, and in teaching-assistant roles in Chinese schools. Embodiment/senses operate through kitchen noise and smell thresholds, hand control in calligraphy, and zongzi wrapping. Digital mediation involves ritual co-presence on WeChat and selective visibility to manage intergenerational gaze. Capital conversion links parental funds and networks to independent return visits and maps China-based training onto UK credentials. The findings suggest that the transnational identity outcomes of second-generation Chinese youth comprise ways of being, ways of belonging, situated transnational identity, and place-specific variations between Glasgow and London. This study contributes to scholarship on transnational migration and diaspora by advancing the concept of navigating in-betweenness to explain the dynamic, sensory, and agentic processes through which second-generation youth negotiate belonging. It also appropriates the “third space” as the co-occurrence of boundary work and embodied cues rather than a discursive label, and links street-level episodes to field-level belonging. City contrasts are noted in language brokering, catering exposure, school roles, and public “Ni hao” encounters.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature:

Printed name: Keying Li

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context and research questions

From 2019 to 2021, while working part-time at a Chinese restaurant in Leeds, I met Lucas, a British-born thirteen-year-old whose everyday life unfolded between his father's expectations and his British peer world. Conflicts frequently arose over the upholding of Chinese practices and Lucas's resistance to them. One afternoon, his father addressed him in Mandarin: “你说什么洋文，你是中国人，在我的餐厅，我叫你说中文！你以为学他们那样说话——像学校里那些孩子一样——就能混进他们圈子了？卢卡斯，他们在街上看见你，根本不会当你是英国人。在他们眼里，你就是个中国男孩。可你呢？连点个中餐都不会说自己的母语。” (*What foreign gibberish are you speaking? You're Chinese! In my restaurant, I'm telling you to speak Chinese! You think speaking like them, like the kids at school, makes you one of them? They see you on the street, Lucas, they don't see a Brit. They see a Chinese. And you? You can't even order Chinese in your own tongue.*)

Lucas lowered his head and, in English, quietly said: “*Does it count if I can order dim sum in Cantonese?*”

The central question guiding this thesis is: how do second-generation Chinese youth negotiate belonging and transnational identity through everyday practices? As Lucas illustrates, participants experience belonging through mundane and situational practices, which including choosing between Chinese and English, preferences for food and music, and their associated sensory textures. Such practices constitute forms of cross-border connection through which they sustain and rework links between the country of origin and the country of settlement (Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Faist, 2004). However, research on diaspora and transnationalism has tended to focus on macro-level flows or assumes a fixed, permanent ethnic continuity, less attention is paid to how these identifications are actually created. Therefore, this thesis explores the transnational practices of second generation Chinese youth in daily life and argues that their transnational identity is a dynamic process.

Their everyday negotiations of second-generation Chinese youth are shaped by wider political and spatial contexts. Within the UK, migration and belonging are structured unevenly across national and urban contexts, particularly in the aftermath of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, exclusionary nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment have intensified public debate over who can legitimately be recognised as “truly British” (Nijs et al., 2020). Within England, Englishness has often been intertwined with whiteness, creating to a hostile environment for ethnic minority immigrants (Virdee and McGeever, 2018). Although London is relative open to migration, this openness coexists with everyday racialised tensions (Schumann & Moore, 2023). Glasgow is influenced by Scotland’s civic nationalism, which is understood to be relatively free of structural and institutional racism because of its “welcoming” attitudes towards immigrants and refugees (Davidson et al, 2018). This thesis explains how their transnational identifications are made through ordinary practices in domains such as food, music, language and return visits, and how such these practices differ across these two urban contexts.

Despite the growing literature on British Chinese, a number of gaps remain. Substantively, existing British Chinese research has produced rich analyses of racism, education, and labour market experiences; however, it has paid less attention on everyday cultural practices as a mechanism of negotiating belonging across multiple domains, rather than within a single sphere such as language. Analytically, transnationalism and diaspora studies continue to under-theorise embodiment, sensory experiences, and the micro-politics of everyday life. Contextually, limited work has examined how different urban contexts within the UK structure these negotiations for young people of Chinese backgrounds, particularly across key cities in England and Scotland.

In response to these gaps, this thesis develops five mechanisms to analyse second generation transnational identity (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5.2). In so doing, it integrates sensory and everyday life perspectives to capture the embodied, affective and lived aspects of transnational experiences. Empirically, the thesis is structured around Glasgow and London as two different contexts for second-generation Chinese youth and examines how these settings shape their identity negotiations in different ways.

In view of this, the thesis asks the main research question: How do second generation Chinese youth negotiate belonging and transnational identity through everyday practices? To address this, the following sub-questions are posed:

- How do food practices across home, school, and family businesses become sites of boundary work and the sensory/embodied negotiation of belonging?
- How do listening, performance, and soundscape navigation operate as visibility-management and positioning practices in everyday life?
- How do translanguaging/transpositioning and interactional positioning structure roles and belonging across home, community education, work, and public space?
- How are transnational family ties sustained, repaired, or thinned through return visits, digital co-presence, and material exchange?
- How do classed resources (capitals) and local opportunity structures shape the capacity to sustain these practices, and what consequences does this have for the density/fragility of belonging?

1.2 Research Focus

1.2.1 Who: Second generation Chinese youth

The study focuses on UK-raised young people of migrant backgrounds from the People's Republic of China, whom I frame as the "second generation". This includes both UK-born youth of Chinese migrant parentage and those who arrived in the UK during early childhood and received most or all of their education within the British system. Rather than grounding the definition solely in legal status or place of birth, this thesis centres on UK socialisation experiences and family migration histories as the basis for analysis. My use of the term "second generation" is discussed more fully in Chapter 2, Section 2.6, where I explain critiques of the term in relation to the immigrant imaginary (Sayyid, 2004, 2009), discuss how participants identify themselves, and clarify why I use the term.

The research findings suggest that "second generation" is not necessarily a term that most participants use to describe themselves, and some may not fully identify with this

label. Whilst the analysis prioritises participants' own narratives, self-understandings, and everyday practices of belonging, I retain "second generation" cautiously as a heuristic and analytical descriptor of a shared structural location: being born or largely raised in Britain within Chinese migrant family histories. I do not treat it as a fixed identity label or assume that all participants recognise themselves through it. Rather, the empirical chapters examine how participants accept, modify, resist or avoid labels such as Chinese, British Chinese, second generation, local, foreign, or in-between across different contexts.

1.2.2 Where: historical framing of Chinese migration to the UK, Glasgow and London

To contextualise the study's examination of residents of Glasgow and London, a brief historical overview of Chinese immigration to the UK is required. In general, Chinese migration to the UK can be divided into four phases. The first involved early labour and seafaring migration before the 1950s, when people landed in port cities such as Liverpool and Cardiff. The second was post-1980s settlement, which was dominated by Hong Kong and southern Chinese migrants working largely in catering. In the third phase, taking place from the 2000s onwards, intensified global mobility brought international students, skilled professionals, investors and other migrants to major British cities including Manchester, London, Edinburgh, Glasgow. By the 2020s, the Chinese population had become widely dispersed across cities and towns throughout the UK. Alongside this, differences in the political and institutional frameworks of Scotland and England created to divergent patterns in the development and organisation of Chinese communities, particularly in Glasgow and London.

In Glasgow, the Chinese community developed from an initial concentration in Cowcaddens Chinatown in the 1990s to a wider pattern of settlement across areas such as Maryhill, Glendale, and Springburn. From 2000 onwards, there was a marked increase in the number of Chinese international students, most notably in areas such as Anderston and Hillhead in Glasgow (Bell, 2018). Most Chinese immigrants who came to Britain around the year 2000 originated from Fujian and arrived irregularly in search of improved living conditions and economic opportunities. They were often constrained

by language barriers and driven by local labour demand, with many entering the catering sector and organising their lives through tightly knit family, hometown, and business networks. Their children expressed reluctance to pursue careers within this sector (Song, 2001; Bell, 2018). In terms of education, Glasgow Chinese School was founded in 1972, and it has since become the largest weekend Chinese school in the UK.

London's Chinese communities are characterised by substantial diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, migration routes, class, and legal status (Nyíri, 1999; Wu & Sheehan, 2011; Mok & Platt, 2018). Although catering once dominated economic life, since 2000 migrants have diversified into finance, technology, academia and other sectors. They have also arrived via varied routes as skilled professionals, students or irregular migrants, with motivations extending beyond economic mobility to education and family aspirations (Song, 2015; Niu, 2025; Düvell et al., 2018). Alongside the dispersal of settlement has dispersed beyond traditional Chinatown areas, Chinese schools have grown in number and diversity, expanding beyond language teaching to include cultural education and skills development.

Situated within these two urban contexts, the thesis investigates how second-generation Chinese youth experience everyday life and actively negotiate their transnational identities.

1.2.3 Four Domains

This thesis investigates food, music, language, and return visits as four domains of everyday practice that serve as empirical sites for the negotiation of belonging. They emerged as recurrent and meaningful arenas in participants' everyday lives, sites where identity was most frequently negotiated and performed. The sequencing follows an analytic progression from embodied everyday micro-practices to interactional practices, and finally to cross-border practices. It traces how belonging is produced across domains that differ in frequency, intensity, and resource demands, while maintaining the same core analytical mechanisms.

The discussion begins with Chinese food as a key site of boundary negotiation. I argue that food mediates cultural difference across social contexts, with the smell of Chinese cuisine functioning as a sensory marker of otherness that shapes embodied transnational experience. In response, second-generation Chinese youth engage in flexible boundary management, such as downplaying overtly “Chinese” foods in public settings while preserving culinary practices within the home and diasporic networks. Food therefore provides an entry point to embodied, transnational experiences at the micro level.

As a second sensory domain, music functions as a key medium for managing cultural boundaries and self-positioning. I reveal that through listening, performing, and curating playlists across contexts, participants emphasise distinctiveness and negotiate belonging in relation to particular groups. Music enables agentive and situational performances of belonging, revealing the layered, selective, and context-dependent performance of second-generation transnationalism.

The third domain, language is then examined as an interactional practice embedded in racialised bodies and power relations, functioning as both social performance and meaning making. I demonstrate that translanguaging and transpositioning enable participants to move across different social fields to escape fixed labels of “Chinese” or “British” and reposition themselves in context. Further, I contend that language learning intertwines with multisensory experiences in Chinese schools, revealing how identity negotiation unfolds at the intersection of structural constraints and individual agency.

In the final domain of return visits, I contend that both physical and digital return trips represent contested sites of active reconstruction, rather than passive cultural inheritance. Specifically, participants negotiate, contest, create and utilise their parents’ transnational networks and capital to shape their own proximity to, or distance from transnational connections. Digital practices, embodied family engagements, material exchanges, class-resource mobilisation, education through return visits, and extra-familial transnational bonding all constitute active arenas of identity-making.

Across these themes, the thesis advances navigating in-betweenness in the UK as an example of embodied, sensory, and agentive identity work in everyday life.

1.3 Theoretical framework

This thesis is structured and operates at five analytical levels.

First, it is situated within the field of transnationalism, with diaspora treated as a stance that informs the theoretical context of the research. Within this field, everyday life is understood as the site where belonging is negotiated, specifically through mundane and situational practices taking place across different ordinary living contexts. Performance and performativity are adopted as the primary lens through which to investigate and interpret these practices, primarily by tracing how belonging is enacted in interaction and how repeated practices reproduce and reshape identity.

Three groups of core concepts are applied throughout the thesis to explain belonging negotiation. Boundary work and positioning illuminate how demarcations of “us/them” and “here/there” are drawn and redrawn. Embodiment and sensory turn highlight how smell/sound/touch make a difference and how belonging is felt. Class and capital explain why some people sustain/convert cross-border ties more easily than others. Translanguaging and transpositioning operate primarily within the language domain rather than across all empirical chapters, thus they are not treated as the central concepts within the thesis.

In addition to the above concepts, “third space” is understood as the identity outcome produced through these mechanisms. It represents the different forms of hybrid and in-between identity positions that emerge across contexts.

I bring five concepts together: everyday life, performance, boundary work and positioning, embodiment and sensory, and capital conversion, because they explain how belonging is negotiated through ordinary practices, under conditions of visibility and evaluation, across shifting social boundaries, as a felt and material experience, and structured in different ways by unequal resources.

1.4 Contributions

This study makes the following original contributions.

Analytically, the thesis develops a five-mechanism framework to analyse everyday practices, encompassing boundary work, positioning, embodiment and sensory experience, digital mediation, and capital conversion. This framework extends the analysis of the micro-politics of everyday life and under-theorised embodiment and senses in the field of transnationalism and diaspora studies.

Empirically, it shows how transnational identity is enacted through everyday practices across food, music, language use, digital ties, and return visits. This extends the empirical focus beyond the organisational level of transnationalism that dominate much of the existing research.

Theoretically, it extends the concept of “third space” (Homi Bhabha, 1994) as a dynamic process produced through everyday negotiation, bringing translanguaging into dialogue with transpositioning (Li Wei & Lee Tong King, 2023). It also extends the notion of digital ambient co-presence (Madianou, 2016) by incorporating dysco-presence (Ou et al., 2024) and selective visibility. By reframing capital conversion, the thesis challenges portrayals of the second generation as passive recipients and instead highlights their agency in actively negotiating, reshaping and transforming transnational resources across contexts.

Methodologically, this thesis provides sensory ethnographic accounts of Chinese takeaway shops, Chinatown, and Chinese language schools in Glasgow and London, offering unique insights into the multi-site fieldwork employed in transnationalism research. Through sensory multi-sited ethnography, it captures the embodied, affective and lived aspects of transnational experience.

1.5 Methods

This thesis is based on a six-month multi-sited ethnographic research study conducted across London and Glasgow, combining participant observation and 36 in-depth structured interviews with Chinese youth aged 18-25. The former was conducted in Chinese language schools, family-run restaurants and takeaways, and participants' homes. Consequently, the data presented herein primarily derive from field notes recorded during these six months, supplemented by interview data to flesh out individual narratives.

A multi-sited ethnographic design was methodologically consistent with the conceptualisation of everyday life and mundane practices as spatially dispersed and relational. Because belonging is negotiated across multiple ordinary settings rather than within a single bounded site, following participants across different locations allowed for the analysis of shifting positionalities, boundary-making processes, and embodied experiences. Through long-term immersion, I was able to identify repeated patterns and routines, such as boundary-crossing between roles in their everyday interaction. This illustrating how ethnography can capture belonging as an enacted and relational process within everyday life.

Throughout the fieldwork, my identity as a Chinese researcher shifted across contexts. When discussing Chinese culture and identity, my background enabled familiarity and mutual understanding, while conversations about life in Britain often positioned me as an outsider. Moving between informal, friend-like interactions and more structured roles required ongoing reflexive adjustment. Reflexive positionality created a more open conversational space, supporting participants in sharing their everyday experiences on their own terms.

1.6 Thesis structure

Following this introductory chapter, **Chapter 2** presents the theoretical framework. It critically examines the research field of diaspora and transnationalism that underpins the study and discusses how the second generation has been theorised in these contexts. The chapter then examines several layers through micro lens including everyday life, as well as performance and performativity, alongside the core concepts and identity

mechanisms that operate across the thesis. It then reviews key research on second-generation Chinese youth in Britain, setting the stage for the empirical chapters that follow.

Chapter 3 justifies the adoption of a multi-sited ethnographic approach to studying second-generation Chinese youth in Glasgow and London. The chapter begins with an introduction outlining the overall methodological framework. It then outlines the researcher's positionality and reflexivity as a Chinese academic. Next, the chapter discusses the study's philosophical grounding in social constructivism, providing a theoretical foundation for the research. It then details the fieldwork, including the target population, key research sites, and challenges encountered. Following this, it further explains the interview process, sampling and participant recruitment. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the data analysis procedures, ethical considerations, and the evaluation of methods.

Chapter 4 explores the everyday food practices, demonstrating how culinary experiences shape embodied transnational identity and boundary-making. It begins by highlighting food as a site of negotiation, then examines family dining tables and intergenerational rituals. It then shifts the focus to family-run takeaway shops and restaurants as places of identity construction and next considers the phenomenon of the "walking hotpot" on university campuses. The chapter concludes by summarising the key findings on the relationship between food and identity.

Chapter 5 examines music as a medium of transnational identity. It starts with a discussion of sonic politics. It then analyses how pan-Asian identity music and K-pop mediate transnational belonging. The chapter then explores auditory practices of resistance associated with in-betweenness, including "sonic bubbles", peer-negotiated listening strategies, and hip-hop as intra-ethnic expression. Thereafter, it considers the performativity of identity in urban space, from the contextual use of "Chinese" fashion to concerts and cultural festivals as sites of reinvention. The chapter concludes by synthesising the musical dimensions of transnational belonging.

Chapter 6 focuses on language as a positioning strategy within power relations (Li & Lee, 2023). It begins with a discussion of translanguaging and transpositioning as

analytical tools. It then examines linguistic practices in family life, comparing linguistic dynamics in households situated in Glasgow and London. The chapter also explores identity negotiation in Chinese language schools, takeaway shops and restaurants, and public encounters where language is racialised, such as unsolicited greetings (“ni hao”) or the use of Chinese as a secret language. The chapter concludes by summarising the relationship between linguistic practice, positioning and identity formation.

Chapter 7 analyses return visits to parental homelands as key sites for maintaining transnational family ties. It begins by revisiting emotional labour as a key practice. It then explores in detail how physical return visits function as a form of emotional labour. The chapter then analyses the role of digital technologies in sustaining cross-border connections, contrasting performative presence with experiences of intimacy. It also examines how transnational familyhood is anchored through material practices, housing, solo return visits, and educational strategies as forms of transnational capital. It concludes by evaluating the significance of return visits in shaping transnational identities and familial relationships.

Chapter 8 draws the findings of the thesis together. It restates the research focus and questions, synthesises the empirical analysis, and highlights the theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions made by the thesis. The chapter concludes by addressing the limitations of the study and identifying areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the context of second-generation Chinese youth living in the UK post-Brexit and post-COVID-19, along with the focus and rationale of this thesis, which is to understand how they negotiate their transnational identities in Britain. The purpose of this chapter is to review the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding this research, and to examine existing theories concerning the formation of transnational identity that can inform and engage with the experiences of second-generation Chinese youth.

The chapter is structured into six sections. The first section reviews the literature on transnationalism and diaspora and situates the second generation within the broader field of transnationalism studies. The second section examines everyday life as a site of practice through the theoretical lenses of performance and performativity. In the third section, I discuss the role of language in the lives of second-generation Chinese youth, especially translanguaging and transpositioning. The fourth section reviews the literature on class and capital as variables in the study. Finally, the fifth section brings these perspectives together to develop several analytical mechanisms, including boundary work, capital conversion, translanguaging/transpositioning, embodiment/senses, and digital mediation, that form the basis of an integrative model through which to analyse the lived experiences of second-generation Chinese youth. The final section critically reviews key research on second-generation Chinese youth in migration studies and identifies existing gaps in the literature.

2.2 Transnationalism and Diaspora

By conceptualising diaspora as a mobilised stance, and situating it within the broader field of transnationalism, this study develops a theoretical framework for examining second-generation Chinese youth's cultural belongings and emotional ties to their parents' homeland (Brah, 1996; Brubaker, 2005; Collins, 2009) through cross-border practices, social fields, and identity formations (Vertovec, 2009; Basch et al., 1994;

Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Combining both concepts facilitates discussion of how second-generation Chinese young people, through specific transnational practices, shape a sense of transnational belonging and transnational identity in their everyday lives. I argue that the identities of second-generation Chinese youth are not static but are i) continuously negotiated and strategically (re)constructed in relation to both their ancestral homeland and the country of residence, ii) situated between memory and imagination, and iii) navigate the tension between boundary maintenance and erosion.

2.2.1 Transnational social fields

Transnational migration scholarship has demonstrated that “migrants are simultaneously embedded in networks and social relations across multiple countries” (Levitt and Schiller, 2004, p.1006). Levitt and Schiller (2004) further defined the transnational social field “as a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organised and transformed” (p.1009). I situate the lives of second-generation Chinese youth within a cross-border social field linking Britain and China, rather than treating them as confined to a single national context. In this sense, transnationalism provides the primary field condition through which this thesis makes its contribution.

Within this domain, second generation Chinese youth constitute transnational social fields created through cross-border practices. This phenomenon is defined as follows:

Immigrants who build such social fields are designated “transmigrants”. Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations, familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously. (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc, 1992, p. 1)

On this basis, transnational practices can effectively include those who remain left behind in their home countries but still participate in transnationalism in various ways, and those who are simultaneously embedded in several transnational social fields simultaneously through specific means. Those who cannot move or are geographically

distant from those in their ancestral homeland, are still part of transnational social fields, as their daily lives are shaped by transnational interactions and practices.

This thesis shifts attention from macro-political and economic processes to the micro level socio-cultural and familial dimensions of transnational life. Early scholarship on transnationalism was primarily concerned with international economics and the political dimensions of transnational flows of labour and capital. Since the 1980s, scholars have increasingly focused on transnational practices in everyday life, such as remittances, transnational marriages, cultural transmission, and community organisation (Levitt & Waters, 2002). Notably, much of this literature continues to prioritise mobility, economic exchange, and formal political engagement. Consequently, the everyday culturally embedded practices of the second-generation remain under-researched. This thesis contributes to this literature by foregrounding how belonging is negotiated through routine, affective, and embodied practices.

From this perspective, scholars have discussed the intensity and durability of cross-border linkages and ties. For instance, Pasura (2008, p. 47) proposed that “the regularity and intensity of these cross-border activities are some of the key features of transnationalism”. He emphasised the need to examine how immigrant groups and their descendants establish and maintain long-term, dynamic social networks across two or more countries. These connections are not merely physical cross-border movements, such as visiting relatives or migrating, they also encompass multi-dimensional transnational activities and engagements in emotions, economy, culture, and identity. To distinguish the degree of connection with the home country, scholars have developed a variety of classifications. For instance, Guarnizo (2000) proposed “core transnationalism” and “extended transnationalism”; Levitt (2001) further divided this into “comprehensive” and “selective” transnationalism; and Levitt et al. (2003) introduced the notion of “intense transnationalism” and used the terms “periodic” and “occasional” to distinguish the degree of participation, intensity, and formality of practices. These concepts aim to capture the diversity and complexity of transnational practices.

Through an examination of transnationalism in everyday life, Vertovec (2003) discovered that both immigrants and their descendants regularly engage in transnational

practices which influence their sense of belonging, loyalty, and attachment. Prior to this, Vertovec (1999) proposed six analytical premises that structure the concept: 1) social morphology, which refers to the formation of dense, cross-border networks connecting migrants and their communities, such as diaspora; 2) type of consciousness, which alludes to a mindset of multilocal belonging and simultaneous attachments to multiple places, that is, being “here” and “there”; 3) mode of cultural reproduction, which refers to the continuous circulation and adaptation of cultural practices across national borders; 4) avenue of capital, which denotes the transnational flow of financial and material resources, such as remittances and investments; 5) site of political engagement, which refers to political activities that span across sending and receiving countries, including voting and lobbying; and 6) (re)construction of place or locality, which alludes to the reshaping of localities through transnational interactions and investments. Meaningful and sustained cross-border relationships and activities connect these different aspects.

First, individuals engaging in transnational participation are deeply embedded in various transnational networks which are maintained by emotional bonds, resource exchanges, and other practices in different domains (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Faist, 2000). UK-raised Chinese youth remain positioned within cross-border networks when they sustain kinship ties, cultural memories, or symbolic attachments to China. Such embeddedness shapes contextual identity negotiation; for instance, they may foreground “Chineseness” within family life, emphasise “Britishness” in school settings, and enact hybrid identities across broader social contexts.

In terms of cultural reproduction, second-generation Chinese youth strategically perform their cultural identities through selective preservation and local adaptation. This process corroborates the core argument of Bhabha’s (1994) “third space”, which is that cultural practices amid cross-border mobility assume innovative forms that are neither purely traditional nor fully assimilated. Instead, they evolve into creative hybrid cultural forms, which serve as the material embodiment of transnational identities.

The (re)construction of place is accomplished through the localised embedding of cultural symbols. Second-generation Chinese youth reconstruct spaces of Chineseness within the UK through a range of sociocultural practices, such as preparing and consuming Chinese food, language use, or engaging with China-related virtual

communities. As Blunt (2005) noted, such practices free the “sense of place” from fixed geographical boundaries. Through both physical and virtual enactments, transnational identities acquire a perceptible spatial dimension. It should be noted, however, that the topic of political participation falls outside the scope of this thesis.

Regarding capital channels, transnational capital not only enables young second-generation Chinese youth to maintain transnational emotional bonds while in the UK, but also continuously remind them of their Chinese background through everyday practices. Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of class and capital (1986), this thesis argues that the unequal distribution of class-based resources and different forms of capital shape the pathways, practices and dimensions through which second-generation Chinese youth construct transnational identities.

Consequently, delving into the intersection of diaspora and transnationalism becomes pivotal to understanding how this group anchors its diasporic identity within transnational practices, and, conversely, how diasporic attributes define these transnational endeavours. Diaspora is one of the key characteristics of transnationalism, though not all transnational populations constitute a diaspora (Blunt, 2007; Faist, 2010; Levitt, 2001). Transnationalism focuses on practices that cross borders, such as those engaged in by transnational migrants or migrant families in both their countries of origin and host countries. These include remittances, family visits, investments, dual nationality, and daily communications (Basch et al., 1994; Vertovec, 2009). The formation of diaspora communities relies not only on transnational mobility and communication technologies but also, and crucially, on the construction of shared emotional and collective identities (Clifford, 1994; Vertovec, 1999). To fully and precisely understand the lived experiences and identity practices of second-generation Chinese youth, distinguishing these conceptual emphases and boundaries requires further clarification.

2.2.2 Diaspora as stance

Diaspora was originally used to describe communities such as Jewish and Greek exiles marked by collective memory, displacement, shared suffering, and enduring attachment to a lost homeland (Safran, 1986, 1991; Cohen, 1997; Tölölyan, 1996). These features

underpin a tripartite theoretical framework structured around the homeland, the diaspora community, and the host nation (Sheffer, 1986). In this thesis, home orientation and diasporic collective identity are treated as foundational contexts, while boundary work is analysed as one of the key mechanisms through which identity is negotiated.

With the diversification of transnational mobility during globalisation, the traditional definition of diaspora has been expanded to include broader groups and intergenerational continuity. For instance, Cohen (1997) extended Safran's (1991) definition to include both voluntary and forced dispersals, recognising that migrants may integrate into host societies while sustaining transnational ties across generations. Scholars have identified multiple categories of diaspora, such as victim, labour, trade, imperial, cultural, ethno-national, and refugee diasporas (Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 1995; McDowell, 1996; Cohen, 1997; Van Hear, 1998), as well as deterritorialised and incipient diasporas (Cohen, 2022). Cohen (2003) cautioned that such classifications often overlook internal diversity, complex migration histories and class differentiation. Accordingly, this thesis draws selectively on those diasporic features most relevant to the present study.

Safran (1991) emphasised the core traits as being an imagined homeland, collective memory, and aspirations for "return". While Cohen (1997) later developed a more systematic framework to examine the complex themes of diaspora history, formation, rebirth, development, construction, diffusion, and activities. To define a diaspora, Cohen used the following concepts: dispersal (traumatic flight to multiple foreign regions); expansion (work/better life/trade/colonial pursuits); retention (homeland collective memory); idealisation (mythic ancestral home commitment); return (collectively approved return movements, even vicarious); distinctiveness (sustained ethnic consciousness); apprehension (uneasy host society relations); creativity (enriching pluralistic lives); and solidarity (co-ethnic empathy/responsibility, especially in hardship) (Cohen, 1997, p. 3).

This thesis underscores diaspora as an ongoing process of identity construction under conditions of dispersal and a state of "becoming" (Houston&Wright, 2000). Specifically, second generation often find themselves in a state shaped by multiple

belongings. They are embedded in transnational networks tied to ancestral homelands, while they are simultaneously being shaped by the racialised discourses and political logics of the host society (Mavroudi, 2019). I treat diaspora as a background inheritance rooted in first-generation migration histories, which have laid the foundations for second generation lives in Britain. Although they were raised and grew up in the UK, second-generation Chinese youth carry a diasporic perspective due to sustained origin connections. Therefore, they have consistently maintained connections with their country of origin to some extent. This condition of in-betweenness motivates this study, which conceptualises diaspora as a dynamic and de-essentialised stance in order to examine how second-generation Chinese youth negotiate macro-level structures and micro-level everyday lived experiences.

Home orientation

As the central concept in diaspora studies, this thesis operationalises “home” as a foundational pillar of the diasporic stance, shifting its conceptualisation from a static geographical origin to a dynamic, multidimensional field constructed through everyday practices. Brah (2005, p. 192) described the complicated imagining of home:

On the one hand, “home” is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense, it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of “origin”. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day ... all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations.

Home is a mythic space of desire within the diasporic imagination, a symbol of the ancestral homeland to which the diaspora can never truly return (Rushdie, 1991; Casey, 1993). However, home is not merely a physical space but also a material and emotional space that constitutes a concrete field woven by daily practices, sensory experiences, memories, emotional attachments, and social relations (Brah, 2005; Pyun & Amato, 2024; Mallet, 2004; Casey, 1993; Fortier, 2002; Blunt, 2005; Boccagni, 2017, 2022). In Clifford (1994) and Brah’s (1996) work, home represents an evolving nexus of

imagined and practised spaces that stretch between the migrant's place of origin and the receiving society.

Home is a multidimensional space dynamically constructed through ongoing mundane practices that links objects, histories, and memories (Clifford, 1994; Brah, 1996) and can even signify an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983). Thus, it is more than a physical dwelling. It is an emotional, social, and cultural container, where individuals interpret, experience, and construct home in daily encounters while moving between "here and there", across multiple localities, or even across different time periods (Al Ali & Koser, 2002; Ahmed et al., 2003; Bivand, 2014; Nowicka, 2007). For example, language practices create particular times and spaces (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015) and can help migrants feel "at home" in new environments. Language often relates to those who speak it, yet it also links migrant communities to distant homelands or elsewhere (Robinson, 2024).

This thesis argues that "home" emerges as a set of deployable cultural resources, which are activated, adjusted, or even suspended according to situational needs and personal agency, rather than being bound by innate emotional ties to a single geographic or ethnic anchor. It examines the everyday practices tied to "home" among second-generation Chinese youth in the UK. These practices, far from being passive repetitions of ancestral culture, emerge as active sites of meaning-making and negotiations shaped by daily life, generational dynamics, and shifting social contexts. Thus, the thesis emphasises that the notion of "home" for these second-generation Chinese youth is no longer reduced to a mythicised longing for the ancestral homeland.

Collective identity

One of the key characteristics of diaspora is collective identity, understood as a continual process through which the second generation navigates between the receiving and sending countries. It is a shared sense of "who we are" under conditions of dispersion, sustained through collective memory, homeland orientation, transnational ties, and experiences of boundary-making and marginalisation (Clifford, 1994; Safran, 1991; Brah, 1996; Cohen, 1997; Brubaker, 2005). Yet collective identity is neither uniform nor fixed. As Brubaker (2004) noted, it is analytically elusive precisely because

it is continuously enacted and reconstructed through social interaction, everyday practice, and strategic positioning (see Section 2.3.2 for a detailed discussion of performance and performativity). Furthermore, individual members of a diaspora exhibit differences both within their own group as well as in relation to other groups. Factors such as age, gender, social class, family background, place of settlement, country of origin, and educational trajectories shape how individuals negotiate belonging (Brah, 1996; Anthias, 1998), producing varied forms of identification and hybrid configurations (Hall, 1990; Clifford, 1994; Safran, 2003).

Whilst second-generation Chinese youth in the UK lack direct migratory experience, their identities are continuously reconstructed through a synthesis of ancestral imaginaries and local British contexts. This dual nationalist pressure complicates identity negotiation among second-generation Chinese youth, as they navigate two sets of “belonging” rules that often overlap or conflict.

Nationalism is defined as an everyday structure of feelings that defines legitimacy and belonging (Billig, 1995). As Anderson (1983) argued, nations are “imagined communities”, sustained through shared narratives, symbols, and exclusions. In the British context, British state patriotism co-exists with English, Scots and Welsh ethno-nationalisms, each with its own narratives and boundaries of belonging (Smith, 2001; McCrone, 2001). Second-generation Chinese youth need to navigate rigid national boundaries that often clash with their enduring transnational ties. This thesis contends that these individuals actively negotiate their identities to construct imagined communities (Anderson, 1983). Whether they align with a hybrid British Chinese identity or a non-hierarchical transnational identity, these acts of negotiation implicitly challenge and reshape traditional boundaries of ethnicity and nationality.

Taken together, the discussions above conceptualise diaspora as a dynamic analytical stance through which the lived experiences of second-generation Chinese youth can be examined. Within this perspective, diaspora is understood as a historically grounded yet continuously reworked condition shaped by home orientation, collective identity, and structural boundaries. Diasporic belonging emerges through everyday practices, emotional attachments, and social relations that stretch across multiple spatial and temporal contexts. For second-generation Chinese youth in the UK, this condition

produces a form of in-betweenness, in which identities are negotiated through the interaction between inherited diasporic histories and the socio-political realities of British society. Building on this foundation, the following section outlines the key theoretical perspectives adopted in this thesis.

2.2.3 Theoretical perspectives adopted in this thesis

This study is situated within the field of transnationalism and treats diaspora as a mobilised stance from which three preliminary analytical layers are derived. First, it examines the sensory dimensions of transnationalism as active modes of negotiation. Second, it explores processes of boundary erosion and maintenance as key characteristics of diaspora. Finally, it conceptualises the third space as the ultimate site of synthesis. As the thesis progresses, this macro-structure is further enriched by integrating micro-level lens to analyse the complex interplay between structural conditions and individual agency.

Regarding the intersections between diaspora and transnationalism, Vertovec (1999) viewed both as focusing on connections between countries of origin and settlement, including various forms of ties to the homeland (Glick Schiller et al., 1992) and cultural imaginaries (Clifford, 1994). This study treats diaspora as a stance, a process which emphasises that identity is not a fixed state but a resource continuously mobilised and reconstructed across different social contexts (Anthias, 2002). Second, the lens of transnationalism transcends the experiential boundaries of specific groups, facilitating scrutiny of practices that cross borders (Vertovec, 2009). It considers emotional, memory, and historical links between diaspora groups and their countries of origin, and their practical engagement with, cross-border interactions within their receiving societies. Datta (2013) commented that combining these concepts transcends the narrow focus on migration alone, evolving into an inclusive conceptual tool for analysing identity negotiation and social connectivity in the context of globalisation. Thus, this thesis focuses on the practical aspects of transnational practices and explores the consequences of these for the consciousness and internalisation of second-generation youth.

Building upon these macro-level concepts, the internalisation of such experiences among the second generation takes place within in the lived, everyday sphere. To bridge the gap between structural field conditions and self-identification, it is essential to examine the embodied dimensions of these practices.

The sensory turn

Despite the Even though a growing body of research on the sensory turn, this concept is yet to be fully integrated in the field of transnationalism (Howes, 2022; Low, 2023; Nikielska-Sekula, 2023). “Home” can be categorised as a series of sensory experiences related to belonging. Brah’s (1996) description of the imagined home focuses on its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, warm summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snow and shivering winter nights. Such non-verbal sensory experiences are central to how individuals perceive the world and construct meaning. In response, Low and Kalekin-Fishman (2016) proposed the concept of “transnational sensory landscapes”, referring to how immigrants react to new sensory scripts based on their sensory memories of the homeland. Low (2023) developed a four-mode model of sensory transnationality: reception, adjustment, rejection, and reproduction. These approaches resonate with sensory ethnography (Pink, 2009, 2015), which emphasises the multisensory, embodied, and emplaced nature of social life, and advocates attending to how experience is felt, perceived, and practiced in context.

Drawing on this work, this thesis adopts a sensory analytical lens to examine how transnational belonging is enacted through embodied practices. Methodologically, this orientation is reflected in the use of sensory ethnographic attentiveness, through which attention is paid not only to discourse but also to context, materiality, and embodied experience. The next section turns to processes of boundary erosion, focusing on how seemingly fixed distinctions are reworked, blurred, or reconfigured through practice.

Boundary erosion

This thesis operationalises boundary work as an analytical mechanism to examine how second-generation Chinese youth actively maintain or erode cultural boundaries. Boundary erosion, it refers to the breaking down, weakening, or reconstruction of

traditionally rigid boundaries surrounding ethnic, cultural, or national identity (Brubaker, 2005). Specifically, the dissolution of identity boundaries manifests in three dimensions:

- 1) The dissolution of spatial boundaries: Brah's (1996) concept of "diasporic space" reveals that transnational mobility and digital technologies have stripped geographical boundaries of their absolute significance. Diasporic individuals construct cultural connections that transcend physical territories through transnational networks, social media, and other means. For instance, second-generation Chinese Britons maintain transnational family networks via video calls (see Chapter 7), blurring the distinction between "here" and "there".
- 2) 2) The hybridisation of cultural symbols: Hall (1999) argued that diasporic groups reconstruct traditional symbols through creative practices. For example, second-generation young people of Chinese origin combine Chinese culinary techniques with British ingredients, creating a food culture that is neither purely "Chineseness" nor fully "localised". Instead, this hybrid food culture serves as a flexible vehicle for negotiating identity (see Chapter 4).
- 3) The flexibilisation of institutional and political boundaries: This refers to a practical strategy of flexibly switching between rights and obligations across different national contexts. This enables diasporic individuals to develop "flexible citizenship" (Ong, 1998) amid legal and social institutions.

The erosion of boundaries challenges essentialist understandings of identity by foregrounding how diasporic individuals actively negotiate and reposition themselves across multiple social categories (Burdsey, 2006; Dwyer, 1999; Blunt, 2007; Kalra et al., 2006). This is one of the key mechanisms of this thesis: to explore how second-generation Chinese youth produce, blur, and reconfigure boundaries through everyday cultural practices. Specifically, it examines two questions: how is the transmission and identification of Chinese culture practiced and developed through their daily lives in the UK, and how do they negotiate and perform these practices and identities in the cities where they reside?

Third space

I use the concept of the “third space” (Bhabha, 1994) as both arena and a conceptual outcome produced by the interplay of mechanisms. It is an interactional condition within Brah (1996)’s diasporic space: a site where boundaries are negotiated rather than a separate theory. Bhabha challenged the idea of communities as stable entities with clear boundaries, characterising them instead as an intermediate or marginal realm where different cultures converge, negotiate, and merge, giving rise to new cultural identities and practices. Hence, he described this hybridity as the third space, charged with tensions, struggles, and fragmentation arising from cultural conflict. For second-generation youth, this fragmentation is encountered while navigating family, school, and public life, as they constantly find themselves renegotiating identities across binaries like “British/Chinese” or “home/outside”, which are shaped by contextual power dynamics, expectations, and performances.

Postcolonial critics, particularly Bhabha, view identity as a process of becoming and negotiation rather than a fixed state, one that is fluid and multifaceted. As Bhabha (1994) argued: “The question of identity is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity... It is always the production of an image of identity, and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image” (p. 45). Hybrid identities in diaspora, as third-space expressions, challenge discourses of authenticity and originality, preserving heterogeneity and creating space for marginalised groups (Kapoor, 2002). As Jefferess (2008) and Bhandari (2022) emphasised, the third space involves resisting hegemonic narratives through ongoing negotiation, political acts of subversion, boundary-crossing, and resistance. Such negotiation undermines colonial power while allowing the colonised to transform it, and adapts continuously to new contexts (Bhabha, 1990, 1997). In this space, cultural positions are dislodged from their origins, unbound by singular mainstream values, enabling individuals and communities to construct identities by “appropriating, translating, re-historicising, and reinterpreting” elements from diverse discourses (Bhabha, 1994, p. 55). For example, Mau (2013) showed how second-generation Chinese students negotiate identities between mainstream schools and Chinese education, with language use constrained by educational structures and ethnic communities. Their in-between identity acknowledges a “reflective middle ground” between self and other (Kim, 2010, p. 584), contradictions as growth opportunities (Dai, 2018), and a self-in-between fluidity (Wang, 2020).

Individual agency

This thesis argues that individual agency is the decisive factor in forging inclusive belonging in the third space, forming creative, adaptive hybrid identities. I frame the third space as a vast, possibility-rich realm. Its instability and fluidity enable dynamic identity negotiation, highlighting positionality and agency in active or passive negotiations of in-betweenness.

Kapoor (2002) argued that human agency renders the outcomes of identity formation unpredictable. However, Bauhn and Tepe (2016) cautioned that without agency, cultural hybridity may impede diaspora members' achievement of identity goals and confidence-building. This implies that the third space is a fluid, possibility-rich realm where individuals negotiate their “in-betweenness” through both active and passive positioning. Whilst existing research suggests that second-generation youth often feel trapped outside belonging due to social and communal pressures (Hirji, 2009), this study challenges the simplistic “confused vs hybrid” binary (Al-Abas, 2019). Al-Abas (2019) distinguished between who are “confused” and struggling to integrate, often abandoning one culture, to develop a singular identity, and “hybrid” individuals who actively draw on dual cultural resources, thereby achieving reconciliation and entering Bhabha’s third space. Although insightful, this binary oversimplifies the fluidity and context-dependent nature of identity. Second-generation identities shift across life stages, with some moving away from being “confused”, driven by their ability to mobilise cultural resources.

Individual agency is manifested through the mundane rituals and social interactions that constitute the fabric of daily existence. To understand how these strategic negotiations of hybridity are enacted, it is necessary to ground this theoretical framework in the sociology of everyday life. The following section examines identity through the lens of performance and performativity, where it is understood as a series of dramaturgical acts through which the second generation navigates and displays belonging within the ordinary spaces of the receiving society.

2.3 Performing transnational belonging in everyday life

This thesis treats everyday life as the site where belonging is negotiated through mundane practices. It adopts the lens of performance and performativity to analyse how belonging is enacted under conditions of visibility and structural constraint. By conceptualising performance as an embodied, relational, and political process, the thesis further foregrounds embodiment and the sensory dimensions of experience, illustrating how belonging is felt, lived, and materially expressed in everyday life.

2.3.1 Situated in the sociology of everyday life

I resist treating “everyday life” as a taken-for-granted background, instead, I conceptualise it as a primary site where transnational belonging is actively negotiated. Everyday life is embedded within social power relations, where social and cultural boundaries are produced through routine interactions (Smith, 2016). In these ordinary settings, ideas of sameness and difference are enacted, felt and constructed. Second generation Chinese youth in Britain actively negotiate, draw, and rework social and cultural boundaries through daily practices and interactions, while simultaneously mobilising transnational cultural resources to construct a sense of self that extends beyond local forms of exclusion.

As Smith (2015, 2016) noted, everyday life is a site where identity, race and ethnicity are constructed. He conceptualised “race as a ‘discursive formation’ written through and continually interacting with the material experience of daily life..... and it works on and through the everyday as that which is central to the construction of ideas of sameness and difference” (2016, p.54). In this sense, everyday life is the site where racial hierarchies and inequalities are constructed and enacted.

What counts as ordinary or taken-for-granted is shaped by broader political, economic, and cultural transformations. These broader structures organise how difference is perceived, lived, and normalised, and enable racial power relations to operate through mundane routines and institutional habits rather than through explicit ideology alone. This thesis demonstrates that second generation Chinese youth negotiate far more than

just their cultural belonging (Chinese/British) in their daily lives. They also navigate how they are perceived, where they are positioned, when they need to explain themselves, and when they choose to remain silent or blur their identity. Living in Britain with Chinese backgrounds, they are embedded within a power dynamic and a racialised social field.

Influenced by de-essentialism, the transnational identities of second generation often appear as multiple belongings which are shifting, and fragmented. Transnational identity refers to a diaspora's sense of belonging to homelands or other communities, which is built upon enduring cultural and emotional connections between individuals and at least two nation-states (the country of origin and the receiving country) (Faist, 2008). Wang's (2018) research on transnational identity among Chinese returnee students from the UK further supplements this perspective. It proposed four core forms; namely, cross-cultural competence, transnational habitus, diasporic consciousness, and diasporic values and attitudes, that demonstrate the multidimensionality of transnational identity construction. These forms are fluid, diverse, and flexible, manifested horizontally in self-socialisation and cultural integration amid geographical transitions, and vertically in breaking through traditional social hierarchies, enabling individuals to achieve social mobility beyond national borders. This multidimensional interactive perspective transcends the traditional binary framework of "assimilation-opposition", with its core value lying in regarding transnational identity as a dynamically constructed system. However, due to the fundamental differences in transnational experiences and identity contexts between Wang's research participants (Chinese returnee students from the UK) and second-generation Chinese living in Britain, certain limitations arise that require modification. For instance, this framework neglects institutional constraints and power relations within society.

Meanwhile, the sense of belonging among second-generation Chinese youth is negotiated across multiple cultural and social fields, each with its own norms, hierarchies, and boundary-making processes. These overlapping contexts mean that identity is rarely singular or stable as their everyday lives cannot be understood outside the social relations and power structures in both receiving and sending countries. Therefore, transnational identity formation is closely connected to diasporic conditions,

where belonging is shaped through ongoing connections across national and cultural spaces.

This study moves beyond the essentialist notion of identity as a fixed entity (Weber, 2019). Grounded in social constructivism, it posits that transnational identity is producing through social interaction. It contends that the boundaries of belonging are continuously negotiated and constructed through the interplay of social, cultural, economic, and religious forces from different nations within specific contexts (Brubaker, 2004). To further specify how identity as practice is enacted in lived contexts, this study turns to the concepts of performance and performativity. A practice-oriented view of identity concerns not only what people claim or possess, but also how identity is repeatedly enacted, displayed and recognised through situated actions and interactions. From this perspective, transnational belonging is performed as individuals express, position and negotiate who they are through embodied, linguistic, cultural and relational practices. The following section develops a performance and performativity framework to examine how identity and belonging are continuously produced through everyday acts rather than fixed attributes.

2.3.2 Performance and performativity

This thesis uses performativity and performance as lenses through which to examine identity. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model of everyday life, often described as self-presentation, provides a useful framework for examining how individuals act, react, and position themselves in relation to others. It suggests that everyone puts on a performance in our society. Whether it is through the clothes we wear, the conversations we hold or the food we eat, performance is a system that signals our place within social group to both ourselves and others (Goffman 1969).

Goffman also distinguishes between the "front stage" and "back stage" of social life and asserts that performance is structured by social power and mediated by audience expectations. The front stage refers to social settings in which individuals perform before an audience, managing their behaviour in line with social expectations. The back stage refers to spaces where individuals withdraw from the audience and step out of

their performed roles. What is especially important for this study is Goffman's insight that self-presentation is never a purely individual act, it is a social performance that depends on an implicit understanding between the person being observed and those observing. Both sides participate in shaping the interaction: the individual manages impressions, while the audience interprets, responds, and thereby influences how the performance unfolds. Performance therefore provides an opportunity to examine how people act and react in society. This is also made possible by a related area of study termed "performativity".

I argue that transnational identities are produced through reiterative acts regulated by social norms of British mainstream society and Chinese cultural society. For instance, Butler (1993) asserts that gender is constructed through repeated citation of social norms in verbal and physical acts. In her discussion, performativity is an underlying, invisible structure. Actors and audiences reiteratively enact these socially prescribed scripts, and the consistent repetition of "gender-appropriate" acts naturalises these performances.

This thesis adapts this lens to analyse the transnational identity of second-generation Chinese young people in the UK. I ask what these transnational identity performances mean and why they matter in different social contexts, to whom are they directed, and how repeat performative acts negotiate the dual structural power of British and Chinese social norms. Within the British mainstream, performances as a person of Chinese heritage are evaluated outside the hegemonic racial and national scripts that position British as implicitly white and monocultural (Smith, 2015; Brah, 1996). These dominant frameworks operate as structural power, shaping how second-generation Chinese youth negotiate their identity performances in relation to predefined expectations of who counts as "truly" British or Chinese in the UK. For Chinese family and ethnic community audiences, UK-socialised young people with Chinese background are regulated by cultural scripts of Chinese culture that emphasise filial piety, cultural heritage, and transnational familial belonging. These norms construct Chinese identity as an attachment to ancestral culture and cross-border belonging, often casting overtly "British" expressions as signs of ethnic dilution or loss (Zhou, 1997; Wang, 2018). This is an ongoing process of performative positioning within unequal fields of recognition. A performative lens helps explain how social norms are

reproduced through the pressure to conform to dominant constructions and how these categories remain inherently unstable.

Situated within diasporic space (Brah, 1996), where multiple cultural and racialised scripts intersect, participants engage in strategic performativity. Rather than choosing between “Chinese” and “British”, they selectively reiterate, adapt, or rework both sets of norms across different everyday contexts. This echoes Butler’s (1993) argument that gender can “subvert” through acts that challenge conventional gender performances, thus revealing the instability of identities. At the same time, it intersects with Bhabha’s (1994) notion of the third space where cultural meanings are negotiated and rearticulated rather than inherited, enabling hybrid and in-between forms of belonging to emerge. Butler’s discussion of cross-dressing and other forms of gender expression shows how performance can challenge not only how identity is enacted but also how it is socially perceived. Extended to the transnational context, the third space becomes the arena in which such subversion unfolds. The strategic deviations from, and creative reworkings of, both Chinese and British cultural norms by second-generation Chinese youth can be understood as a form of Butlerian subversion. Through these practices, they forge a transnational identity is forged that transcends essentialised ethnic and national categories and reflects their lived dual cultural embeddedness.

Performance is also seen as embodied practice. Accordingly, I trace how embodiment entails a knowing, participatory, and political body. Lloyd (2010) describes the body as a performative site of information, upon which practices are inscribed on bodies and read as “information sources by co-participants who actively interrogate the bodies of others in practice to gain access to embodied knowledge” (p. 3). Bodies are conceptualised as information sources and become communicative surfaces through which tacit knowledge is generated and recognised. Pelias (2018) extended this argument further by positioning performance as an epistemological stance. The body becomes a site of knowing that integrates cognitive, affective, and intuitive dimensions. Embodied action is a way of understanding the world, not merely expressing it.

Drawing these points together, this thesis suggests that performance should be treated as an embodied, relational, and political process. Bodies are marked by race, gender, class, and history, and are always staged and read within broader symbolic systems

(Waskul and Vannini 2006, 2013). Therefore, embodied performance is situated within social expectations that view certain bodies as more legible, legitimate, or contestable than others. By analysing how bodily practices and embodied experiences function as signs within both British and diasporic contexts, this study conceptualises transnational belonging as an ongoing, performative, and embodied process of knowledge production.

2.3.3 Embodied transnational belonging in everyday life

I contend that transnationality is not only a mental phenomenon, but also a bodily and physical experience embedded in everyday life. Sensory and material practices are a crucial dimension that remain under-researched transnationalism studies. Nikielska-Sekula (2023) conceptualised embodied transnational belonging as a “dynamic, bodily felt materialisation of social, cultural, political, economic, and affective processes that assist the emplacement of mobile people in new localities, and that span the borders of nation-states” (p. 1). It emerges through everyday practices that render certain sensations “home-like”, whether by acquiring new sensory attachments in the receiving country or by rediscovering and reproducing bodily memories transmitted through family life. Taste, sound, touch, and rhythm thus become key sites where transnational connections are materially sustained. Thus, diasporic belonging to homeland or to transnational ethnic communities is enacted and reproduced through embodied and routine actions, cultural practices, and situated interactions.

Attention needs to shift from abstract normative scripts to the ordinary spaces in which such repetitions unfold. Pasura and Mutambasere (2023) argued that transnational religious ties among Zimbabweans in Britain are anchored in the consumption of homeland products in everyday practices, such as wearing religious uniforms and speaking ethnic languages. Through these practices, migrants reproduce cultural forms and create a new home and a feeling of being “at home”. Such micro-practices anchor belonging in the body. They transform ordinary spaces in the receiving country into affectively charged environments that feel recognisable and secure.

For second generation Chinese youth, who do not share the same lived experience of migration or residence in the homeland, transnational attachments are often mediated

through everyday sociocultural activities. As Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2002) suggested, such attachments are sustained through routine activities, such as speaking parents' languages, engaging in food, celebrating homeland-related festivals, and participating in cultural, musical, or sporting events.

For instance, familiar foods provide a strong sensory link to reconstructing everyday life as it was in an idealised homeland (Brah, 1996). Food not only carries cultural significance but also plays an important role in evoking memories, emotions, and constructing a sense of belonging through sensory experiences such as taste, smell, and texture. This has been acknowledged in multiple studies; for instance, Reddy and Dam (2020) and Lin, Pang, and Liao (2020) illustrated how immigrants maintain cultural identity through food practices, such as rebuilding a corner of Taiwan in the backyard garden of their homes in Belgium by planting Taiwanese vegetables (Lin et al., 2020, p. 10) and preparing food in cultural events to help them “go home” in some way (Reddy and Dam, 2020). Chapter four will discuss Chinese food shapes transnational identity of second generation Chinese.

Music, another sensory dimension in this thesis, it is characterised by ritualised re-enactment of the musical traditions of the place of origin, where language, melody, and dance collectively articulate a shared response to homesickness (Turino, 2008). Yet music does more than express homesickness; it creates an embodied social space where belonging is felt, performed, and reproduced. Chapter 5 examines music as an embodied practice through which participants perform, negotiate, and position themselves within society.

2.4 Language in the lives of UK-raised Chinese background youth

Language in this thesis is regarded as a transnational tool defined by the unity of connectivity and agency. It is a core tool for expressing hybrid identity, linking social fields, and negotiating power, operating through dynamic interactions between individuals and society. I therefore argue that language is a space for second-generation Chinese youth to actively negotiate identity, challenge power and boundaries, and create new possibilities, reflecting their agency in self-positioning.

2.4.1 Language ideologies and family language policy

Existing scholarship has revealed that the link between ethnic language maintenance and identity construction is highly relevant to understanding the sense of belonging and social positioning among second-generation Chinese youth. Several scholars have reported that the loss of grandparents' native languages has contributed to reduced transnational engagement and a lack of transnational belonging among second-generation Chinese (Louie, 2006; Ueda, 2002; Kasinitz et al., 2002), as has language negotiation within immigrant families via family language policies (Medvedeva, 2012). Collectively, these studies underscore how language and identity negotiation are shaped by two key factors: individual agency and the contexts of specific discourses and ideologies.

The family is the primary site for Chinese language maintenance. Thus, the family language policy (FLP) is defined as behaviours that allow for the practise of specific patterns of language use and literacy practices in the home domain and among family members. It consists of three components: language practices – the habitual pattern of selecting from the varieties that comprise its linguistic repertoire; its language beliefs or ideology – the beliefs about language and language use which reflect the socio-political and economic interests of policy makers (e.g. parents), cultures, educational experiences, and expectations related to, and intertwined with, specific contexts; and specific efforts to modify or influence that practice through any kind of language intervention, planning, or management (Spolsky, 2004; Shohamy, 2006; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009). Research documenting the impact of family language practices on children's acquisition of bilingualism has largely concentrated on documenting how parents influence their children. However, the current study reveals that the participants, as children in a family as well as flexible users of multilanguage, are taking the initiative in formulating family language policies as well as influencing the language practices of other family members.

Pavlenko and Blackledge's (2004) study on identity negotiation in a multilingual context revealed that human cognition, meaning, and identity do not occur naturally but

instead are constructed through discourse in social interaction (i.e. specific linguistic systems, conceptual frameworks, and narrative patterns). The identities an individual can claim are governed by the discourses available within their social and historical contexts, cultural norms, and existing societal ideas, terms, and narratives regarding what constitutes a legitimate identity. As Tabouret-Keller (1997) found in a study of multilingual communities, ethnic minorities prioritise using the receiving country's dominant language to demonstrate their national belonging. This relates to the work of Blackledge (2002), who found that UK politicians linked Asian families' use of Asian languages to ethnic minority children's academic underachievement and street violence, while avoiding referring to "racism" and "Islamophobia" as core causes of social conflict. It is thus evident that this emphasis on context, together with the cultural beliefs embedded in language, means that bilinguals and multilinguals are always engaged in the process of positioning themselves within language practices. Davies and Harré (1990) noted that people are positioned by others in dialogue while actively positioning themselves, drawing on "positions" provided by specific discourses (e.g. "daughter"). Individuals express their personhood in interactions by adopting fluid, variable identities assigned to speakers. Thus, context and discourse are integral to positioning, which permeates all chapters of this thesis. Identity analysis cannot be separated from its contextual and discursive background. As Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) noted, identity becomes of interest when it is questioned or in crisis, and negotiation occurs only when identity is positioned through power struggles and narratives within specific discourses, interactions, and contexts.

2.4.2 Translanguaging and transpositioning as analytic tools

Li (2011, 2014, 2017) and García et al. (2015) developed the concepts of translanguaging and transpositioning (Li & Lee, 2023) to capture how people simultaneously and spontaneously adopt multiple roles in adaptive communication amid liquid modernity. García and Reid (2015) defined translanguaging as "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages". This challenges traditional views of fixed linguistic boundaries, emphasising instead the dynamic, flexible nature of language use. In this

thesis, translanguaging, as an expression of hybridity, highlights how individuals cross conventional linguistic boundaries in communication. Because bilinguals and multilinguals constantly shift their self-positioning and identification across contexts and cultures, this dynamic adjustment embeds identity at the intersection of multiple dimensions (race, class, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexuality, geopolitical location). Interactions and potential fragmentation between these dimensions generate multimodal, multisensory semiotic systems (Li, 2018).

García and Li (2014) distinguished translanguaging from code-switching by arguing that, rather than merely alternating between two languages, speakers construct interconnected practices that defy neat categorisation into a single language. These practices form a comprehensive set of symbolic resources, blending linguistic varieties with other semiotic resources like gestures and body language. Additionally, Li (2009) introduced the notion of “translanguaging space”, where multilingual users integrate personal histories, experiences, attitudes, and ideologies to create a coherent, meaningful social environment. Li Wei (2018, pp. 23–24) further elaborated that:

...a translanguaging space acts as a third space which does not merely encompass a mixture or hybridity of first and second languages.... it is forever evolving and combines and generates new identities, values and practices.

From the theoretical perspective of transitional social fields, the “translanguage space” proposed by Li Wei (2009, 2018) serves as the core medium through which transnational communities maintain boundaries, reconstruct identities, and reproduce cultures within cross-linguistic contexts. Within the British Chinese diaspora space (such as the Birmingham Chinese Supplementary School), the hybridised use of English, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Hakka (Huang, 2017) fundamentally constitutes the linguistic response of transnational communities to the demand for dual belonging. Through translingual practices, this diaspora weave historical memories of the homeland and real-world experiences in the receiving country into a unified identity narrative, thereby achieving the reproduction of diasporic identity.

Thus, building on Li and Lee’s (2023) definition of translanguaging as a way for individuals to “mobilise their entire semiotic repertoire for communication and daily life” (p. 424), the concept of transpositioning is proposed. Li and Lee argued that

identity comprises the negotiable and fluid process of individuals positioning both themselves and others during each interaction. This involves drawing on verbal and semiotic resources (Kramsch, 2009), while referencing “their own linguistic texts... interlocutors and audiences... as well as the contexts they simultaneously respond to and construct” (p. 221). Such a process is manifested through the body, contexts, social and cultural processes, and events (Thibault, 2017; Kiesling, 2022). For instance, Li Wei (2011) demonstrated how second-generation Chinese young people move seamlessly between “family conversations”, weekend Chinese schools, and dinner-table chats. In these momentary interactions, they alternately adopt the stances of “British teenagers”, “dutiful children”, and “cultural brokers”, revealing the emotional roots and fluid nature of their transnational identities. This kind of transpositioning is achieved not only through language but also via prosody, gestures, facial expressions, and media choices. In doing so, it allows their identities to be anchored both in ethnic heritage through Mandarin (along with its associated memories and customs), and in local British life through English and peer relationships. As Curdt-Christiansen (2009) observed in Chinese families in Quebec, creating effective family language policies is often fraught with challenges. A common pattern involves generational language shifts: grandparents speak dialects, parents use limited Mandarin or English, and children grow up speaking mainly English with some Mandarin (Fishman, 1991; Clyne, 2003; Clyne & Kipp, 1997).

2.4.3 Transanguaging and transpositioning as performance

I try to extend translanguaging using the concepts of performativity and performance. As Zhu and Li (2022) viewed performance as translanguaging the moves across and beyond boundaries, including that of stage and everyday life and modes of communication” (p.2). Jones (2016) proposed a “trans-” perspective that expands performance studies by foregrounding movement across boundaries. The prefix “trans-” signals fluidity and multiplicity, and a mode of performing complex relationships between one site, identification or mode of speaking/doing/being and another. Building on this, Chalklin and Harvey (2016) argued that boundary-crossing is not a clear-cut movement from one side to another. Instead, communication, experience, knowledge,

and the people involved are intertwined, flowing across and beyond boundaries in ways that cannot be easily separated.

Extending this discussion into transpositioning, performance can be understood as the shifting of positions between roles, audiences, and normative frames, allowing individuals to re-situate themselves as they navigate boundaries between stage and everyday life. For second generation Chinese youth, the Chinese/dialect and English both constitute their everyday language. They fluidly switch between languages across two or more cultures and perform roles in different language. Li (2011), for example, showed how second-generation Chinese youth move effortlessly among “family talk”, weekend Chinese-school, and dinner-table chat. In these moment-by-moment interactions, they adopt the stances of “British teenager”, “dutiful child”, and “cultural broker”, exposing the emotional rootedness and mobility of their transnational identity. This enhances their ability to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds, enabling them to act as bridges in transnational activities, community work, and form a sense of transnational belonging (Huang et al., 2021; Pang, 2020). In addition, they can optimise the combination of rights and obligations across institutional systems on both sides, expanding the scope for political participation and resource mobilisation, thereby equipping them with “flexible citizenship” (Ong, 1999). This linguistic flexibility not only allows them to navigate networks spanning family, community, and school, transnational networks, but also positions them as bridges between ethnic communities and mainstream society, granting them advantages in resource allocation.

Alongside this, language, including both English and Chinese, can be understood as a form of capital that enables the maintenance of transnational networks, the provision of emotional support and access to transnational resources. The next section draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of class and capital to examine how capital intersects with class, how class structures unequal transnational capacities, and how second-generation Chinese youth engage in processes of capital conversion across contexts.

2.5 Class, capitals, and unequal transnational capacity

Given the diversity among second-generation Chinese young people, and to better understand their internal differences as well as their transnational practices and outcomes, this section examines the role and impact of the class framework in the daily lives and transnational practices of the second generation. Bourdieu (1985) argued that class manifests in people's daily social practices, which continuously create and reinforce hierarchical structures through cultural production. He categorised capital into four types used to position actors within society (Bourdieu, 2018):

- Economic capital: Refers to capital directly associated with economic resources.
- Social capital: Denotes resources acquired through social networks, including interpersonal relationships, social trust, and group support.
- Cultural capital: Encompasses personal attributes such as cultural knowledge, educational background, and artistic taste, as well as culturally competent skills recognised by society.
- Symbolic capital: Rooted in reputation, prestige, and social recognition, its power stems from the acknowledgment of others and can be converted into other forms of capital.

For second generation Chinese youth living in the UK, the four types of capitals derived from their families exert an equal influence on their everyday life and transnational practices.

Economic capital directly influences their living conditions in the receiving country, such as housing, school, material experiences. In terms of transnational practices, it serves as a key link in maintaining material connections and physical return. This includes covering the transportation and accommodation costs to visit China regularly, participation in activities such as family gathering meals, leisure activities and internships abroad, etc.

Cultural capital exhibits distinct transnational attributes and serves as the most direct resource for second-generation Chinese youth to maintain transnational connections and diasporic consciousness. It includes cultural knowledge, ritual and moral, language, customs, beliefs, literature, music, and films, all of which that are carried, reinterpreted,

and lived through family life. Cultural capital enables them to convert educational and cultural knowledge from the home country into valuable cultural assets in British society (Fernández-Kelly, 2008). Moreover, Chinese parents generally regard education as a core pathway to maintaining their existing class status and even achieving upward mobility. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) observed that second-generation Chinese young people often hold high educational aspirations, but their actual achievements are influenced and constrained by their parents' capital structure (e.g. economic capital, cultural capital, educational level, and language proficiency). Studies have revealed that middle-class Chinese parents typically adopt various proactive educational strategies to help their children maintain and perpetuate their class status. For instance, Choi et al. (2024) explored how middle- and upper-class Chinese parents in London develop multiple strategies to cultivate their children's transnational/cross-cultural capital, such as encouraging them to learn the home country's language, sustaining cultural activities/travel, and leveraging bilingual or bicultural backgrounds, thereby gaining advantages in global mobility, education, or privileged networks. Such strategies play a positive role in class reproduction.

For this research, social capital comprises two dimensions in this study: networks and mobilisable social resources within the living society, and diasporic community networks (Putnam, 2000). For second-generation Chinese youth, this type of capital is not inherent but acquired through transmission, and then actively build and maintenance via parental and family socialisation. Portes et al. (2009) found that second-generation individuals can obtain social capital and support from ethnic communities in the receiving society, which play a vital role in educational and psychological support. In transnational contexts, social capital exhibits greater extensibility. Faist's (2000) theory of transnational social spaces posits that the transnational relational networks of migrant families constitute mobile social capital. Through the bridging function of transnational social capital, individuals can access resources across national contexts, most notably through participation in elite transnational business networks, the acquisition of information and insights from other countries, and opportunities to mobilise these advantages in the receiving country.

In this thesis, symbolic capital primarily refers to parents' integration level, occupation, or reputable qualifications. Such capital also possesses dual contextual attributes

(relevant to both the home country and the host country). Parents' immigration status can be influences the daily lives and transnational practices of the second generation, particularly in terms of legitimacy for documented versus undocumented immigrants. Through a study of 32 undocumented parents, Enriquez (2015) found that even if children hold citizenship, their parents' undocumented status imposes an intergenerational penalty, forcing the entire family to collectively bear the risks and restrictions associated with undocumented immigration. For example, it may bring stigma to and impose limitations on the second generation (e.g. inability to travel freely between China and the UK, difficulty maintaining transnational connections, disrupted transmission of transnational capital, and risk of downward mobility). By contrast, documented parents' legal status provides their children with a foundation of social legitimacy, making it easier for them to maintain transnational connections and develop transnational identities through return visits. These observations highlight the differences in economic, social, and cultural status among different classes in society, as well as the unequal distribution of power/resources. Such inequalities are perpetuated through intergenerational capital transmission.

As Portes and Rumbaut (2001) contended, parental capital, occupational position, and the social resources available to migrant families are critical in which second-generation youth navigate identity and belonging. This is particularly evident among British Chinese communities, where family-run catering businesses, supplementary schooling, and transnational kinship ties continue to serve as key channels of cultural and linguistic transmission (Li & Zhu, 2013; Song, 2015).

2.5.1 Unequal capital and class variation of British Chinese families

Drawing on Bourdieu's framework of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), this thesis examines how classed resources (different forms of capitals) and local opportunity structures shape the capacity to sustain these practices, and with what consequences of this for the density/fragility of belonging?

From a historical and migration trajectory perspective, British Chinese families have entered British society from very different starting points. Earlier migrants, many of

whom came from Guangdong and Fujian and entered through restricted or irregular routes, were often constrained by immigration policy and the limited value of their human capital in Britain at that time. As a result, they relied heavily on ethnic enclave economies, especially catering and small-scale retail. These migrants formed the core of the working-class Chinese community in Britain, and this class position has often been reproduced across generations. For these families, the accumulation of economic capital has typically depended on intensive physical labour, family-based work, and relatively closed social networks. This has often reinforced social isolation and made upward mobility more difficult (Chan et al., 2020). By contrast, more recent migrants arriving through skilled or investor routes have generally entered Britain with greater economic, educational, and professional resources, giving them a different class starting point and a wider range of opportunities.

Cultural capital also operates unevenly within British Chinese families. Zhou (2001) found that many Chinese parents seek to convert limited economic resources into their cultural capital for their children, for example through extracurricular training or access to high-performing schools. Education is widely seen as a key route for overcoming class barriers and responding to racial disadvantage (Louie, 2004). Notably, this strategy manifests differently across socioeconomic strata. Middle-class families leverage their institutionalised cultural capital within the British education system for targeted investments (Lareau & Cox, 2011), whereas working-class families place equally high value on education but often have fewer resources, less institutional knowledge, and relatively limited capacity to guide their children through educational pathways (Zhou, 2001).

The operation of social capital has also become increasingly transnational. For British Chinese families, social networks stretch across borders in complex ways. However, the benefits of transnational social capital are not equally distributed, especially with respect to intergenerational transmission. Class also shapes how such networks can be used. Middle-class families are often better positioned to mobilise transnational social capital for the benefit of their children, for example through private education, overseas study, or transnational internships. For working-class families, transnational ties are often limited to remittances, kin obligations, and fragmented family networks, and lack

the broader institutional resources needed for sustained class reproduction across borders (Choi et al., 2024).

Taken together, the position of Chinese families in Britain is shaped by both the volume and composition of the different forms of capital they hold and by the class position from which they begin. These inequalities are often further intensified in the transnational sphere. This gives rise to uneven forms of transnational mobility. For participants living in privileged families, transnational networks can be converted into educational, economic, and symbolic advantage, allowing transnational identity itself to function as a resource. For those from long-established labouring backgrounds, especially in sectors such as catering, transnationalism may be experienced less as an opportunity than as a form of obligation, emotional labour, and kinship responsibility (Song, 2001).

2.5.2 Capital conversion of second generation Chinese youth

This study emphasises the agency of second-generation Chinese youth in this process. They are not merely passive recipients of capital transmission, instead, they engage in strategically selection of the capital transmitted by their parents, engage in cultural hybridisation practices, and even resist established paths of capital utilisation by their parents or employ innovative capital combination methods, ultimately shaping their own class practices and social positions. This emphasis on agency aligns with Levitt's (2001) theory of second-generation transnational migrant practices, which posits that second-generation can somehow break free from the constraints of their parents' class by proactively deploying transnational resources.

This thesis extends the discussion of class reproduction by emphasising the second generation's capacity for self-direction, specifically how they use, negotiate, and sometimes contest the forms of capital and resources inherited from their parents. Existing work on social and cultural reproduction has shown how families transmit cultural practices, values, language, manners, and educational aspirations in ways that help children secure similar or higher social positions (Althusser, 2006; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Second-generation Chinese youth are undoubtedly constrained by

their parents' class and capital. Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" (1977) helps explain how these inherited structures become internalised as durable dispositions that guide perceptions and actions. In other words, through social conditions such as family, class background, and educational experiences during their upbringing, they gradually develop a set of ways to perceive, experience, and act in the world. Second generation Chinese youth's aspirations, strategies, and even their awareness of possibilities are shaped by the classed delineated in which they are raised. However, reproduction is never automatic. In transnational contexts, inherited capital will be devalued, transformed, or strategically converted across social fields, opening space for negotiation and partial reconfiguration of classed trajectories.

The process of capital conversion among second-generation Chinese constitutes an unequal "class struggle." Whilst individual agency matters, divergent life trajectories within the same ethnic group can only be understood by taking into account the unequal accumulation and composition of capital rooted in class origins. Capital and class inequality not only determine not only what they "can transform," but also dictates the premium they need to pay in self-identification and social integration during the transformation process.

2.6 Defining the "second generation"

In this thesis, "second generation" is used cautiously as an umbrella and heuristic category, because it identifies participants' shared structural and familial positioning and their socialisation experiences. Specifically, it refers to young people who were born or largely socialised in Britain, who come from Chinese migrant family backgrounds, and who have at least one parent originating from the People's Republic of China (PRC).

It is important to note that use of the term "second generation" has been criticised in migration studies for being embedded within an immigrant imaginary that positions migrants' descendants as perpetually transitional and never fully settled (Sayyid, 2004, 2009). I recognise this critique and acknowledge that such terminology can risk reproducing othering by defining racialised subjects through migration, descent and

origin. That said, other available terms also carry limitations. Labels such as “1.5 generation” and “2.5 generation” rely on age-based or genealogical distinctions that cannot capture the complexity of childhood socialisation, family life and transnational mobility (Zhou and Lee, 2007). Terms such as “huayi” carry essentialist assumptions about ethnicity (Tan, 2013), while “children of immigrants” can overemphasise descent and parental origin. None of these terms is neutral (Scocco, 2024). Similar to the term “refugee,” such labels are not merely descriptive but are embedded in legal status, political, and moral regimes that define belonging, difference, and legitimacy. The act of categorising individuals under such terms is itself problematic, as it fixes people into predetermined identity positions and risks reducing complex, fluid experiences to rigid classifications.

Following Brubaker and Cooper (2000), this thesis distinguishes between categories of practice and categories of analysis. Categories of practice refer to the labels, terms and classifications used by social actors in everyday life, community settings, institutional contexts and political discourse. Such categories shape actions, claims-making, belonging and exclusion, and are consequential in the social world. Categories of analysis, by contrast, are the conceptual tools used by researchers to interpret and explain social processes. There is a risk of reproducing categories of practice as fixed analytical categories when they are imported directly into analysis without paying sufficient attention to their origins, uses, limits and effects. That is to say, I recognise the risk that “second generation” may impose an external academic label on participants whose identifications are fluid and situated. To avoid this, I prioritise participants’ own terms and language and analyse how they describe themselves in relation to family, migration history, Chineseness, Britishness, place, education, work and belonging. This thesis therefore focuses on processes of identification, categorisation, belonging and boundary-making, examining how participants describe themselves, how they are positioned by others and by themselves, and how these forms of belonging are negotiated, challenged and reworked across everyday and transnational contexts.

For this reason, this thesis retains “second generation” as a cautious analytical descriptor and an object of reflexive analysis, rather than as a fixed identity label or a category of practice universally used by participants. The term is partly grounded in the fieldwork because it was used or recognised by some participants, parents and

community gatekeepers when referring to young people born or raised in Britain within Chinese migrant families (see example in Chapter 5, Section 5.3). Nevertheless, I do not assume that all participants recognised or embraced this label. Many described themselves using more situational terms, such as “British Chinese”, “Chinese background”, “more British than Chinese” and “in-between”, or avoided fixed labels altogether. The relevance of “second generation” varies across participants, contexts and stages of the life course. It becomes more visible in moments when participants are positioned through family migration histories, parental expectations, language and belonging, cultural practices and racialised encounters. For example, this is evident in participants’ attempts to cover the smell of Chinese food at school (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5) and in family dinner ritual practices (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3). For this reason, the term is used cautiously as an analytical entry point to describe a shared sociological location, rather than to impose a stable or fixed identity.

This thesis distinguishes between commonality, connectedness, and groupness in analysing the term “second generation”. Participants share certain structural commonalities, such as UK socialisation within migrant family histories, which shape variable life experiences. At the same time, these shared conditions generate diverse forms of identification rather than a uniform collective identity. Accordingly, this thesis approaches “second generation” as a social position within a classificatory framework that organises migration-related experiences. In this sense, the thesis uses the empirical data to analyse how these young people continually “do” their identities in daily life through discourse, social interactions, and transnational mobility.

To ensure analytical coherence, the research focuses exclusively on participants with PRC-origin family backgrounds and excludes those from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos, and other Chinese-speaking regions. This operationalisation was grounded in the pronounced heterogeneity of origin within the British Chinese population (Parker & Song, 2007, 2009; Bell, 2011), where distinct diasporic communities emerge among Chinese immigrants from different regions. These differences stem from variations in political contexts (such as colonial histories and the construction of national identities) and cultural practices (such as linguistic variants and ethnic organisational networks) (Song, 2015; Zhou & Lee, 2013). This

exclusion criterion thus refined the focus of the research, ensuring the sample specifically represented second-generation youth with a PRC background.

Within the context of transnationalism studies, a more explanatory approach is to understand the “second generation” within transnational social fields; specifically, by focusing on the extent and ways in which they participate in transnational connections, cross-border practices, and transnational networks. As Fouron and Glick Schiller (2002, p. 196) argued:

Developing this definition of a transnational second generation, which is bounded not by the territorial limits of a state but by the boundaries of social fields that stretch across national borders and link emigrant populations to an ancestral homeland, will greatly enhance migration studies.

The term is analytically indispensable as it captures the distinctive experiences of individuals whose life trajectories and family histories are shaped by migration. However, Zanfrini (2023) argues that such labels are socially constructed and simplify complex life courses into origin-based classifications. Further, Palmas (2006, cited in Scocco, 2025) noted the following when any labels are adopted to describe migrants’ children: “whatever denomination is used, it is not difficult to prove its reductive and often misleading character. Reductive because it reduces a biography to an origin, and misleading because it removes the subjects’ ways of freely defining themselves, playing among the many identity and symbolic holds in a fluid and irreversible space” (pp. 17). Such terms describe a group of people while overlooking how subjects define themselves within fluid and changing social spaces, navigating flexibly among multiple identities and symbolic meanings.

From this perspective, this thesis explores how second-generation Chinese youth actively navigate and define themselves in everyday life when confronting complex social realities, and how they challenge or resist the imposed label of “second generation”. It emphasises that they are not defined solely by birthplace or nationality but are active agents who sustain and reshape transnational connections while building their lives within the host society.

In second-generation literature, language emerges as a pivotal cultural marker of diaspora and transnational identity. The subsequent section examines the role of language, particularly Chinese, within transnationalism, and how both Chinese and English operate as resources through which identity is practised, negotiated, and performed.

2.7 Five mechanisms for analysing second-generation transnational identity

This thesis incorporates five mechanisms including boundary work, capital conversion, positioning, embodiment and sense, and digital mediation as core analytical dimensions cross the thesis. Subsequently, it examines the outcomes generated by this integrative framework.

The study is situated within the field of transnationalism studies and treats diaspora as a stance. Home orientation, as one characteristic of diaspora, refers to the points or place in which people are transnationally connected (Brah, 1996; Blunt, 2005). By focusing on transnationalism from below, this study conceptualises everyday life as the site where all practices take place (Smith, 2015, 2016), and analyses them through the lens of performance and performativity (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990). A more specific lens is the sensory turn, which remains underexplored in transnationalism and is a key gap addressed by this study (Low, 2023). Capital and class are used as the tools used to analyse transnational practices (Bourdieu, 1986). Translanguaging and transpositioning as concepts to analyse language practices (Li & Lee, 2023). Third space is conceptualised as the outcome arena for identity negotiation (Bhabha, 1994). Yet these lenses often operate in isolation, focusing on discrete aspects of transnational experience without explaining how they intersect to shape identity. In this thesis, I demonstrate how they function together to move from abstract conceptualisation to grounded empirical analysis, making it possible to interpret what is happening in domains of food, music, language and return visits, how it is happening (mechanisms), and with what consequences (outcomes).

To bridge theoretical lenses and lived practices, I identify six interrelated mechanisms and modes of operationalisation through which second-generation individuals construct

and negotiate identity, along with signposts to empirical chapters (see Table 1). No mechanism operates in isolation, as their dynamic interactions are rooted in the empirical practices documented in Chapters 4-7.

Table 1: Mechanisms and Operationalisation

Mechanism	Definition	Operational Indicators
Boundary Work	Drawing/negotiating lines between “self” and “other” (Brubaker, 2005).	- Hiding Chinese food smells at school (see 4.5); - Creating “auditory bubbles” with headphones (see 5.4); - Separating “family-only” vs. “public” spaces in takeaways (see 6.5); - Restricting WeChat Moments to Chinese contacts (see 7.4).
Positioning	The process of expressing one's personality by adopting variable identities in interaction (Davies & Harré, 1990).	- Replying in English to racialised greetings such as “Ni hao” (hello) (see 6.6); - Using formal Mandarin with elders (see 7.3); - Using Chinese as secret language with siblings (see 6.6); - Identifying with the music of other diasporic communities and positioning oneself in a shared space with them (see 5.3); - Performing hip-hop at KTV with Chinese students (refusing Mandarin songs) to position oneself as “locally rooted” (see 5.4.3).
Embodiment and Senses	Using bodily sensations (smell, touch, sound, movement) to anchor transnational ties (Low, 2023) and shape identity and practices.	- Kitchen noise/smell thresholds (see 4.4); - Ritual embodied practices through eating (see 4.3); - Tactile cultural learning, including zongzi wrapping and controlling brush pressure during calligraphy (see 6.4.2); - Embodied musical practices and urban performances (see 5.5).
Digital Mediation	Using virtual platforms to maintain cross-border	- Ritual digital co-presence (festival greetings, collective red-envelope exchanges in WeChat family groups) (see 7.4); - Selective visibility (hiding posts of tattoos/non-

	connections (Alinejad, 2020).	Chinese partners from relatives) (see 7.4); - Read-receipt avoidance (see 7.4).
Capital Conversion	Translating parental resources into personal transnational practice, transforming resources into belonging.	- Parental funds/networks lead to independent returns (see 7.5.3); - Leveraging family networks to source and turning Chinese tutoring into UK credentials (see 7.6); - Property and autonomous stays (see 7.5.2).
Translanguaging/ Transpositioning	Shifting cultural positions through multilingual repertoires (Li & Lee, 2023).	- Language brokering between family members and friends (see 6.3); - Using English rather than Chinese to deliver emotions (see 6.4.1); - Changes in music according to the context and peers (see 5.4.2).

This is a model that situates second-generation people within specific contexts, focusing on their practical behaviours across diverse settings to systematically trace the multi-layered dynamic processes of identity negotiation, performance, and embodiment. This is a necessary framework, as no single concept can fully account for the generative mechanisms of second-generation transnational identities. Moreover, it is sufficient, as its core concerns are directed towards the practical domains closely intertwined with the everyday lives of these groups. In addition, this framework establishes the theoretical foundation for subsequent empirical analyses. Although certain mechanisms may operate with some variation across different domains, this precisely reflects the context-adaptive nature of identity negotiation and does not diminish the overall explanatory power of the framework.

The interplay of lenses, domains, and mechanisms produces three distinct and interconnected outcomes which capture the unique transnational identity of second-generation youth: ways of being/belonging, situated transnational identity, and place-specific differences.

Firstly, in line with Levitt and Glick-Schiller's (2004) distinction between "ways of being" as actual social relations and practices, and "ways of belonging" as affective, meaning-laden identification with homeland, this outcome captures how second-

generation Chinese youth in Britain navigate the gap between doing transnational and diasporic identity. This thesis treats “ways of being” as observable practices across sites and “ways of belonging” as explicit or implicit identifications, claims, recognitions, and evaluations tied to groups, places, or categories. However, an individual’s way of being in a given context does not necessarily lead to a sense of belonging. For example, in her research on descendants of Italian immigrants, Fortier (2000) found that although individuals actively participate in Italian cultural festivals, language courses, or religious rituals, such “being” is more often driven by cultural consumption, family expectations, or social convenience than identification with an Italian identity. For second-generation Chinese youth, it involves actively and selectively declaring certain practices as belonging to them and forming part of their identity. Therefore, it can be said that belonging is a process of being ascribed value and meaning, shaped not only by individual subjective will but also by the combined influence of the state, social structures, and the perspectives of others (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In many cases they may not gain a sense of belonging, even if they actively participate in homeland affairs within transnational networks. Instead, they may feel marginalised or in a state of being “neither here nor there” due to differences in language proficiency, ethnic stereotypes, or generational distance (Christou, 2006).

Secondly, this thesis demonstrates that the negotiation of transnational identities among second-generation Chinese youth remains embedded within the power relations of specific spatial contexts. These transnational identities increasingly manifest as situated performativity, wherein the activation, manifestation, and deployment of identity are profoundly shaped by concrete spatial-temporal contexts, such as “British-Chinese”, “diasporic Chinese”, and “pan-Asian”. Through selective exposure within particular scenes, second-generation Chinese youth dynamically adjust the presentation of their identity across different social arenas, engaging in a form of social performance that is “doing” within interactions (Goffman, 1959; Hall, 1990). This performance reveals how power relations and context delineate the boundaries of identity performance, while the process of dynamically adjusting to either transgress or conform to these boundaries constitutes one of the crucial outcomes of transnational identity formation.

Thirdly, the reinforcement and erosion of boundaries constitute the third outcome of transnational identity. Guided by Brubaker’s (2005) framework which states that

boundaries are fluid and practice-shaped, this thesis reveals that boundaries become fortified when practices are defined (by themselves or others) as “mismatched” with British/Scottish mainstream norms, or when they are employed to safeguard autonomy and avoid racial discrimination. Boundaries erode when practices create hybrid forms transcending the China-UK binary or through amicable interactions that treat difference as a resource. This renders in-betweenness visible and acceptable. Both the reinforcement and erosion of boundaries constitute active processes which are not solely driven by external pressures.

Finally, place-specific differences extend beyond individuals in micro-level interactional contexts to intersect with Britain’s post-Brexit and post-pandemic macro-realities, ultimately shaping transnational identity outcomes. London’s super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007) and global orientation foster a fluid transnationalism, where second-generation Chinese youth can publicly claim hybrid Chinese-British identities and even convert their transnational ties into identity capital. Crucially, this openness also exposes them to elevated risks of racism and other forms of rejection, as the city’s racial diversity, whilst a source of inclusion, can occasionally exacerbate inter-ethnic tensions and a surge in anti-immigrant sentiment. By contrast, Glasgow’s concentrated Chinese community compel second-generation Chinese youth to adopt strategic, concealed identity negotiation. This often forces them to choose one identity in specific contexts to fit in with peers, mainstream Scottish society, or the Chinese diasporic community.

2.8 Rreview of literature on second generation Chinese youth

Existing research on second-generation Chinese youth in Britain follows a multidimensional evolutionary trajectory. Much of the early literature approached the integration of this cohort in terms of educational attainment, labour market participation, and social mobility (Ballard, 1994; Modood, 2005; Parker & Song, 2007; Song, 1999, 2015), culture maintenance and ethnic identity (Parker, 1993, 1995, 2000, 2007; Pang, 1999; Anthias, 1998; Werbner, 2002; Song, 2003), and sense of belongings (Song, 1995, 1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2015). It was not until the development of the transnational and diaspora frameworks in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Vertovec, 1999; Anthias, 1998; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004) that studies began to conceptualise second-generation

Chinese identities in Britain as shaped by both incorporation into the UK context and sustained ties to parental homelands.

Building on this, a layer of scholarship foregrounds globalisation and transnational connectivity, examining how flows of people, media, and capital reshape what counts as “British Chinese identity” (Parker & Song, 2007, 2009; Bell, 2011; Yeh, 2000, 2014). Here, identity is not only a matter of local incorporation but also of diasporic imagination, digital co-presence, and return mobilities. Alongside this, another body of work centres on second-generation Chinese youth in mainstream and supplementary schools, highlighting academic trajectories, family expectations, and the interplay of gender and ethnicity (Woodrow & Sham, 2001; Francis, Archer, & Mau, 2010; Lau, 2014). Second-generation Chinese individuals are often subject to the stereotype of the “model minority”, which highlights their achievements in education and professional pathways. However, as Song (2015) argued, such recognition constitutes a conditional form of acceptance: one that is valued only when conforming to ideals of diligence and obedience and excluded when deviating from them. It does not necessarily translate into genuine social, cultural, or psychological integration. Many continue to experience feelings of invisibility, marginalisation, and even subtle forms of racial discrimination that are frequently overlooked by mainstream society. This limited sense of belonging is reinforced by their underrepresentation in media and institutions, and a lack of peer networks during formative years. Rather than focusing on integration as measured by achievement or conformity, this thesis centres on belonging as an agentive, affective relationship to place and society. As both Vertovec (2004) and Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) have suggested, second-generation identities are shaped by transnational ties and multiple attachments, rendering belonging a fluid, negotiated process that exceeds national boundaries.

More recent UK scholarship folds in digital mediation and macro-conjunctures to explain variation under the Brexit referendum (2016), the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–present), and the rise of anti-Asian racism, all of which have heightened the social visibility and politicisation of the “ethnic Chinese” category, impacting the daily lives of second-generation Chinese young individuals. Among the topics receiving the most attention are discrimination (Tyrrell, et al., 2019; Cheung, 2021; Hyde, 2024; Zhou,

2025; Bao, 2021; Hsiao, 2020) and belongings (Huang, et al., 2021; Pang, 2020; Yen, et al., 2021; Li & Ding, 2024).

Such literature emphasises that the majority of second-generation young people assert a sense of belonging to Britain through education and socialization, while simultaneously feeling a sense of “in-betweenness” because of racialisation and cultural background. This echoes the experiences of second-generation diaspora that simultaneously feel a sense of belonging and attachment to multiple nation-states, while also experiencing alienation (Walsh, 2006). As Bacchus (2020) found when exploring the experiences of second-generation South Asians within diasporic communities, they have struggled in in-between scenarios, experiencing racism, workplace discrimination, and generational conflicts in the receiving society. Lulle, Moroşanu, and King (2018) further explored EU-born youth aged 18-35 living in London, revealing the affective impact of Brexit and how they experienced “othering” in the referendum. Chinese youth were frequently wrongly blamed as virus carriers during the pandemic, illustrating how those who do not look white readily become symbols of external threat (Silverio et al., 2022). These studies collectively demonstrate that the “in-betweenness” experienced by second-generation Chinese individuals is not an internalised personal sensation, but rather a product of institutional racism within British society. This provides a multi-dimensional perspective for understanding diaspora as a process and the identity politics of second-generation Chinese youth amid socially turbulent events. Here, it is important to recognise that these experiences are also shaped by the context of the city or region, as well as the individual's background, leading to further variations. Consequently, second-generation Chinese youth from different backgrounds face distinct challenges and advantages. However, current research on second-generation Chinese youth from diverse backgrounds within the post-pandemic, post-Brexit context remains rare. To address this gap, this thesis explores four themes: food, music, language, and homecoming, which emerged through fieldwork and participant interviews.

Firstly, Chinese food often plays an important role in second-generation Chinese youth's everyday lives as it is both a form of consumption as well as a transnational practice to maintain cultural identity and transnational connections. The consumption of familiar foods provides a strong sensory link to reconstructing everyday life as it was

in an idealised homeland (Brah, 1996). This has been acknowledged in multiple studies; for instance, Reddy and Dam (2020) and Lin, Pang, and Liao (2020) illustrated how immigrants maintain cultural identity through food practices, such as rebuilding a corner of Taiwan in the backyard garden of their homes in Belgium by planting Taiwanese vegetables (Lin et al., 2020, p. 10) and preparing food in cultural events to help them go home in some way (Reddy and Dam, 2020). These studies not only examined the symbolic significance of food consumption (e.g. which foods represent Taiwan) but also highlighted the sensory experience of food in shaping immigrants' sense of belonging. Nevertheless, second-generation individuals are frequently overlooked by researchers. In light of this, Chapter 4 begins by examining the experiences of second-generation Chinese youth in Glasgow who were born into families operating takeaway businesses. It focuses on their food-related practices, particularly how sensory experiences shape their diasporic consciousness, and how these practices are situated within interactive contexts and broader urban contexts for negotiating identity.

As another sensory dimension, music is characterised by ritualised re-enactment of the musical traditions of the place of origin, where language, melody, and dance collectively articulate a shared response to homesickness (Turino, 2008). This mediating function reveals a generational divide: the musical practices of first-generation migrants are primarily oriented towards the imagined homeland, drawing on homeland songs during festive rituals or mother-tongue melodies at family gatherings to forge a tangible auditory homeland (Reyes, 1999). By contrast, the musical practices of second-generation youth display postmodern characteristics: fragmented styles, the transnational circulation of cultural products and information, and the recombination of diverse cultural elements (Baudrillard, 1994; Kotarba, 2008). They neither fully inherit the cultural codes of their parents' homeland nor completely integrate into the mainstream cultural framework of the receiving society. Instead, they forge a hybrid cultural identity within the interplay of two cultural spheres (Hall, 1992; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

The postmodern cultural landscape provides the structural conditions for these selective practices. Baudrillard (1994) and Kotarba (2008) described an endless availability of choice, fragmented musical styles, explosive consumerism, and intensifying global

interconnectedness. From the perspective of social constructivism, popular music is not a static cultural product but a field in which meaning is actively constructed through personal experience and interpretation (Kotarba & Vannini, 2006). The ways in which second-generation youth categorise musical genres, emotionally respond to trends, and internalise styles are, fundamentally, processes of dynamic identity construction. However, such an approach lacks a systematic analysis of the identity negotiation mechanisms of second-generation individuals. It also neglects the situated performativity and selective engagement embedded in their musical practices and consumption (Wong, 2019; Liu, 2020). To address these gaps, Chapter 5 explicitly conceptualises music as a transnational cultural practice and, drawing on different sites in London and Glasgow, traces how the musical practices of second-generation Chinese youth produce fluid identity positions and relations of belonging across transnational kin networks, peer groups, and urban public spaces.

Thirdly, second-generation Chinese youth are often bilingual or multilingual, switching fluidly between languages across two or more cultures. Li (2011), for example, showed how second-generation Chinese youth move effortlessly among “family talk”, weekend Chinese-school, and dinner-table chat. In these moment-by-moment interactions, they adopt the stances of “British teenager”, “dutiful child”, and “cultural broker”, exposing the emotional rootedness and mobility of their transnational identity. This enhances their ability to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds, enabling them to act as bridges in transnational activities and community work, and to form a sense of transnational belonging (Huang et al., 2021; Pang, 2020). In addition, they can optimise the combination of rights and obligations across institutional systems on both sides, expanding the scope for political participation and resource mobilisation, thereby equipping them with “flexible citizenship” (Ong, 1999).

Li Wei et al.’s (2009, 2014, 2020, 2023) examination of the bilingual, multilingual and translingual practices of second-generation Chinese in London revealed that multilingualism enables them to forge broader friendships, while Mandarin Chinese opens up social, cultural and economic opportunities in mainland China. This linguistic flexibility not only allows them to navigate networks spanning family, community, and school, but also positions them as bridges between ethnic communities and mainstream society, granting them advantages in resource allocation. Consequently, for second-

generation Chinese youth, Chinese language represents not merely cultural capital or resources, but also a means to sustain transnational networks, provide emotional support, and access transnational resources. This provides a foundation for understanding the diasporic identity and transnational connections of second-generation Chinese youth in Britain. Chapter 6 examines their transpositioning by focusing on their everyday multilingual practices across different British cities, and the embodied experiences that occur during these linguistic activities.

The practices within food, music, and language outlined above all take place within Britain. By contrast, the practice of return visits represents an embodied action by second-generation Chinese youth that crosses geographical boundaries, exerting a more direct influence on their transnational engagement. Existing studies have shown that return visits/re-migration are closely linked to a sense of belonging, identity negotiation, and the positioning of “home”, and are inherently connected to research on transnationalism (e.g. regarding “return visits” as part of transnational practices) (Carling, 2014; King, 2010; Erdal, 2014; Christou, 2011; Vathi, 2015). In conjunction with this, digital communication and the lower costs of cross-border transportation have reshaped the “ambient co-presence” (Madianou, 2016) and care circulation of transnational families (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) enabling relatives to maintain emotional bonds, provide care, and “do family” through various media (such as the selection and combination of “polymedia”) (Baldassar, 2016; Wilding, 2006; Madianou, 2013, 2016; Morgan, 1996; Baldassar & Merla, 2014). Research findings indicate that the impact of visiting their parents’ home carries among members of the second generation. Some scholars have reported that it can be a positive experience, as returning allows children to become more familiar and closer to their parents’ original land and to their remaining relatives, strengthening their sense of cultural identity (Lee, 2008, p. 20). Conversely, others have found that young people or children feel alienated and like “outsiders” in their ancestral homeland, reporting experiences of exclusion and discrimination to varying degrees (the “reverse diaspora/counter-diaspora” of second-generation/ethnic return has also been used to capture this complexity). This places them in a passive and marginal position within transnational families (Lee, 2008, 2016; Varhonen, 2015). However, these works neglect the role of class and capital in maintaining transnational families.

Furthermore, within the British context, minimal research has been conducted on second-generation Chinese in the field of transnational families. Even though literature can be found on transnational networks that discusses the contradictions of digital co-presence and proposes the concept of dysco-presence (Ou et al., 2023), this focuses on young people who have lived and grown up in China, rather than second-generation Chinese young people. Additionally, much of the literature on transnational family maintenance places cross-border emotion works within the context of relationships between the first generation and left-behind relatives, largely neglecting the agency of the second generation and their practices within transnational kinship networks (such as planning return visits, digital co-presence, gift exchange, and the daily organisation of emotional/care work). Moreover, no micro analysis has been conducted of the temporality practices of return visits and transnational family interactions. These inadequacies are particularly prominent in research on second-generation Chinese youth. In Chapter 7, this thesis discusses transnational family maintenance, including care circulation, digital ambient co-presence, polymedia communication, and further connections in education. It also examines how second-generation Chinese youth “do” family to reveal the agency and practical mechanisms they employ within transnational kinship networks.

In summary, integrating the four practical dimensions of food, music, language, and return visits into a unified analytical framework provides a multidimensional identity-operational mechanism for understanding the navigational strategies of second-generation Chinese youth in the post-pandemic and post-Brexit era. This approach elucidates their ways of being and ways of belonging, boundaries and situatedness, as well as urban distinctions.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has developed the theoretical and conceptual foundations for analysing how second-generation Chinese youth in Britain negotiate transnational identity in everyday life. I argued that diaspora and transnationalism should be treated as analytically distinct yet mutually constitutive dimensions. Transnationalism is positioned as the research field, highlighting cross-border networks, practices, and

unequal flows of capital that shape everyday life. Diaspora is conceptualised as a mobilised stance, foregrounding home orientation, collective identity, and boundary-making processes. Together, these perspectives situate second-generation Chinese youth within transnational social fields that stretch between Britain and China, while recognising that their identities are not inherited intact but are actively negotiated within specific socio-political contexts.

Building on this macro-level framing, the chapter shifted attention to the sociology of everyday life, arguing that belonging is an embodied, relational, and performative accomplishment. Drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical model and Butler's theory of performativity, the thesis conceptualises transnational identity as a phenomenon that is enacted through repeated, context-sensitive practices rather than possessed as a stable attribute. Embodiment and the sensory turn further extend this perspective by emphasising how taste, sound, touch, and material environments anchor transnational attachments in the body. Language practices, analysed through translanguaging and transpositioning, demonstrate how identity is dynamically repositioned across audiences and discursive contexts. In conjunction with this, class and capital, informed by Bourdieu's framework, reveal that transnational capacity is unequally distributed. Economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital shape the resources available for return visits, digital connectivity, educational strategies, and identity work, while the second generation exercise agency through processes of capital conversion rather than passive inheritance.

The chapter also explained that "second generation" is used in this thesis as a cautious heuristic descriptor, not as a fixed identity label. Participants identified variously as "British Chinese", "Chinese background", "more British than Chinese", "half and half", "in-between", or avoided fixed labels altogether. Their identifications shifted across family, school, peer, community and transnational contexts, showing that belonging was relational, situated and shaped by audience, place, language, racialisation, and family history. "Second generation" remains an analytical shorthand for a shared structural location, not an identity assumed to be held by participants themselves.

Crucially, this chapter has proposed an integrated analytical framework composed of interrelated mechanisms: boundary work, positioning, embodiment and senses, digital

mediation, capital conversion, and translanguaging/transpositioning. These mechanisms operate across empirical domains and generate three interlinked outcomes: differentiated ways of being and belonging, situated transnational identities, and place-specific variations shaped by Britain's post-Brexit and post-pandemic realities. The framework demonstrates that no single theoretical lens is sufficient to capture the complexity of second-generation transnational identity; instead, identity emerges through the interaction of structural conditions, embodied practices, linguistic positioning, digital infrastructures, and classed resources.

By identifying gaps in existing migration scholarship, particularly the under-theorisation of sensory embodiment, the limited attention to second-generation agency within transnational families, and the insufficient integration of class and capital into analyses of everyday transnational practice. The following empirical chapters therefore move from theoretical abstraction to lived experience, examining how food, music, language, and return visits function as concrete sites through which second-generation Chinese youth in Britain negotiate belonging, reproduce or rework boundaries, and construct transnational identities in practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to detail the research design, methods, and analytic procedures I used to examine how second-generation Chinese youth in Britain negotiate identity, with a specific focus on operationalising the integrated framework within a city-comparative design (Glasgow vs London). For this research I adopted a social constructivist stance and employed a multi-sited ethnographic design: participant observation served as the primary data collection method (conducted across key sites including Chinese language schools, Chinatowns, family-run Chinese restaurants, and participants' homes in both cities), while interviews acted as a supplementary tool. Interviews were conducted with 36 participants (17 females and 19 males) aged 18-25 to deepen interpretation of observed practices. This methodological choice aligns with the ethnographic tradition of producing "thick description" through immersive field engagement (Geertz, 1973), and directly responds to the research questions' emphasis on dynamism and contextuality: cross-city observation captured how opportunity structures shape identity negotiation via the four practice domains (food, music, language, return visits), while interviews revealed participants' meanings, intentions, and reflexive understandings – laying the groundwork to link practices to mechanisms (e.g. boundary work, embodiment) and outcomes.

The chapter is structured into five sections. The first section describes my positionality as a Chinese researcher and how this identity influenced interactions with participants, access to research sites, and relationships with both participants and gatekeepers. This provides the rationale for the methodological choices made in this research, with a particular focus on the concept and applicability of multi-sited ethnography. The second section explains the methods used in the study: semi-structured interviews and participatory observation and discusses the procedures for collecting data in detail. The third section reflects on multi-sited ethnography and lays out the research map for the study, including integrated framework-methods alignment. The fourth section addresses ethical considerations regarding the implementation of these methods, including issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and researcher-participant

dynamics. The fifth section presents a detailed discussion of the data analysis process, outlining the techniques employed to systematically interpret the collected data.

3.2 Positionality and reflexivity as a Chinese researcher

As a Chinese researcher in my twenties, my positionality inevitably influenced the research process, particularly when navigating the roles of both “insider” and “outsider” when I was a teaching assistant (TA) in Chinese schools in Glasgow and London, as these were the main venues in which I approached participants. Debates around being an “insider and outsider” have evolved beyond rigid binary frameworks: Merton (1972) first conceptualised insider-outsider distinctions, while later scholars like Ryan (2015) advanced the discussion by emphasising multi-positionalities as a more nuanced lens, arguing that researchers do not occupy fixed positions but rather move across overlapping, context-dependent identities. This perspective aptly describes my experience in the field. As Ryan (2015) noted, “inside” and “outside” are not tied to a fixed “what or where” but to context-specific interactions, and this fluidity defined my positioning. As a Chinese researcher, participants often framed me as an “outsider” regarding their lived experiences of British society, while viewing me as an “insider” in conversations about racial or cultural identity.

My positionality also manifested in the practical dynamics of fieldwork. As a Chinese international student (rather than British-born Chinese), this “outsider” status was reinforced: in interviews, some participants adopted a formal, explanatory tone when discussing British social norms (assuming I might be unfamiliar with these) or Chinese cultural practices (anticipating a need for clarity). This dynamic, whilst sometimes creating a performative layer in responses, also prompted participants to articulate their identity negotiations more explicitly, enriching data with detailed reflections on how they navigated cultural boundaries. Yet this outsider status also introduced constraints. During interviews in London, some participants appeared hesitant when discussing their sense of belonging in British society or experiences of racial discrimination. Similarly, my limited familiarity and knowledge with British education systems and peer social norms meant I occasionally missed subtle cultural cues, underscoring the need for reflexivity in interpreting data.

Conversely, my Chinese cultural and linguistic background occasionally facilitated “insider” access. My Chinese identity often helped establish trust with participants. For instance, during observations in Chinese language schools, I was able to communicate with teachers and students in Mandarin, which not only reduced social distance but also allowed me to quickly obtain a place in schools. Similarly, while carrying out participant observation within Chinatown, my East Asian appearance enabled smoother integration into social spaces. In interactions with family-run takeaway businesses, I was able to observe everyday workplace conversations and how they adapted their communication strategies depending on whether they were serving Chinese or other ethnic customers. These experiences align with Parker and Song’s (1995) findings that sharing an ethnic background and language with participants can facilitate access and rapport-building in research on East Asian communities.

My positionality also influenced how participants engaged in interviews, particularly those recruited through Chinese schools. Due to my prior role as a teacher in these schools, some participants displayed a degree of reservation and their responses often reflected a hierarchical dynamic rather than an informal peer-to-peer exchange. I noticed that some interviewees adopted a classroom mode of communication, responding in a structured, formal way rather than engaging in a relaxed conversation. At times, their answers seemed to align with what they perceived to be my expectations or what would be deemed socially acceptable, rather than expressing their true personal opinions. This power dynamic affected how they discussed cultural identity, family relationships, and social experiences. By contrast, participants recruited through personal networks tended to be more open and expressive in interviews, engaging more naturally in discussions.

Recognising this, my role boundary management needed to adapt to different contexts. At Chinese language schools, I clearly distinguished between my roles as a TA, I never collected data during teaching sessions, and during post-session interviews, I proactively explained the role transition by moving from the classroom to the public space, adjusting my tone and interaction style to minimise the power dynamic. I made a conscious effort to introduce myself in a relaxed way, sharing my own experiences in the UK to establish common ground and reduce perceived social distance. Allocating

time before interviews for casual conversation also helped build trust, facilitating more in-depth discussions. I wore visible audio recording devices and avoided over-engaging in personal topics to maintain research transparency. It should also be noted that I proactively avoided sensitive topics, including immigration status and political views. When participants mentioned those topics, I adopted a listening approach rather than pressing for further details, all in compliance with ethical guidelines.

A key dimension of my positionality lies in an unexamined assumption I initially held: I subconsciously expected and hoped that participants would express some degree of positive sentiment towards China, whether in the form of nostalgia, cultural pride, or affection for tradition. Though this expectation was not overt, it subtly shaped my early interactions. In preliminary interviews, I found myself inclined to ask leading questions such as “What do you miss most about China?” or “What good memories do you have of Chinese culture?” When participants shared warm accounts of family trips or expressed appreciation for Chinese food, I felt a sense of calm and reassurance. This assumption, however, was quickly challenged in the field. When I spoke with a few TAs about their views on China, their responses were negative; for example, “People are rude” and “They spit and pee in the streets”. I instinctively felt their views were overly harsh, perhaps even unfair.

Once I became aware of how my assumptions were manifesting in question design, tone, and even non-verbal cues, I began to adjust my practice. I broadened the scope of interview questions, avoiding those with emotional pre-loading. For example, shifting from “What do you miss about China?” to a more open prompt such as “In your own words, how do you feel about China?”, I systematically documented my reactions in my fieldnotes, noting where my affective connection to China might be influencing my interpretations.

As the research progressed, I realised that participants’ attitudes towards China were rarely one-dimensional. Whilst some described it as “home” or “a place full of warmth”, others expressed detachment, citing pressure, intergenerational dissonance, or feelings of alienation amid rapid social change. This complexity forced me to re-evaluate how my own standpoint shaped my reading of the data.

During the analysis phase, I employed three strategies to mitigate bias. First, I explicitly separated descriptive data (participants' words) from interpretive reflection (my own responses and readings), creating parallel columns in the coding matrix to track these layers (Davies, 2008). Second, I cross-referenced critical statements, such as complaints about social pressure, with other data, including participants' descriptions of family life in the UK, to explore whether these sentiments stemmed from individual experiences or wider cultural narratives (Flick, 2004). Third, I conducted peer debriefing with my supervisors, inviting them to review my analytical summaries and point out any tendencies to downplay critical perspectives or overemphasise positive ones (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This process underscored a vital lesson: positionality is not merely about insider/outsider status, but about recognising and confronting the unconscious assumptions embedded in our identities, emotions, and cultural attachments (England, 1994; Rose, 1997). My early inclination to seek affirmation of China from participants revealed that no researcher is entirely neutral. What matters is the ability to name those biases, trace their effects, and adjust our methods accordingly.

Ultimately, this reflexivity deepened the analytical rigour of my research. Rather than seeking alignment with my own cultural sentiments, I began to value the diversity and tension in participants' perspectives, treating them as windows into the complex negotiations of transnational identity. This not only enriched my understanding of the field, but also fostered greater humility in confronting the uncertainties that fieldwork inevitably reveals.

3.3 Social constructivism as a philosophical stance

This study adopted social constructivism as its philosophical stance, based on the premise that social reality is continuously constructed, negotiated, and reproduced through human interaction, language, and everyday practices within specific historical and cultural contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This perspective is particularly well-suited to the analysis of transnational identity, which is inherently fluid, situated, and marked by individual agency (Tedeschi et al., 2020).

As Risse (2004) argued, it is more analytically productive to understand social constructivism as a form of social ontology. According to this viewpoint, individuals are inseparable from the social context and the collectively shared culture in its broadest sense, and it is these systems that give structure and order to social practices as social meanings are embedded in specific contexts, and social constructs vary across groups and settings. Social constructivism therefore recognises the existence of multiple realities grounded in shared meaning systems, power relations, and everyday practices (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1997). Hay (2016) illustrated this using the example of money, which has no inherent value as its worth is derived entirely from the collective agreement of those who use it. In this sense, social reality is understood as a world of meanings constructed through interaction, a view that enabled me to conceptualise transnational identity not as static cultural inheritance, but as a dynamic and ongoing social process.

This study focused on second-generation Chinese youth who simultaneously inhabit multiple cultural spheres: they live within broader British society, participate in Chinese community (local and cross-border) life, and maintain imagined and material ties with China through kinship, language, culture, and the circulation of goods. Their transnational practices span time and space, producing experiences that are transnational and context dependent.

Grounded in this ontological position, the research design was shaped by the need to trace identity practices across multiple sites and to capture the process of meaning-making through diverse narratives in the society where participants live. For second-generation Chinese youth, the most significant negotiations of identity often take place locally, within the everyday life of the UK. These individuals are not merely situated between two national cultures; rather, they must continually navigate the intersecting cultural frameworks and power structures of the society in which they live. In each context, they are required to respond to its particular norms, expectations, and modes of interaction. Accordingly, I employed multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995), conducting participant observation across key settings, such as the home, Chinese school, community organisations, and everyday consumption spaces, to observe how transnational identities are constructed within and through situated encounters.

At an epistemological level, social constructivism holds that knowledge is actively constructed through language, symbols, and social interaction, and is always shaped by its socio-cultural context (Baker, 2023; Jovchelovitch, 2001). The complexity of transnational identity lies partly in its embeddedness – it is often located in embodied narratives, sensory experiences, and emotional attachments. This requires research methods capable of accessing those layered, often implicit dimensions.

Therefore, utilising in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation enabled me to enter participants' living worlds and observe how identity is constructed through food related practices, music consumption, linguistic practices, and return visits. This approach reflects both the epistemological assumptions of social constructivism and the methodological strengths of multi-sited ethnography in capturing the lived, situated, and processual nature of identity work.

3.4 Multi-sited ethnography

3.4.1 Why multi-sited ethnography

In this study, the transnational identities are shaped by the everyday, dynamic interplay of meaning-making across domains central to participants lived experience: home, school, and local community. An everyday life perspective therefore requires attention to how meanings travel, translate, and acquire new inflections as individuals move through the ordinary spaces of their daily trajectories. Identity is not constructed within a single bounded arena, but through the cross-domain circulation of practices that are woven into daily schedules and social obligations. In this perspective, “site” refers to not only geographically distinct physical places, but also institutional domains differentiated by culture, norms, communicative practices, or discourse regimes, all of which structure everyday experience. A single-site approach risks isolating these domains analytically, thereby obscuring how identity is produced through their ongoing interaction in lived experience (Amit, 2000). Meanwhile, field sites are no longer understood as isolated, singular entities in globalised world, instead, social relations are anchored in particular communities and places while routinely extending beyond them

in everyday life (Falzon, 2020). For instance, the Confucian value of *xiao* (filial piety), learned and embodied through routine family life, may be reworked into expressions of diligence or deference in the school context, only to acquire further symbolic layers within Chinese community organisations. Such fluid, context-dependent reinterpretation cannot be adequately captured by a single-site research design. A multi-sited ethnographic strategy can illuminate how these domains intersect within everyday life, revealing identity as a relational and processual formation rather than a fixed attribute tied to one context.

From a theoretical standpoint, the core value of multi-sited ethnography lies in its capacity to capture the relationality and contextuality of everyday social life. Ethnographic research becomes multi-sited when the phenomena, actors, narratives, or structures under investigation are characterised by mobility, spatial dispersion, or cross multi-site entanglement, whether involving connections, conflicts, or negotiations across different fields (Falzon, 2009). The notion of “site” here does not refer solely to geographically distinct physical spaces but may also encompass symbolic or institutional domains differentiated by culture, norms, communicative channels, or discourse regimes. Gille and Ó Riain (2002) argued that multi-sited ethnography is particularly suited to the study of globalised processes, as it enables researchers to explore how such processes unfold across multiple settings and extend through both time and space.

Here, a multi-sited design also engages with multiple everyday spaces within each city: Chinese supplementary schools, Chinatowns, takeaways and restaurants, and participants’ homes. The cities function as contextual settings within which young people’s lives unfold, not as equivalent units to be systematically contrasted. By examining similar everyday settings across both cities, the research design enables a systematic analysis of how local configurations structure the everyday mechanisms of identity negotiation, with identity outcomes as the central comparative focus. Across cases, I highlight both shared patterns and place-specific variations, revealing how second-generation Chinese youth negotiate belonging differently in response to local conditions while addressing a consistent set of research questions (Saint Arnault and Sinko, 2021).

I need to clarify the primary analytical focus remains on people and their everyday negotiations of belonging, rather than on London and Glasgow as objects of comparison. The everyday sites selected in each city were not institutionally matched. The presence of takeaway businesses as ethnographic sites in Glasgow but not in London illustrates the asymmetry of the research settings. Likewise, the inclusion of a music carnival and street interactions in London, without a parallel event-based setting in Glasgow, further demonstrates that the sites were not selected as comparable units. Therefore, the sites differ in type, scale, and function, the research cannot sustain a city-to-city comparison in the conventional sense. Instead, the field sites emerged through following participants' everyday movements and relational networks within each city. The analytical focus remains on how second-generation Chinese youth navigate belonging within the contexts available to them, rather than on measuring differences between urban systems.

These spaces are situated within city contexts differ in scale, demographic density, institutional infrastructure, and class composition. London hosts a larger and more internally differentiated Chinese population, with denser community networks, greater cultural visibility, and more stratified middle-class resources. Glasgow represents a smaller and more spatially dispersed Chinese community, where institutional infrastructures are fewer and everyday visibility operates differently.

What varies is the identity outcomes that Chinese background youth navigate in different social and material environments. These contextual differences provide the place for young people navigate, perform, and negotiate belonging. In London, participants will encounter expanded opportunities for cultural experimentation, peer bonding, and public expressions of Chineseness. In Glasgow, belonging will be negotiated through more intimate networks, family-centred practices, or strategic moderation of visibility. The variation, therefore, lies in modes of navigation and the range of legitimate performances available to them. I highlight shared patterns and place-specific variations in terms of identity mechanisms, revealing how second-generation Chinese youth navigate belonging differently in response to local conditions, while addressing a common set of research questions (Saint Arnault and Sinko, 2021).

Across the empirical chapters, the analysis demonstrates how urban context and classed resources shape the capacity to perform belonging, not just the content of cultural practices. Specifically, it examines how young people interpret expectations, manage visibility, switch cultural registers, and reconcile multiple value systems in their everyday lives. Young people with similar migration backgrounds perform belonging and draw on different repertoires of negotiation depending on institutional access, peer density, and the distribution of classed family resources.

This study contributes to a gap in the limited work on how different UK contexts structure the everyday negotiations of second-generation Chinese youth. I challenge the homogeneous assumption of “British Chinese” experience, this study shows that young people actively recalibrate their strategies in response to local context. The emphasis remains on how individuals navigate context, not on comparing cities as discrete units.

3.4.2 The map of research methods

Participant observation as the lead method rests on its proven capacity to capture behaviours and interactions in their natural context, generating an understanding of a group's beliefs, values, and practices (Price et al., 2017). Thus, it enables researchers to identify unspoken rules and norms that are often taken for granted by group members (Bernard, 2006). The core concern of this project was to create knowledge about the everyday practices of second-generation Chinese youth, which are embedded in scene-specific contexts that participants may be unaware of, or struggle to articulate. Participant observation, especially when conducted across the widest range of possible settings (Sharpe, 2019), makes these tacit patterns visible and thus addresses the question of how different fields shape identity formation.

Interviews were retained as a complementary method precisely because they enabled me to probe beneath the surface of observable conduct and uncover the motives, value systems, and ideological framings that guide it. Rubin and Rubin (2012) stressed that qualitative interviews excel at eliciting the “interpretive frameworks” people draw upon when accounting for their behaviour; Kvale (1996) similarly described the interview as a “construction site of knowledge” where deeper layers of meaning can be negotiated.

In the present study, site-matched interviews with teachers, pupils, restaurant staff, and family members provided access to subjective rationales, moral logics, and ideological stances; for example, a young person's ambivalence about using Cantonese in a takeaway because it sounds too ethnic, or a parent's belief that Saturday Chinese school is essential for preserving Chinese culture. Such insights illuminate the cognitive and affective architectures that underpin the identity practices observed in classrooms, Chinatowns, and family eateries – dimensions that remain largely invisible to the participant observer's eye alone (Brinkmann, 2013; Mason, 2018).

By weaving these deeper narratives back into the fieldnotes, the research moved beyond a catalogue of situated behaviours to a multilayered explanation that links practice, motivation, and ideology. In short, interviews extended the analytical reach of participant observation, furnishing the study with the interpretive depth necessary to answer the research questions.

3.4.3 Integrated framework-methods alignment

The following four areas of practice emerged to stand out during the fieldwork process and across multiple sites, becoming the core subjects of analysis in subsequent empirical chapters. Their specific research design and operationalisation pathways were as follows:

First, food was found to occupy a significant position in participants' lives and served as a core empirical site for capturing the embodiment of identity mechanisms. Specifically, for home-setting observations, this included 3 family meals in Glasgow and 6 meals with participants, as well as 2 family meals in London and 8 meals with participants. Meals with Glasgow-based participants outside the home mostly took place in Chinese restaurants. For details on participant observation in participants' homes, see section 3.5.2, and for ethical considerations, see section 3.8.1. Similarly, meals with London-based participants were conducted predominantly in Chinese restaurants and Asian food restaurants, though not in Chinatown because they considered food in London Chinatown to be for tourists. Prior to conducting participant observation, informed consent was obtained from all individuals involved, including

family members, and they were provided with detailed information about the study. Data related to mainstream UK schools were collected through interviews.

Key areas of focus during this process included: who cooks or eats with participants (e.g. family members, British friends); where meals take place (e.g. at home, in Chinese restaurants, or in UK-style restaurants); what is consumed at school or home or restaurant; rituals and rules (e.g. mealtime etiquette, chopstick use); mealtime norms and eating practices; and participants' evaluations of Chinese food (e.g. their perceptions of what is "authentic" or "inauthentic"). Additionally, attention was paid to participants' interactions with other individuals involved in these food practices, such as parents, as these reflect differing perspectives and how participants navigate such situations.

These food practices directly map onto the logic of identity operation: within participants' homes, participants adhere to rituals such as "not standing chopsticks upright in rice" (see section 4.3), embodying both the intergenerational transmission of Chinese culture and embodied identity practices. In takeaway shop settings, observations and interviews revealed participants reserving authentic Chinese cuisine for the home while offering adapted versions to the market (see section 4.4). This behaviour constitutes a process of constructing and reinforcing cultural boundaries. In the school setting, interviews concerning lunchbox types and social feedback showed that sensory embodied experiences (such as the aroma of Chinese food) and boundary management jointly shape identity tensions (see section 4.5).

Secondly, music was found during the research process to constitute a significant means of self-enjoyment within the lives of participants. My primary focus was on specific everyday behaviours: by immersing myself in their daily leisure lives, I observed the platforms and playlists they used for listening, and their musical selections across different settings, such as at home, with friends, or alone with headphones. Additionally, participation in musical events was examined, including switching music between different individuals in a car (see section 5.4.2), singing activities at karaoke venues with Chinese gatherings (see section 5.4.3), attending the Notting Hill Jamaican Music Festival in London with participants (see section 5.5.2), and performances in Chinatown (see section 5.5.1). Concurrently, interviews explored participants'

motivations for listening to music, shared musical tastes with peers, and their attitudes (see section 5.3.1), alongside the relationship between participants' musical preferences and those of family members (see section 5.3.2). These behaviours revealed that music-related practices in participants' daily lives are shaped through sensory, locational, and boundary-working mechanisms, thereby producing a situated transnational identity within an urban context.

Sensory experiences, which emerged consistently during fieldwork, acted as subtle yet powerful threads connecting distinct social settings. Through observing daily interactions, participating in communal and familial events, and conducting interviews, the salience of the senses became clear: across participants' homes, schools, restaurants, and community gatherings, sensory practices tied to food, sound, touch, and smell repeatedly surfaced as key sites of emotional resonance, memory, and identity negotiation. This revealed sensory experiences not as a supplement, but as a core ethnographic lens into the unspoken, non-visual dimensions of transnational identity work.

Subsequently, the operationalisation of language centred on family language policies, language learning at Chinese schools, and linguistic practices encountered at takeaway establishments and while walking with participants. Within households, participant observation and data recording occurred during shared meals with participants and their family members, concentrating on linguistic practices such as whether Mandarin or English was used with parents. Particular attention was paid to translanguaging in participants' interactions with parents and others, alongside the linguistic capabilities of parents, including Mandarin, English, and parental hometown dialects. The focus was on the dynamic processes that situated these practices within conversational contexts to reveal participants' transpositioning practices (see section 6.3). In Chinese language schools, I was concerned with the contexts in which participants practised translanguaging, the purposes underlying such practices, and the respective positions Chinese and English occupied within the immediate context (see section 6.4.1), alongside the embodied activities participants engaged in during school Chinese lessons (see section 6.4.2). At takeaway establishments, emphasis was placed on participants' linguistic practices during work alongside other multimodal practices, including gestures, facial expressions, and accents. These revealed that their language use in back

kitchens and front areas operates through mechanisms of boundary-making and positioning (see section 6.5). Street-level linguistic practices emerged during my walks with participants in London. Initially not a primary site for participant observation, this space gained significance when I encountered scenarios such as individuals using Chinese greetings (“Ni hao” as “hello” in English) to approach others, and participants describing Chinese as a secret language on the streets during interviews (see section 6.6). The identity outcomes ultimately described are operations mediated through the combined mechanisms of boundary work, embodiment, translanguaging/transpositioning practices, and the reproduction of capital, all situated within an urban context.

The practice of return visits to China also emerged through interviews. These interviews specifically examined family visitation behaviour, such as frequency, duration, accompanying persons, and purpose of visits to China. They also explored measures and behaviours employed to maintain transnational family relationships, including digital co-presence (see section 7.4), intergenerational care practices (see section 7.3), material support and exchange, and parental roles (see section 7.5). Additionally, it also included further transnational connections beyond the family such as educational networks established elsewhere (see section 7.6) and identity mechanisms manifested through digital mediation, capital conversion, and embodied practices. Ultimately, the findings illustrate that young people's transnational identities are shaped through proactive family visits and embodied care practices extending to extended family members. This maintains deeper connections with transnational families in China and fosters multiple transnational affiliations.

3.5 Fieldwork

This section presents the process of the field work in Glasgow and London across Chinese language schools, Chinatowns and restaurants, and participants' homes. The fieldwork design aimed to capture distinctions between Glasgow and London.

3.5.1 Second-generation Chinese youth in Glasgow and London

The dispersed settlement patterns of the second-generation Chinese population pose significant challenges in accessing and engaging with young Chinese individuals (Parker, 1995; Wu, 2001). Given the geographical distribution and the representativeness of the cities, I chose to conduct my fieldwork in Glasgow and London. Glasgow is home to approximately one-third of Scotland's Chinese population (Bell, 2018), while London hosts around one-third of the entire British Chinese population (Wang, 2016). For central London, I focused specifically on Westminster, Camden, Mayfair, and Hackney. These two cities represent distinct cultural landscapes within the broader migrant experience: Glasgow's Chinese community is smaller, more tightly knit, and deeply embedded in local networks, whereas London's highly diverse and cosmopolitan context offers a more complex and fluid setting. These geographical and cultural contrasts made multi-sited ethnography a crucial tool for understanding how second-generation Chinese youth navigate transnational identity, maintain connections, and undertake transnational socio-cultural practices across different social contexts.

Conducting research across different cities required a flexible and adaptive methodological approach. In Glasgow, my research was primarily conducted through engagement with Chinese schools, family interviews, and interactions within the city's Chinatown. The focus was on how young people sustain their cultural practices and sense of belonging in their daily lives. Given the smaller scale of Glasgow's Chinese community and the relatively close-knit nature of its social networks, common gathering spaces – such as Chinese language schools, family events, and community organisations – were more structured and predictable. This stability facilitated the development of long-term trust and allowed for a deeper understanding of participants' everyday social dynamics. Furthermore, routine cultural activities take place in Chinese language schools, such as Mandarin language education and community celebrations, providing regular opportunities for interaction. This made it easier to conduct sustained observations and in-depth interviews within familiar and consistent settings.

By contrast, fieldwork in London was far more dispersed and required a more adaptable research strategy to accommodate the diversity of locations and fluid nature of participants' lifestyles. As a highly cosmopolitan and dynamic city, London's Chinese community is geographically widespread, with social interactions occurring across a broader range of spaces. Participants' movements were often shaped by their individual interests, professions, and social activities, meaning that research sites extended beyond Chinatown to include university campuses, cafés, workplaces, and even the street. Whilst this diversity provided a valuable opportunity to capture practices across multiple cultural contexts, it also presented methodological challenges. The unpredictability of participants' engagement placed significant demands on my responsiveness, requiring me to swiftly adapt to different environments and continuously recalibrate my observational and interview strategies. Often, I could only document my observations retrospectively after returning to my accommodation. At times, certain details might have been inadvertently omitted, which I later supplemented through subsequent interactions with participants, allowing for clarification and deeper insights into their experiences. Therefore, certain challenges and limitations exist when conducting multi-sited ethnographic research on second-generation Chinese youth in the UK.

3.5.2 Fieldwork sites

Chinese language schools

Several factors informed the decision to select Chinese language schools as the primary field sites for this study. First and foremost, these schools offer a unique intersection of community context and sample diversity, making them particularly valuable for exploring the transmission and negotiation of cultural identity. Chinese schools also extend their curriculum beyond language instruction, offering activities such as Chinese New Year celebrations, cultural workshops, and history lectures. These provide rich opportunities to observe how language learning and practices is entangled with the cultural and emotional dimensions of identity formation. As Li and Zhu (2010) pointed out, Chinese language schools function as micro-institutions of cultural reproduction, whose day-to-day operations offer direct insights into how Chinese families attempt to maintain heritage language and cultural practices across generations.

Another key reason for selecting Chinese language schools lay in their thematic alignment with the research focus. This study investigated how language emerges as a core site of tension and negotiation. Chinese schools are particularly fruitful locations for capturing these dynamics, as they constitute spaces of intensified cultural expectation and identity performance. Here, students are often required to respond to diasporic expectations to retain the parents' language and culture, while simultaneously engaging with the dominant cultural and linguistic environment of the society in which they live. For instance, students preparing for GCSE Mandarin may be observed reciting classical Chinese poetry in class yet switch seamlessly to discussing Western pop culture in English during breaks (see Chapter 6).

I conducted 48 hours of participant observation at Chinese language schools in Glasgow from March to June 2023, and 36 hours in London from June to September 2023, attending classes for approximately four hours every Saturday. Before entering the field, I provided a clear explanation of my research aims to the headteachers and staff and obtained formal permission to join classes in the role of a TA. This enabled me to be physically present in the classroom without occupying a dominant or disruptive position. Importantly, headteachers sent emails to all parents and staff about my research to obtain consent and permission before I sat in the classroom. The headteacher stated the research purpose and my role in the school, and attached the research poster, research information sheet, participant information sheet, and consent form. The parents and other teachers all gave me a friendly response.

My observational position in the classroom can be best characterised as a form of moderate participation (Spradley, 1980) situated between active instructional involvement and detached observation (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Assigned the role of a TA, I engaged in tasks such as correcting students' homework and distributing materials, while taking fieldnotes during quieter moments sitting at the back of the room. On the one hand, my role in the classroom helped to build trust with both teachers and students. Some students later volunteered to take part in interviews. On the other hand, the classroom setting allowed me to witness unfiltered expressions of ambivalence and reactions and attitudes of resistance that might be masked in formal interviews, particularly due to perceived expectations around "correct answers", socially desirable

responses, or respect for parental authority. Second-generation Chinese youth in particular tend to talk differently about their identity according to who they are speaking to (see Chapter 4). These subtle, often non-verbal cues, such as sensory experiences, offered important insights into how identity and language practices are negotiated in these settings.

Chinatowns and restaurants

The inclusion of Chinatowns in this study was grounded in their unique status as transnational social and cultural spaces. Glasgow's Chinatown is relatively small, primarily consisting of a few Chinese restaurants, supermarkets, and travel agencies, with a more stable customer base of local Chinese residents and international students (Mak, 2020). By contrast, London's Chinatown is significantly larger, with a complex social ecosystem comprising tourists, Chinese residents, and restaurant workers (Sales, et al., 2011; Ang, 2020). In this sense, Chinatown serves as a material site through which second-generation Chinese youth navigate and project their hybrid identities, making visible the tensions and possibilities inherent in transnational cultural belonging.

Between March and September 2023, I conducted 15 field visits in Glasgow's Chinatown and 20 in London's Chinatown. These visits were generally scheduled on Saturday afternoons, following the end of Chinese school classes, allowing for an analysis of different cultural practices and social interactions within these environments. During each visit, I typically selected a dessert shop or a Chinese restaurant, using the setting to conduct informal observations. These shops are usually popular with second-generation Chinese young people, and most of the operators are immigrant families with children. I then remained in the venue to observe customer interactions. Key observational dimensions included: the age, gender, and dress styles of visitors; language use; interactions with people; background music, décor, and cultural symbols; and noting whether different social groups acknowledge each other, interact, or display cultural or generational divides.

The inclusion of Chinese restaurants, particularly family-run eateries and takeaway shops was driven by their unique role as symbolically charged spaces where second-generation Chinese youth negotiate the intersecting expectations of the diasporic

community and the receiving society. Prior studies have identified such businesses as implicit sites of intergenerational cultural transmission, where parental expectations around community belonging, familial obligation, and Chinese work ethics are embedded into daily operations (Li & Zhu, 2010). As Miri Song (1997; 2001) observed, children in Chinese families grow up “helping out” in restaurants, absorbing not only practical skills but also deeply rooted notions of identity and responsibility through embodied participation.

I conducted six visits to two family-operated takeaway businesses run by participants’ families. Having established a relatively friendly relationship with them in the early stages, they allowed me to visit for participant observation. During these visits, I typically sat near the counter, observing interactions between staff and customers, language choices in different social contexts, and how they managed customer expectations across cultural backgrounds. When the restaurant became particularly busy, I occasionally assisted in taking orders by noting menu items called out by the cashier and passing them to the kitchen to facilitate efficient meal preparation. However, I often felt somewhat out of place, particularly during peak hours when staff worked seamlessly together, handling orders with practised efficiency while I struggled to keep pace with their established workflow. During quieter periods, I engaged in casual conversations with kitchen staff and younger employees, discussing their perspectives on working in family-run businesses.

Participants’ homes

Participant observation was also conducted in the homes of five participants: three based in Glasgow and two in London. The decision to enter participants’ domestic spaces was grounded in the recognition that the home plays a central role in the reproduction, negotiation, and contestation of cultural identities, especially for second-generation migrants. According to Blunt (2005) and Boccagni (2022), the home is not merely a private sphere but a crucial site where intergenerational dynamics, emotions, memory, material culture, and social relations, along with diasporic culture and expectations, intersect in shaping transnational belonging.

For second-generation Chinese youth, the household is often the first and most consistent point of cultural socialisation, as this is where expectations regarding filial piety, heritage language use, and Chinese customs are enacted, sometimes explicitly, but more often through everyday routines, food preparation, symbolic decorations, and informal parent-child interactions. Participants will often navigate between two cultures within the home. As Lau (2015) found, young second-generation Chinese were expected to be well behaved, to preserve “the face” and integrity of the family and to respect parental authority. The importance of upholding Chinese traditions was evident despite differences in parents’ backgrounds, length of British residence, socio-economic status, and age groups. Nevertheless, intergenerational power struggles between children and their parents within the family were found to occur from time to time, such as children questioning and challenging parental authority as well as adherence or becoming estranged from their parents or even feeling lonely (Lau, 2011).

Entering the home thus enabled me to observe the sensory and material dimensions of identity that are often difficult to capture in interviews alone: the languages spoken in casual interactions, the foods being prepared and shared, and the presence of Chinese decorative objects (such as calligraphy scrolls or ancestral photographs). These observations were crucial for understanding how transnational identities are performed and spatially anchored within the domestic sphere, and how participants reinterpret cultural expectations derived from their parents while simultaneously negotiating their own attachments to British and Chinese cultural worlds.

3.5.3 Challenges and limitations

Multi-sited ethnography presents several challenges and limitations. First, it requires researchers to conduct in-depth fieldwork across multiple locations, necessitating frequent mobility and significant logistical coordination. This is both time-intensive and resource-demanding, requiring substantial financial support. In this study, I conducted interviews and participatory observations over a period of three to four months. Fieldwork in Glasgow was relatively convenient as I was based there, allowing me to dedicate time beforehand to identifying potential participants and building rapport with them before the formal research phase began. However, conducting fieldwork in London posed a distinct set of challenges. I needed to locate suitable

participants quickly and establish connections within a limited timeframe to facilitate high-frequency participant observations. Given that my accommodation in London was only available for three and a half months, I had to maximise my time and access key sites while maintaining the depth and consistency of my interactions. This required frequent movement between research locations, which, in turn, limited my ability to develop an in-depth understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of each site and its surrounding neighbourhoods in the way that long-term immersion might have allowed. Despite having visited London numerous times before, this rapid transition into intensive fieldwork made it challenging to fully grasp participants' embedded experiences within specific social settings, at least in the initial stages.

Another challenge of multi-sited ethnography lies in the potential fragmentation of data. Given that my research spanned multiple settings, the data collection process was inherently dispersed. This fragmentation posed difficulties during the later stages of data analysis, as integrating information from diverse sites into a coherent and comprehensive analysis became more complex.

Nevertheless, despite the logistical and methodological challenges of conducting multi-sited fieldwork across two cities, this approach proved highly effective in capturing the complexities of participants' lived experiences. It is an approach that also allows researchers to explore how individuals interact with their most frequented and symbolically significant spaces, uncovering the ways in which these locations shape their identity performances and social engagements. By following participants across different sites, multi-sited ethnography provides a more holistic understanding of how identity, culture, and social practices are negotiated and expressed within diverse transnational and urban contexts.

3.6 Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were used as another method to explore participants' lived experiences. This section explains the criteria for selecting the group of people who took part in the interviews and how they were recruited through snowball sampling, as well as how and why the interviews were conducted.

3.6.1 Sampling and recruitment

The target group for this study comprised young people who were either born and/or raised in the UK or had migrated at a very young age, with at least one parent from the People's Republic of China (PRC). All participants were 16-25 years old, with only those aged 18 or above eligible for interviews. In total, 50 individuals were observed ethnographically, among whom 36 participated in interviews (17 females and 19 males), recruited through snowballing (see Table 2). In Glasgow, 18 participants were interviewed, 10 of whom were recruited through Chinese schools and 8 through personal networks, with interviews conducted at home or in university settings. In London, 18 participants were interviewed, four of whom recruited through Chinese schools and 14 via personal networks.

Table 2: Details of respondents

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Home	Father's/ Mother's birthplace	Father's/ Mother's occupation
Alex	Male	22	Glasgow	Fujian, Guangdong	Family-run Chinese takeaway
Claire	Female	18	Glasgow	Both from Fujian	Family-run Chinese takeaway
Hannah	Female	20	Glasgow	Both from Fujian	Family-run Chinese takeaway
Jack	Male	25	Glasgow	Both from Fujian	Chef, Housewife
Jacky	Male	24	Glasgow	Both from Fujian	Family-run Chinese takeaway
Jia	Female	20	Glasgow	Fujian, Guangdong	Family-run Chinese takeaway
Josh	Male	21	Glasgow	Both from Fujian	Family-run Chinese takeaway
James	Male	20	Glasgow	Fujian, Guangdong	Chef, Housewife
John	Male	19	Glasgow	Both from Fujian	Family-run Chinese takeaway
Mike	Female	21	Glasgow	Both from Fujian	Family-run Chinese restaurant
Ming	Male	19	Glasgow	Zhejiang, Fujian	Decoration, Restaurant owner
Rob	Male	21	Glasgow	Both from Fujian	Family-run Chinese

					takeaway and restaurant
Larry	Male	22	Glasgow	Both from Fujian	International trader, Housewife
Kelly	Female	21	Glasgow	Fujian, Hong Kong	Family-run Chinese takeaway
Ruby	Female	20	Glasgow	Guangdong, Anhui	Family-run Chinese restaurant
Sue	Female	21	Glasgow	Both from Fujian	Family-run Chinese takeaway
Joe	Male	20	Glasgow	Both from Fujian	Family-run Chinese takeaway
Jennie	Female	20	Glasgow	Both from Guangdong	Family-run Chinese restaurant
Alice	Female	24	London	London, Tianjin	Seafood shop owner, Accountant
Jane	Female	22	London	Both from Beijing	International business owner, Housewife
Amy	Female	22	London	Hubei, Henan	Freelancer, Lawyer
Harry	Male	21	London	Harbin, Shanghai	Engineer, Accountant
Lily	Female	19	London	Hainan, Jiangsu	Doctor, University lecturer
Selena	Female	21	London	Both from Jiangsu	Family-run Chinese restaurant, Chinese supermarket
Andy	Male	25	London	Both from Nanjing	Translator, Financial project manager
Daniel	Male	25	London	Both from Chengdu	Engineer, Bank project specialist
Emily	Female	24	London	Beijing, Hebei	Family-run international business company
Eric	Male	25	London	Guangdong, Hong Kong	Family-run Chinese restaurant
Jamie	Male	22	London	Guangdong, London	Accountant, Editor
George	Male	22	London	Tianjin, Hebei	University lecturer, Accountant
Lewis	Male	20	London	Jiangsu, Zhejiang	Market seller, Nurse
Millie	Female	22	London	Both from Fujian	Office workers
Ivy	Female	21	London	Shanghai, Zhejiang	University professor, Neurology research scientist

Maya	Female	25	London	London, Beijing	Tour guide, High school Chinese teacher
Tom	Male	25	London	Unknown	Unknown
Vincent	Male	25	London	Henan, Shandong	Unknown

The aim in selecting the 36 interviewees was to capture a diverse cross-section of second-generation Chinese youth, with attention paid to variations in educational background, parental capital, social class, and urban context. Although the sample could not represent all second-generation Chinese individuals in the UK, it reflected the key socio-cultural realities of those born in the 2000s, a cohort shaped by transnational economic, cultural, and social practices associated with the intensified age of globalisation (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Vertovec, 2009).

In relation to participants' demographic characteristics, clear spatial and socio-economic patterns emerged between those living in Glasgow and London. Most Glasgow-based participants (16/18) came from families with backgrounds in the catering sector, with the majority of their parents originating from Fujian province. More than half of the Glasgow interviewees (10 out of 18) were born in London and moved to Glasgow before starting school, where they subsequently grew up. Three participants were born in China and migrated to the UK before the age of seven, while the remainder were born and raised entirely in Glasgow. Residential mobility was common among this group, with most participants having moved home at least once. Typical trajectories involved relocation from more central, well-connected, and economically active areas (such as the Townhead) to more peripheral or suburban locations, such as Hamilton. Now, these families are concentrating in and around areas where Chinese catering businesses are commonly located, including G1, G3, G4, G12, G15, G33, ML11, as well as neighbourhoods such as Townhead, the West End, Anniesland, Cowcaddens, Baillieston, Cambuslang, and Stepps, etc.

Participants live in London displayed both greater socio-economic diversity and similarly patterned residential trajectories. While majority of them came from skilled or education-led migration backgrounds, and various parents' places of origin in China, including Beijing, Tianjin, Zhejiang, and other regions (see Table 2). In terms of life-course trajectories, only three of the 18 London participants were born in China and

migrated to the UK before the age of five, while the remainder were born and raised in the UK. Five participants had lived outside London during childhood or early adolescence, in cities such as Bath, Oxford, Brighton, Liverpool, and Leeds, before relocating to London prior to the age of 14. A further six participants spent their formative years in London but moved to other cities after the age of 19 for university or employment. Notably, ten participants chose to attend university in London and continued to reside there thereafter, reflecting both the concentration of higher education opportunities and the city's ongoing significance in shaping their educational and social trajectories.

Their residential locations are widely dispersed across the city, including areas such as Canary Wharf, Vauxhall, Camden, Wembley, Redhill, and Barnet, etc. Despite this spatial dispersion, both London-based and Glasgow-based participants commonly reported moving from centrally located and transport-accessible neighbourhoods to more peripheral areas offering improved housing quality and larger living spaces. This pattern aligns with existing research on ethnic minority and migrant residential mobility, which suggests that initial settlement in central urban areas often gives way to suburban relocation as families prioritise housing conditions and educational opportunities for their children (Peach, 2006; Wang & Fan, 2012).

Participants were aged between 16 and 25, with only those aged 18 and above taking part in interviews. This age range was chosen because late adolescence and early adulthood represent critical periods in the formation of identity (Erikson, 1968). As individuals transition into adulthood, whether by entering higher education or the workforce, they encounter people from diverse backgrounds. These interactions, along with cultural exchanges and moments of contrast, help clarify identity boundaries and prompt reflections on the question of "who am I?" Furthermore, whilst there is a growing body of work on second-generation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Levitt & Waters, 2002; Kasinitz et al., 2008), the experiences of Chinese descendants in the UK remain significantly understudied (Pang, 1999; Song, 1997).

Snowball sampling is used to access eligible participants, especially relatively small or hard-to-reach populations, such as ethnic minority youth (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Noy, 2008). In Glasgow, my recruitment began through a personal connection: a friend

introduced me to her landlord's son, Jacky, a 24-year-old male born and raised in Glasgow. He then shared details of my research and interview recruitment with others, who in turn passed the information sheet and recruitment poster along to further contacts. A similar approach was used in London. However, as noted in the literature, a key limitation of snowball sampling is its tendency to produce homogeneous networks, as participants often refer individuals with similar educational backgrounds, social class positions, or residential areas (Goodman, 2011; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). This posed a challenge for ensuring diversity and contrast within the sample. Therefore, diversity was sought in terms of gender, family migration histories, socio-economic backgrounds, linguistic repertoires, and connections to Chinese community organisations. For example, many Glasgow participants were linked to family-run catering businesses.

To address the limitations of snowball sampling, I expanded recruitment channels by engaging directly with Chinese supplementary language schools in both Glasgow and London. These institutions were chosen as complementary recruitment sites because they attract families with different levels of cultural and linguistic investment, enabling the sample to include participants who actively maintain Chinese heritage practices and those who are more distanced from them.

3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

Ethnographic interviews emphasise interaction with participants within field settings, embedding conversations naturally into their daily lives and cultural practices (Spradley, 2016). Such interviews are not simply about information collection as they also constitute a process of co-constructing meaning as researchers and participants jointly interpret the lived world through interaction (Young & Temple, 2022). These interviews took place not only in neutral spaces (such as university public spaces, cafés, library open spaces) but also during breaks at Chinese-language schools, around family dining tables, or in the takeaway restaurants, linking narratives closely to participants' everyday lived worlds. Additionally, interview content was cross verified with observational data from everyday settings such as restaurants and Chinese language schools, imbuing the research findings with contextual relevance and depth.

Although my interviews were structured around core themes (including life experiences, connections to China, return visits to the homeland, language practices, family relationships, schooling, leisure activities, food and music preferences, and future plans), they were not rigidly tied to a strict outline. This participant-led approach is advocated by Chase (2021) who argued that researchers should create open dialogic spaces where participants actively present their life narratives. Participants were encouraged to freely diverge from the topic and share experiences they deemed most meaningful. Chun et al. (2020) noted that minority groups are often marginalised in mainstream narratives, and researchers must afford them greater control over discourse in methodological design. Semi-structured interviews, through open-ended questions, help participants autonomously define the focus of their narratives and connect personal experiences to social contexts, thereby revealing more authentic and complex identities and emotional worlds.

Importantly, language use in the interviews was always decided upon by the participants. At the beginning of the interviews, I explicitly inquired of participants: “In our forthcoming discussion, would you prefer to use Chinese, English, or switch freely between both languages depending on the topic? I shall fully accommodate your choice”. This approach addresses the dynamic power relations in multilingual research emphasised by Holmes et al. (2013), in that language choice is by no means a neutral, instrumental decision, but rather a core element directly influencing the balance of discursive power between researcher and participant. Ultimately, 31 of the 36 interviewees explicitly stated that they expressed themselves more fluently and naturally in English, while the remaining five opted for a mixed Chinese-English (translanguaging) mode. For the second-generation Chinese youth in this study, English serves as their primary language in educational and social contexts, enabling more precise articulation of identity experiences. Conversely, Chinese proved more suitable for describing cultural experiences rooted in Chinese traditions. For instance, when one interviewee explained terms such as “孝道” (filial piety) and “人情” (human relations), they switched to Chinese, demonstrating how the language becomes a key vehicle for capturing cultural logic.

To supplement and deepen data from initial interviews, I conducted follow-up interviews with 10 of the original 36 participants. Though shorter in duration, these secondary interviews saw participants demonstrate greater openness and engagement, owing to the trust established earlier. Such trust was built through long-term participant observation, informal interactions, and ongoing relationship maintenance (Neale & Flowerdew, 2022). Because no new indicators of identity negotiation or mechanisms emerged, it became apparent that I had reached the limit of my informational power. This saturation point occurred after completing follow-up interviews with 10 participants, as all subsequent data only reinforced pre-existing themes without adding new analytical dimensions.

During the research process, certain topics remained highly sensitive, particularly those related to family migration histories and residency status. As noted by Roza (2021), some migrants remain cautious towards external inquiries due to fears of government surveillance, especially when such discussions touch on aspects of their lives that might be perceived as “irregular” or “illegal”. In this sense, I kept reminding myself that every interaction, whether a formal interview or an informal conversation, would be an opportunity for me to build trust, demonstrate respect, and ensure transparency (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). When dealing with vulnerable or hard-to-reach populations, a single interview is rarely sufficient to elicit comprehensive narratives (Block et al., 2013). Through repeated interviews and participant observation, researchers can gradually enhance participants’ sense of security and develop a deeper understanding of their emotions and social identities as their stories unfold over time. For this reason, particular emphasis is placed on the “informed” component of informed consent: it is not only about clarifying the purpose of the research, the use of data, and confidentiality measures, but also about actively recognising and responding to participants’ concerns, ensuring they fully understand their right to refuse or withdraw (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). In this study, participants provided more detailed information during the second interview, as we had maintained regular contact since our initial meeting. This demonstrates that trust is built progressively through interactions (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). The next section explores informed consent and other ethical considerations in greater detail.

To fully preserve the integrity of original information during interview transcription and bilingual content translation, whilst mitigating any potential loss of meaning in the translation process, all interviews were transcribed within 24 hours post-recording using Word transcription software. Outstanding parts were annotated to indicate participants' pauses, tonal emphasis, and non-verbal cues (e.g. laughter, silences, accents). ChatGPT served as a tool for translating multilingual field notes and interview transcripts, rooted in the study's focus on second-generation Chinese youth whose expressions often mixed English and Chinese. For field notes documenting casual interactions and interview fragments with untranslated Chinese terms, I first used ChatGPT to generate initial translations, and then cross-checked these. For dialogue segments in Chinese and translingual expressions, the original text was retained to prevent translation bias.

3.7 Data analysis

Faced with a large number of ethnographic observations, field notes, and in-depth interview data, I chose Reflective Thematic Analysis (RTA) as the core analytical methodology. RTA emphasises the subjectivity and stance of the researcher as an important resource for the analysis process rather than a bias that must be eliminated (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Thus, the researcher's background serves as an analytical tool to reveal patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The use of RTA in this study enabled me to view my own identity and background (as a Chinese researcher or someone with cross-cultural experience) as an analytical insight to help explain certain phenomena and capture the ambiguous, contradictory, or fluid qualities of the identities of second-generation Chinese youth. Although ethnographers generally emphasise the impossibility of complete neutrality on the part of the researcher (Hammersly, 2006; Herbert, 2000), my research questions were essentially about the construction of identity. This construction was generated through a combination of narratives, interactions, and my interpretation as a translator (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Therefore, RTA enabled me to reflect on "why these accounts appeal to me" and to incorporate this reflection into the analytical process to gain a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural significance behind the data and fully capture the nuanced process of identity negotiation among second-generation Chinese youth living in the UK. Even when

considering the lens through which RTA researchers interpret data, subjective bias must still be minimised during data processing to allow the data to speak for itself. Thematic analysis thus emphasises the objectivity and representativeness of themes, ensuring they are clearly supported by the data and encompass the majority of cases.

This analytical process was guided by Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework for thematic analysis (2019). The analysis began with data familiarisation: I read and revisited interview transcripts and field notes, highlighting meaningful excerpts and documenting my immediate insights and emotional responses through reflexive memos. This stage aimed to capture the latent meanings within the data and establish a strong foundation for identifying patterns. I also examined connections across different datasets, noting points of convergence and tension which later informed the coding and theme-building stages.

To enhance the efficiency and rigour of data organisation, all interview transcripts, field notes, and reflexive records were imported into NVivo 12 for computer-assisted qualitative data management. In the first round of coding I employed an open coding approach, enabling the identification of broad themes relevant to the research questions, such as language use and return visits. Following this, I reorganised and refined the initial codes, grouping fragmented codes into more conceptually cohesive sub-themes to form the basis for deeper thematic analysis.

The next stage involved defining and consolidating core themes through the synthesis of related codes and reflective interpretation. Each theme was assigned clear boundaries and a central analytical focus. Then, I revisited every quote within each theme, annotated identity practices, resources, audience and stance, and the proximal aims of the action. The recurring patterns identified during this process, for instance, the practices of boundary-making articulated through discourses of authentic/inauthentic food at home and in takeaway shop. By revisiting the multiple theoretical lenses and carrying out comparison and revision through different theoretical frameworks, mechanisms and operational pathways through which identity negotiation generated.

The final stage centred on verifying the coherence and validity of the themes and mechanisms. In line with Byrne's (2021) emphasis on continuous tracing of the

researcher's influence, I critically reflected on how my interpretations shaped the analysis and whether the themes truly addressed the overarching research question.

To ensure the integration and triangulation of multiple data sources, I systematically cross-referenced each interview-derived theme (e.g. “the embodiment and racialisation of language” in Chapter 7) with field notes to identify behavioural evidence. Conversely, notable field observations were revisited in the interview transcripts for corroboration. NVivo 12 facilitated this process, allowing for efficient keyword searches, thematic comparisons, and the identification of connections across datasets, which ultimately strengthened the depth and validity of the analysis.

3.8 Ethical considerations

This research adhered to the highest ethical standards, having secured approval from the University of Glasgow's College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. This section outlines the robust measures adopted for informed consent, participant awareness, and data confidentiality, ensuring young participants and their families were fully informed and protected throughout the study. In addition, it discusses the strategies adopted to minimise potential risks, including sensitive-topic management and researcher well-being, while fostering reciprocal and respectful relationships with participants (European Commission, 2021).

3.8.1 Informed consent and recruitment

Ethnographic research involving young people necessitates obtaining consent from relevant stakeholders, including schools, parents or legal guardians, and the participants themselves (Graham et al., 2013). When recruitment was conducted through Chinese language schools, I provided head teachers with a detailed explanation of the research aims and ethical safeguards, including evidence of my Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance, which is recognised by organisations working with children (ASA, 2011). I also supplied an information sheet and a recruitment poster outlining the scope of the study, data collection procedures, and the rights of participants. Upon obtaining written permission from school administrators, I sent formal notifications to students

and their parents via the school's email system, ensuring that all potential participants and their guardians were fully informed and able to decide voluntarily whether to take part (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001).

In observation-based research settings (such as Chinese schools, Chinatown, and Chinese restaurants), I obtained explicit permission from school administrators and class teachers. In takeaway shops, my visits were contingent upon the permission of the participants, who shared location details only after agreeing to my presence. When approached by individuals in Chinatown who asked about my purpose, I was transparent about my role as a researcher and openly described the nature and objectives of my project. Such openness aligns with the principle of conducting "overt research", thereby avoiding unnecessary misunderstandings or ethical risks associated with covert observation (McKenzie, 2009; Calvey, 2008).

The ethical use of images needs to be based on a rigorous informed consent mechanism. This process not only relates to the protection of participants' privacy but also involves respecting the rights of image producers. Pink (2007) stated that in visual ethnographic research, the collection and use of visual data must be premised on participants' full understanding of the purpose of the images and the scope of their dissemination, ensuring that consent is voluntary and explicit. This study strictly adhered to this principle: dual permission was obtained for photographs and for participants to appear in the photos. This included both oral confirmation from the participants who were photographed regarding the right to use their portraits, and authorisation from the photographers of the images to use their works for the research.

Entering participants' home spaces was guided by three core principles: first, informed written consent was obtained prior to any observation, where I explicitly outlined the purpose, duration, and scope of the study (e.g. focusing on shared living areas rather than private spaces like bedrooms or bathrooms) and emphasised participants' right to pause, adjust, or terminate observations at any time. Second, I negotiated privacy boundaries through pre-observation discussions: for instance, participants could signal if a conversation or space was off-limits, and I avoided documenting any content they deemed sensitive. Third, I committed to anonymisation and data minimisation from the

outset, ensuring no identifying details (e.g. specific apartment numbers, unique family heirlooms with personal histories) were recorded to protect participants' privacy.

Regarding interviews, I provided each participant with a written statement detailing the interview content, as well as the procedures for data recording, storage, and eventual disposal (Gillam, 2013). Written informed consent was sought and obtained only after participants had fully understood the nature and purpose of the study. Participants were informed of their right to refuse to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with, to withdraw from the interview at any time, and to request the withdrawal of their data within two months of participation (European Science Foundation, 2011). Due to the absence of funding, no financial remuneration or incentives were offered; instead, participation relied on pre-established trust and the participants' interest in contributing to the research project (Block et al., 2013; Trotter, 2019). Specific content omitted for privacy reasons included private conversations about family finances, health issues, or interpersonal conflicts (even if inadvertently overheard, as these fell outside the agreed-upon scope); photographs or descriptions of identifying items (e.g. school uniforms with institution names, personal letters); and specific details about residential locations (e.g. neighbourhood names, building features) beyond the broad city-level information provided. This omission ensures that participants cannot be inadvertently identified and that their right to domestic privacy, even within a research context, is upheld.

3.8.2 Participant awareness and research openness

Even when researchers strive to maintain transparency, participant observation inevitably contains covert elements, which stem from the natural dynamics of interaction (Hammersley, 2018). Moreover, the degree of openness in research is fundamentally shaped by the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Calvey, 2008). Fieldwork on the identities of second-generation Chinese youth illustrates this point: for example, during participant observations in a takeaway shop in Glasgow, having established familiarity and trust with the participant, interactions that initially required covert note-taking – such as the multilingual conversations between participant and kitchen workers – gradually shifted into open dialogues where I could ask direct questions. This transition was also facilitated by the researcher's duty

of care (European Science Foundation, 2011; ASA, 2011), as I actively participated in random tasks such as taking orders and packing food, thereby engaging in the same labour as the participants.

The dynamic balance of power between the researcher and the participants lies at the heart of ethical practice. Rabinow's (1977) concept of symbolic violence becomes particularly salient in cross-cultural research: questions such as "Do you feel more connected to Chinese or British culture?" might inadvertently reinforce binary perspectives. To mitigate such unilateral power dynamics, I drew on collaborative ethnographic approaches (Tedlock, 2019). After interviews, I asked participants to give feedback. As one participant noted, "I don't like being asked to choose a side, it feels like someone asking me to pick between my dad and mum". Such reflexive feedback transcends mere data extraction and contributes to co-constructed knowledge.

These practices demonstrate that research openness is a dynamic process built through ongoing negotiation and reflexivity, while respecting individual differences and cultural contexts. Accordingly, this study adhered to the principles of non-maleficence (avoiding harm to participants), beneficence (ensuring positive outcomes for all involved), autonomy (respecting participants' decisions), and justice (treating all participants equally) (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001). The initial challenge lay in negotiating access to participant groups, whilst the ongoing challenge is to maintain these relationships over time.

3.8.3 Anonymity, confidentiality, and data protection

In line with the principle of non-maleficence (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001), this study prioritised protecting participants from potential harm and unforeseen consequences by implementing robust anonymisation and confidentiality strategies. Pseudonyms are used consistently, personal details are carefully altered where necessary, and specific place names are replaced with broader geographic areas; for example, referring to "North London" instead of a particular street or restaurant to reduce the risk of identification (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015). This approach aligns with the ethical standards of qualitative research methods, which stress that safeguarding the

privacy of participants is essential for ensuring trust and the integrity of the research relationship (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Seidman, 2013).

Conversations and interactions with participants were treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality, particularly when they involve deeply personal experiences, vulnerabilities, or identity struggles. I made it clear to participants that no information shared during interviews or observations would be disclosed to parents, teachers, or other school staff without their explicit consent. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) highlighted, interaction between researcher and participants constitutes co-constructed spaces that demand ethical sensitivity; thus, maintaining confidentiality was not a static obligation but an ongoing negotiation throughout the research process.

3.8.4 Risks and dilemmas

Murphy and Dingwall (2001) argued that the core of the principle of justice lies in ensuring all participants are treated fairly and equally. Such fairness should not only be reflected throughout the research process but should also extend to sharing the value and benefits of the research outcomes. As stressed by Block et al. (2013), research participants should not be regarded merely as “subjects” of study; they should also derive benefits from the research. For instance, in Trotter’s (2019) ethnographic study of the Norwegian Red Cross, Trotter actively engaged in after-school tutoring and provided the organisation with evaluation reports (p. 99). This form of context-specific reciprocity offers a valuable reference for similar ethnographic endeavours.

In this study, I sought to respond to the needs of second-generation Chinese youth in multiple ways. For instance, I offered practical support such as guidance on university resources (including academic presentation skills) and shared Chinese cultural and media content to foster a more reciprocal dialogue during and after interviews. In my fieldwork at Chinese schools, I voluntarily took on teaching responsibilities and assisted in organising cultural activities (e.g. Chinese New Year craft workshops). This not only alleviated some of the teaching workload for the school but was also regarded by the school staff as a meaningful form of reciprocity and support. Such fieldwork reciprocity strengthens trust between the researcher and participants and ensures a

positive alignment between the research outcomes and participants' interests (Pink et al., 2021).

An equally critical dimension of ethical practice is that of safeguarding the researcher's own well-being. The European Commission (2021) stresses that neglecting researcher safety and emotional health can not only harm the individual but also directly affect the quality and sustainability of the research. Female researchers in particular often encounter additional emotional labour and invisible work during fieldwork (Adams, 2022). Lee's (1995) framework distinguishing between "environmental risk" and "situational risk" provides a valuable lens for identifying and managing these challenges in ethnographic settings.

In my fieldwork, environmental risks were primarily related to physical safety. For example, in certain areas of London where public safety is less predictable during winter, I avoided travelling alone at night. Situational risks manifested as role conflicts and emotional strain, especially during participant observation at participants' home. My dual positioning as both "friend" and "participant observer" occasionally became blurred; for example, when conversations escalated into family tensions or when I needed to disengage but felt constrained by courtesy. To mitigate these risks, I maintained a clear exit strategy, restricted visits to public or semi-public areas of the home where possible, and used pre-arranged check-ins. I also ensured my phone was charged with a reliable signal so that I could request assistance if needed. In addition, I had to carefully navigate when to intervene, ensuring that I neither compromised participants' psychological comfort nor disrupted the authenticity of the observed interactions. These challenges resonate with Guillemin and Gillam's (2004) notion of ethically important moments, those unpredictable situations in the field that require flexible judgment and reflexive adjustment by the researcher. Such strategies not only respect participants' interactions but also create a necessary protective framework for the researcher.

3.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has elaborated on the methodological underpinnings and practical implementation of a multi-sited ethnographic approach to exploring how second-generation Chinese youth in Britain negotiate their transnational identities. Grounded firmly in a social constructivist paradigm, the methodology recognises identity as fluid, performative, and deeply contextual, shaped by interactions across multiple socio-cultural settings. Multi-sited ethnography was specifically selected for its capacity to trace these transnational practices across geographically dispersed yet culturally interlinked sites, including Chinese language schools, Chinatowns, family-run takeaway businesses, and participants' homes in Glasgow and London. However, this fieldwork presented challenges, including logistical complexity, fragmented data, and the need for reflexive engagement to manage positionality across varied research environments.

The integration of participant observation and semi-structured interviews enabled the collection of rich, multi-layered data. Participant observation was critical for accessing non-verbal, embodied practices, such as sensory and affective dimensions of identity negotiation, while interviews provided interpretative depth, illuminating participants' subjective understandings, motivations, and reflective insights.

Throughout the fieldwork and data analysis processes, researcher reflexivity emerged as an essential practice. Acknowledging my positionality as both insider and outsider, as a Chinese student and researcher, facilitated a deeper understanding and more nuanced interpretation of interactions, simultaneously presenting both ethical dilemmas and analytical challenges. RTA provided a robust methodological framework for managing these complexities, systematically incorporating my subjective responses into data analysis to enhance interpretative clarity.

Finally, the ethical considerations discussed underscore the critical importance of maintaining confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent, especially given the sensitivity of topics around migration histories, cultural identity, and family relationships. Ethical practices were continuously negotiated throughout the research process, reflecting a dynamic commitment to safeguarding participants and respecting their narratives.

With the methodological foundations and ethical considerations comprehensively addressed, the thesis now progresses to empirical chapters, beginning with Chapter 4, which examines food-related practices and identity negotiations among second-generation Chinese youth in Glasgow. This work traces how identities are enacted and contested within domestic, educational, and commercial food spaces.

Chapter 4: Food, Smell and the Visibility of Chinese Identity in Multicultural Glasgow

4.1 Introduction

This chapter addressed how do food practices across home, school, and family businesses become sites of boundary work and sensory/embodied negotiation of belonging. It examines three core mechanisms of boundary work, digital mediation, and embodiment/senses across three home, family-run takeaways/restaurants, school/social settings to analyse their impact on three targeted outcomes: (1) the formation of context-specific ways of being and ways of belonging; (2) the development of situated transnational identity; and (3) place-specific patterns of cultural practice unique to Glasgow. Participants were embedded in diverse class backgrounds and urban contexts. Glasgow youth often navigate belonging through collective alignment and community-oriented adaptation, whereas London youth draw on greater autonomy and classed resources to construct more personalised and negotiable transnational identities.

The chapter explores sites from micro to macro and opens with home food practices in both cities Chinese families, focusing on the family dining table as a microcosm of cultural transmission by investigating dietary taboos, ritualised etiquette, and customs, all anchored in mechanisms of embodiment/senses and boundary work. Next, the chapter shifts to family-operated takeaways and restaurants, exploring how second-generation Chinese youth navigate boundary work to balance cultural preservation and commercial viability. The following section focuses on school and social networks, analysing how participants use embodiment/senses and boundary work to manage the visibility of Chinese cuisine and negotiate inclusion. It highlights the role of food smell as a key sensory marker in triggering scrutiny. Finally, the chapter demonstrates that food practices across home, takeaways, and school do more than serve as expressions of diasporic cultural imagination or bridges between cultures, they also function as a domain through which transnational identity is actively negotiated.

4.2 Food as a site of transnational identity negotiation

Food acts as a sensory bridge between “here” (the host country) and “there” (the homeland or cultural imagination) (Collins, 2008; Ahmed et al., 2003). Nevertheless, in this process, the second generation are frequently overlooked by researchers. Do their food practices, situated between their parents’ traditions and the local mainstream culture, perpetuate the gustatory memories and emotional sustenance characteristic of the first generation? Or do they, by balancing inheritance and innovation, forge distinctive cultural expressions and identities of their own? Unlike the first generation whose identity negotiations often centre on nostalgia for the homeland, the second-generation navigate a more complex interplay between the family’s heritage and the local and broader socio-cultural landscape.

In the context of globalisation, the line between “traditional” and “Western” cuisines is becoming increasingly blurred (Collins, 2008), as Chinese food has entered the British mainstream as a process that shapes participants’ everyday eating habits and cultivates a hybrid, distinctive culinary practice within the third space (Bhabha, 1994). For instance, in Oman's food and beverage market, dishes such as biryani (spiced rice stew) in India, dosa (Indian pancake) in South India, and tabbouleh (Arabian parsley salad) in the Middle East, are being seamlessly integrated onto the same menu and are no longer categorised separately as foods of a particular culture (Jacob & Sharma, 2018). Food is no longer rigidly confined to its original cultural framework but is increasingly incorporated into the global culinary landscape, becoming part of localised food markets and consumption patterns.

Accordingly, examining food practices provides crucial evidence through which to explore the construction of transnational identity and the negotiation of a sense of belonging.

4.3 “Don’t put your chopsticks straight up in the centre of the rice”: intergenerational rituals and the negotiation of transnational identity at the family table

The findings suggest that at the family dining table, boundary work surfaces in rules, etiquette, and taboos that mark what counts as proper conduct and “Chinese” ways of eating. Embodiment and the senses anchored these boundaries in routine acts, such as rice as a staple, soup before meals, the feel of chopsticks being handled “correctly”. These embodied acts turn cultural norms into daily habits – youth do not just “know” Chinese dining culture, they “feel” it through their senses, making it a natural part of their self-concept.

Analysis of participant narratives and field notes confirms how these two mechanisms drive identity outcomes: ways of being and ways of belonging. Their adherence to dining rules/rituals (e.g. chopstick use, toasting etiquette) was framed as routine or a way to show respect to the family table, not as a deliberate choice to “be Chinese”. This routine engagement strengthens their connection to ancestral traditions: dietary habits passed down (e.g. prioritising home-cooked Chinese meals) reinforce identification with the culinary culture of their forebears, while taboos and rituals maintain emotional links to their parents’ hometowns. Moreover, they practised these customs within their lives in Glasgow, forging a hybrid identity that was neither wholly Chinese nor wholly British.

Almost all participants expressed a clear preference for Chinese food and several noted that Western fast food often causes physical discomfort, with home-cooked Chinese meals are perceived as healthier and milder. Alex, a 22-year-old undergraduate student, shared his everyday dietary preferences:

I have a preference for Chinese food at home, like the Fish-Flavoured Eggplant and Mapo Tofu my dad makes. There are others I can't quite recall at the moment, Luosifen, and, umm, there are many, all perfect with rice. It's because the food in here, it's all fast food, like burgers, fries, pizza. I find that eating those can easily cause me to have nosebleeds due to heatiness. So, I prefer eating Chinese food, because if I have Western food, I end up having to drink a lot of water the next day.

Similarly, Jack, who also hails from a Chinese family, shared:

Of course I love Chinese food – it's my food. At home, we all eat Chinese food: my parents cook, and we share a few dishes together, which are delicious. Since we're from Fujian, we often make soups, which are lighter and healthier. Food here can be overly greasy: if I eat pizza one day, I often end up with a nosebleed the next.

Such Chinese foods are often regarded as “comfort food” because they elicit positive bodily responses and enhance wellbeing. The physical reactions that Jack and Alex report signify a somatic boundary that distinguishes their families’ culinary heritage from local food culture, reinforcing their emotional and cultural bond to Chinese cuisine. This bond is consolidated in the private family sphere at home, in contrast to the public sphere where Western dietary norms predominate. Food writer Mayukh Sen (2021) described immigrant women returning “home” by cooking home-country food, highlighting how immigrants and their descendants use home/ethnic foods to alleviate homesickness. This reveals a clear alignment with traditional Chinese culinary practices, which are deeply anchored in family routines and consistently upheld by their parents.

Everyday dietary routines, such as eating rice with every meal or beginning with soup, reflect more than habitual preferences. They function as embodied cultural knowledge, passed down through family practice and reinforcing a deep-rooted sense of Chinese identity. For instance, Alex’s comment that dishes “all go perfectly with rice” transcends mere food preference, signifying his profound connection to Chinese culture. He credits this understanding to his upbringing, recounting how his father taught him the significance of rice from a young age: “Rice is our staple, so many dishes are meant to accompany or be mixed with rice for a better taste, my dad told me this from when I was little.” Similarly, Jennie, aged 20, describes how her family begins meals with soup: “We always drink soup before eating. My parents have done this for as long as I can remember, and so we do the same. They say it’s healthier. There’s a Chinese saying: “A mouthful of soup before a meal keeps you slim and healthy.”

These intergenerational food practices position the family home as a transnational social space through which connections to China and ancestral culture are sustained.

Routines such as having soup before a meal or pairing every dish with rice do not merely bring pleasure; they also imbue a sense of cultural belonging and identity, symbolising the flavour of home, the legacy of culture, and a sentimental link to the older generation. Alex and Jennie both illustrate, through their own experiences, the influence of their parents on their eating habits and practices. Under the impact of these family traditions, often underpinned by ideas like “healthiness” and “tradition” and reinforced by short proverbs or sayings, children naturally adopt similar dietary customs. In Scotland, the family’s domestic space, where parents cook authentic Chinese dishes, preserves a sense of continuity with their Chinese heritage. Participants’ testimonies suggest that these terms and their underlying cultural significance were likely acquired from older family members, and that passing down these dietary habits and culinary practices is a critical way to maintain a connection to their parents’ cultural roots.

Second, food and food-related practices also act as channels linking place where they living and ancestral culture are sustained. As Jennie’s reference to a Chinese saying shows, such cultural elements forge a powerful emotional bond with ancestors and home culture, especially important across geographical and temporal distances. By following the mealtime habit of “drinking soup before meals” and recalling the proverb “A mouthful of soup before eating keeps you slim and healthy”, participants continuously reproduce cultural codes associated with China and their ancestral hometown, even in a transnational context. Thus, food serves not merely as an everyday act of nourishment but also generates meaning through embodied, habitual, and relational acts. In the flow and transmission of these customs and sayings, collective identification with home and ancestral lineage is reinforced. The local knowledge and oral traditions embedded in dietary practices constitute a key means by which overseas Chinese communities continue to connect with their ancestral culture.

Participants in London likewise expressed loyalty and enjoyment of Chinese food, while demonstrating hybrid patterns of family eating practices. Daniel, a 25-year-old participant living in East London, shared:

“I prefer chips. When we eat at home, my family always prepares a separate portion of chips for me. It’s been like that since I was a child. The rest of the dishes are Chinese food, I eat together with my family.”

Millie, whose parents run a chain of Chinese takeaways in London, similarly described a more personalised approach to eating at home:

“Chinese food was always central at home, the way I ate it was a bit different. I cook sometimes, like mixing things together and putting all sorts of random ingredients into my food. My mum would say, ‘No one would eat that’, but I quite liked it. In the end, they just let me be.”

Their accounts highlight the hybridity and duality of family eating practices, characterised by the simultaneous maintenance of collective dining scenes and individually difference. From the mechanism of boundary work, Glasgow families tend to construct cultural boundaries through shared participation in Chinese meals and rituals, producing internal unity and external differentiation. For example, Alex and Jack regularly eat dishes together with their families, with rice serving as a unified staple. Bodily responses, such as experiencing nosebleeds when eating Western food further reinforce a boundary in which “Chinese food” becomes synonymous with family belonging. By contrast, the London practice of preparing a separate portion of chips represents a form of boundary erosion. As Millie’s practice of mixing food and her parents’ response of “letting her be” tacitly respects this ambiguity, making food to function as a site of experimentation between tradition and innovation. In this process, participants actively engage in cultural construction, producing food identities that are simultaneously Chinese yet distinctive, situated within a third space. While the family as a whole continues to uphold Chinese culinary traditions, space is deliberately left for individuals to adapt to mainstream dietary practices.

Differences in participants’ family food practices are fundamentally shaped by the class structures, community formations, and urban contexts of the two cities.

In terms of class, most Chinese families in Glasgow are almost engaged in catering. This work requires long hours and intensive labour, leaving parents with little time to prepare separate meals for children (Song, 1999). As a result, families tend to adopt a shared eating model in which all members consume the same Chinese dishes. Meanwhile, class shapes everyday dispositions and practices (Bourdieu, 1984). In this context, food practices primarily serve practical aims: saving time, sustaining the family

business, and maintaining community ties. By contrast, the Chinese immigrants in London is characterised by a highly diverse occupational structure. Class differences translate into unequal access to resources and differing parenting values, which in turn shape more varied food practices. Research on the London suggests that in global cities, middle-class dispositions often prioritise diversity, flexibility, and individual agency, with family practices placing greater emphasis on personal choice and experimentation for their children (Savage et al., 2013). Combined with London's cosmopolitan urban context, dietary differentiation becomes a routine and accepted outcome.

Community structure further reinforces these differences. The Chinese community in Glasgow is dominated by migrants from Fujian, resulting in a relatively homogeneous and mutual help community in which Chinese food functions as a key marker of collective identity. As Brah (1996) notes, homogeneous diaspora communities often prioritise cultural transmission and risk management. In this setting, family practices act as tools for reproducing shared culture, and children's food preferences are expected to align with shared norms. In contrast, London's Chinese community consists of multiple sub-groups and displays a fragmented structure characterised by low density and weak ties (Vertovec, 2009). Under conditions of super-diversity, migrant communities in global cities are less oriented towards maintaining a single collective identity and more focused on individual development. Therefore, families face fewer pressures to conform to shared community norms in their everyday food practices.

Urban context and cultural values are also crucial. London promotes cultural values associated with individualism, innovation, and high mobility (Savage et al., 2013). These values emphasise personal autonomy and encourage individuals to express diversity. Among middle-class Chinese families, parenting practices often aim to foster children's sense of global citizenship (Beck and Nyíri, 2022). Within this framework, food-related differentiation, such as preparing chips separately or mixing foods creatively is understood as an expression of individual agency and a means of developing autonomy. This contrasts sharply with the logic of subsistence-oriented family life in Glasgow's catering households, where food practices are shaped primarily by economic necessity.

In terms of identity outcomes, participants in the two cities display different ways of being and ways of belonging. In Glasgow, young people's ways of being are grounded in collective family routines and shared cultural practices, while ways of belonging are anchored in alignment with family and community norms. By following and performing the same food routines as other family members, they maintain connections to their ancestral homeland while reinforcing belonging within the local Chinese community. In London, participants' ways of being are more likely to position themselves as negotiators of difference, such as mixing foods or adapting staples, they develop personalised markers of identity. While Chinese food remains central to family meals, participants also actively accommodate mainstream British food preferences. Their sense of belonging emerges from familial acceptance of personal difference, even when their food practices diverge from collective norms.

A further pattern observed in this study is that family dietary norms are often linked to Chinese traditional superstition and folk beliefs. In anthropological terms, "superstition" refers to practices or beliefs lacking a formal theological basis but holding strong social and psychological significance within a particular cultural milieu (Douglas, 1966; Orsi, 2002). These everyday norms are intertwined with folk-religious traditions, such as ancestor worship, taboos, and symbols of good or bad luck. For younger generations, these taboos are not simply rigid old rules but, through the small everyday rituals at the family dining table, provide a means to experience and participate in a cultural identity that traverses both place and time.

One participant, James, shared his family's dining rules, which he termed "Chinese superstitions". He explained that following these rules makes him feel closely connected to Chinese tradition:

Sometimes like Chinese superstitions. Like while I'm eating rice at home, my parents will say, "Don't put your chopsticks straight up in the centre of the rice; that's not good. That's worshipping the dead". And when you're eating rice, you have to eat every grain, don't leave anything behind. You know, you have to clean your rice bowl. It's about showing respect for the food. Sometimes little things like that make me feel I'm Chinese.

From James's account, one can see that he is carrying out all the rituals out of respect, which is both a way of being and way of belonging. These ritual practices are tangible, repeated acts that structure his presence within the family and cultural context. James explicitly links adherence to these "little things" to feeling "Chinese". The rituals serve as a sensory and behavioural bridge to his cultural heritage, creating a sense of connection to a broader "Chinese" collective. These dining rituals can be understood as forms of everyday performance, enacted within a specific interaction order and brought into being through repetition. By correctly handling chopsticks and finishing every grain of rice, James performs a culturally intelligible role, signaling respect, moral competence, and familial alignment. These are socially legible performances through which his "Chineseness" is recognised and affirmed within the family setting. Furthermore, this demonstrates how routine consumption practices intersect with lived religion, moral taboos, and transnational identity formation. Scholars of "lived religion" (Orsi, 2002; Ammerman, 2007) argue that religious or spiritual meaning often manifests in mundane routines rather than being confined to formal worship. In the Chinese cultural context, these customs are not regarded as part of organised religion but are more aligned with folk beliefs. Here, the taboo against placing chopsticks upright in a bowl of rice, which is commonly associated with funeral offerings, becomes a micro-ritual that fuses a daily act (eating) with a connection to ancestors or a spiritual realm. Building on Mary Douglas's (1966) *Purity and Danger*, such small prohibitions can be interpreted as ways of delineating correct behaviour and preserving symbolic "purity", in this case showing respect and avoiding any suggestion of death at the dining table. Though these actions are not formal religious rites, in everyday life they function similarly, conveying respect (for ancestors, food, or unseen forces) and linking individuals to a broader moral world.

Other families also incorporate folk beliefs into daily life. For instance, Jia, a 20-year-old participant living in Glasgow, described her family's significant Chinese New Year ritual. At one New Year's Eve dinner I observed, before anyone began eating, Jia's father played a ten-minute phone recording of firecrackers online. As the crackling sounds filled the dining room, Jia's grandfather explained its purpose: "In China, you'd set off firecrackers for this long. The noise drives away all the bad luck from the past year, so we can enjoy our first meal of the New Year." Jia listened quietly, showing no surprise: for her, this symbolic scene is an integral part of the family celebration. Using

recorded firecracker sounds to “drive out” bad luck exemplifies how traditional customs can be reinterpreted and passed on across time and geographical boundaries through transmission mediated by technology. This case evidence digital mediation as a key mechanism, one that substitutes for the in-person, outdoor practice (setting off physical firecrackers) Jia’s family would have staged in China, enabling the transnational transmission of traditional Chinese New Year rituals and shaping their “way of being” and “way of belonging” in the UK. This digital ritual is an essential part of her family’s celebration, and her quiet, unsurprised reaction reveals that engaging with the recorded firecracker sounds has become a natural “way of being” during the holiday. She does not need to question the practice, it is woven into the routine of how her family marks New Year, turning a tech-mediated act into a familiar, unselfconscious part of her daily cultural existence. More importantly, digital mediation fosters Jia’s “way of belonging” to Chinese cultural traditions. The recording retains the core symbolic meaning of the original practice (driving away bad luck, welcoming a fresh start) even as it shifts the medium: the sound – transmitted via technology – still anchors the family to the folk customs of their ancestral homeland. By participating in this digital ritual, Jia connects to a broader collective of Chinese communities that mark New Year with firecracker traditions, reinforcing her sense of belonging to a diasporic group.

These dining taboos and rituals in James’s and Jia’s households demonstrate the essential role that everyday micro-practices of ethnical or regional beliefs play, functioning as embodiment, digital meditation, and boundary-making in the formation of transnational identities among second-generation Chinese youth. James’s experience anchors these micro-practices in embodiment and boundary-making: his family’s rules (avoiding upright chopsticks in rice, finishing every grain) are not abstract norms but tangible, sensory acts – feeling chopsticks in his hand, focusing on cleaning his bowl – that embody “Chinese” ways of eating. These acts also draw a boundary between his family’s cultural practices and mainstream UK dining customs (e.g. no emphasis on finishing every grain or chopstick etiquette), marking what counts as “their” way of being. Jia’s Chinese New Year ritual, by contrast, relies on digital mediation as a micro-practice: her father’s use of a phone recording to replicate firecracker sounds transforms technology into a tool to preserve the ritual’s symbolic meaning (driving away bad luck) and keep it part of the family’s holiday routine.

What might seem like trivial household rules in both cases actually carry deeper cultural weight, strengthening emotional ties to older generations and reinforcing cultural identity in transnational social fields. This aligns with transnationalism scholarship which highlights how everyday acts sustain cross-border connections (Vertovec, 2009; Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Kramsch's (2009) work on translingual identity further illuminates this: just as translingual shift between identities through small, daily interactions, second-generation Chinese youth do not inherit culture "wholesale" from prior generations. Instead, they remake it through micro-practices like James's chopstick etiquette or Jia's digital firecrackers, acts rooted in everyday social contexts that keep the culture alive. This reveals cultural transmission is not a top-down process from big culture but a gradual negotiation: James and Jia do not just "learn" traditions, they live them through routine, making culture a part of their daily selves.

Their responses reveal that their ways of being, and ways of belonging, whether out of respect or a desire to avoid conflict, comply with these traditions. In the case of James, even though he was instructed at home to avoid placing chopsticks upright in the rice, his attitude towards this was that "there's nothing scientific about it, it's just a superstition, my parents do it that way, I just listen to what they say, or I'll get argued with, it's annoying. Just follow them". Although he still follows traditions, he does not identify deeply with them and instead shows an unwillingness to be constrained. This, in itself, implies a subtle form of cultural transmission that, while not grounded in ideological acceptance, nonetheless takes place through embodied repetition. By contrast, Jia's response does not reflect rejection or detachment. In her family, the sound of firecrackers is played at New Year, and she commented: "I know Chinese New Year is about family reunion and the myth behind, not real, I'm young, and it's not my turn to do that kind of thing, but it needs to be like that for my grandparents and it's important." She is in a position where the younger generation seems to be more observing and patient. While not fully accepting of traditional practices (such as the "not real" of the myth behind firecrackers), Jia chooses to show respect for these practices and understandings while recognising the importance of ritual culture. She sees herself as part of a cultural system in which ancestral customs are still present; respected, but not fully accepted. James and Jia's responses demonstrate the fluidity and erosion of cultural boundaries between generations. James's critique and adherence to

tradition, and Jia's respect for and critique of tradition, reflect the fact that cultural identities are not bound to established frameworks, but rather are progressively formed and adapted through the interplay of intergenerational, cultural, and personal choices.

According to Steven Vertovec's (2009) theory of transnationalism, small-scale rituals or everyday belief practices in immigrant families frequently serve as vital media for maintaining cross-border connections. These small rituals provide moments for younger generations to communicate and interact with the cultural memories of their parents and grandparents, enabling them to recognise and enact their transnational cultural networks within a complex intercultural context. Consequently, a seemingly simple mealtime manner, like that described by James, is not merely about obeying family rules, it is an active engagement in the ongoing exchange between ancestral culture and day-to-day life (Levitt, 2009; Louie, 2006). Furthermore, these behaviours constitute the everyday performance of Chinese identity. James adheres to them despite privately thinking they are "superstition", while Jennie participates even though she recognises "myths are not real". These repetitive rituals (such as the order of soup consumption or chopstick usage) serve to perform Chinese identity before family and community. This performance embodies "Chinese" ways of eating, marks what counts as "their" way of being, and draws a boundary between the family's cultural practices and mainstream UK dining customs, thereby securing emotional and cultural validation. The essence of this performance lies in the active practice of demonstrating belonging through action.

4.4 Family-run takeaways and restaurants

The evidence from this study indicates that in families running Chinese takeaways or restaurants in Glasgow, boundary work operates both front-of-house (customer-facing spaces) and back-of-house (domestic or kitchen spaces). This mechanism produces ways of being as these families modify their dishes to cater for mainstream British palates, while retaining more authentic or home-style dishes for domestic consumption. The restaurant thus becomes a living site where their "Chineseness" and "Scottishness" coexist, rather than opposing forces. Against this backdrop, second-generation Chinese youth grow up moving between these two culinary realms: assisting front-of-house by

explaining “adapted” dishes to British customers, then joining the family in back-of-house meals featuring unmodified ancestral recipes. Their ability to navigate front-of-house/back-of-house (FOH/BOH) boundaries through food adaptation, language shifts, and cultural understanding fosters a sense of belonging to both social worlds. Further, the way they navigate these dual cultural spheres without fully aligning with either produces a situated transnational identity, such as talking to Chinese people as Chinese while speaking to local people as Scottish.

The Chinese takeaway is a central feature of many participants’ upbringings, serving not only as a family workplace but also as a site of cultural production. From an early age, they often help out with daily tasks, thus becoming familiar with both the business operations and the adaptations necessary for cooking in these establishments. Kelly, a 21-year-old student in her second year at university, recounted her experiences helping in her parents’ takeaway:

As a child, I often did my homework in the shop, waiting for my parents to finish work and bring takeaway home. On weekend days when I wasn’t at school, I’d go to the shop to help out with various tasks, such as cash handling, serving dishes, and taking phone orders from customers.

This deep involvement in the family-run business not only acquainted her with the Chinese cuisine sold in these takeaways and the associated commercial model but also reinforced her connection to Chinese food culture.

Life in Glasgow also prompts comparisons between these takeaway offerings and other ethnic cuisines in the local food scene. Many participants spoke of “traditional”, “genuine”, or “authentic” Chinese food, particularly given that their parents’ livelihoods depend on appealing to Scottish tastes. Their reflections illustrate how young second-generation Chinese position themselves as simultaneously acknowledging the boundary between Scottish society and the local Chinese community, and those “doing business” with a British clientele. This negotiation illuminates broader processes of cultural boundary formation, wherein individuals balance tradition and global influences to forge a sense of belonging that transcends simplistic divisions between home and host cultures. Moreover, it exemplifies the dynamic negotiations concerning cultural boundaries and identity positioning that are

continually undertaken by the second-generation (Vertovec, 2009). As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) observed, immigrant descendants often construct transnational social ties through everyday practices, forming flexible identities that span both “home” and “host” contexts.

For second-generation Chinese youth growing up in Glasgow, the experience of Chinese food is shaped by multiple influences. On the one hand, their parents’ need to make a living means they often encounter Chinese takeaway cuisine adapted to Scottish tastes. These foods reflect commercial necessity rather than cultural authenticity. However, these young people also develop their own understanding of what counts as “real” Chinese food. This understanding is informed by their connections to the ancestral homeland, their interactions with the wider Chinese community, and their position within broader British society. Throughout this process, second-generation immigrants do not simply absorb the cultural narratives of their parents’ generation, nor are they entirely subsumed into British mainstream culture. Rather, they engage in ongoing negotiation, compromise, and balance, ultimately creating a sense of belonging that accommodates multiple identities and values.

When discussing family-run takeaway shops and restaurants, almost everyone indicated that the food on offer is primarily aimed at local customers. Indeed, some participants even mentioned being forbidden by their parents from eating certain items sold in these establishments because they had been “Westernised”. Jacky, a 24-year-old male born in Scotland, emphasised this point when describing the dishes served at his parents’ Chinese takeaway:

Well, it’s not traditional. It’s just like a lot of oil, that’s what they like. A lot of Scottish people would buy it and call it Chinese. They don’t really sell traditional dishes; they just make it for local people. Yeah, it’s like Western-based. So, you have your chips and rice and fried fish, something like that. Then you have curry sauce, gravy, or something. It is good, but I don’t really like it.

By remarking that these dishes “are made for local people”, Jacky is indeed drawing a distinction, possibly reflecting how he differentiates himself from “Scots” or “locals” in terms of food-related cultural practices. In doing so, he highlights the difference between what is marketed as “Chinese takeaway” and the traditional Chinese cuisine

he recognises. Jacky appears to be asserting his distinct identity as a person of Chinese heritage, underlining the ways in which he sees himself diverging from mainstream Scottish food culture.

Similarly, another interviewee, Ruby, used comparable language when talking about her family's bun shop: "Char siu bao (roast pork bun) sells well here because locals – the foreigners – like sweet things, so we make more of them every day." Referring to Glasgow customers as "foreigners" illustrates her attempts to distinguish herself and her ethnic background from other groups. This reveals a significant inversion of expected identity categories. Rather than aligning with the dominant British majority, Ruby repositions herself and, by extension, her diasporic Chinese identity as the normative centre. This discursive move denotes an act of identity reterritorialisation, in which the second-generation speaker asserts cultural ownership over the space of the restaurant and symbolically others the local Scottish customers.

Jacky also observes that these dishes are not "traditional" but have instead been adapted to suit local tastes. Referring to them as "just made for local people" and "Western based" highlights a process more complex than mere personal taste. It speaks to how racial, ethnic, and cultural differences are continuously negotiated and reshaped within Scotland's broader social context. His comments point to a familiar pattern whereby Chinese takeaways adapt traditional recipes to British palates. Joe (20, male) also noted that his father does not allow him to eat the food sold in their family's takeaway, explaining:

It includes fries, heavy oil, and curry sauces. That's not the correct version of real Chinese like we have at home. My dad won't let me, but people will buy it eventually – there's something they'll go for, like fish.

This sense of difference may stem from the contrasting representations of food at home and in takeaway shops, a deeper understanding of cuisine, and how personal identities are formed in ways that go beyond birthplace or residence.

For second-generation Chinese young people, the divide between the "authentic" Chinese food prepared at home and the "modified dishes" sold to Scots in takeaway shops represents an everyday negotiation of ethno-cultural boundaries. They experience

both divergence from and fusion with mainstream or other minority groups in Scottish society, with discussions of what is “real” versus “inauthentic” Chinese food serving to express and reinforce British-Chinese identity (Louie, 2006; Vertovec, 2009).

However, the shop is not merely a place that provides food; it also functions as a platform for cultural expression, illustrating how participants preserve their cultural identity, even if such identifiers are not always exhibited publicly. Chinese restaurants and takeaways have become a ubiquitous presence across Glasgow, reflecting the city’s multicultural composition and the continued expansion of the Chinese diaspora. Their visibility is reshaping the local culinary landscape in multiple ways. Most notably, the vibrant signage and bilingual menus signal Glasgow’s departure from a traditionally British or European-dominated gastronomic scene, introducing various Cantonese, Sichuanese, and fusion-style dishes to the local palate. For second-generation Chinese in particular, they inherit not only their parents’ commercial sensibilities but also a legacy of adapting Chinese cooking to local tastes. When families choose to highlight certain elements, such as calligraphy, festival lanterns, or Lunar New Year decorations, they enact a form of cultural continuity in a space that might otherwise be seen primarily as a business setting and plan. Thus, although these Chinese restaurants are guided by market demands, health regulations, and local consumer preferences, they also act as microcosms of cultural preservation. They enable both owners and customers to retain and negotiate their sense of “Chineseness” in a new society, even if these markers of identity may remain partly behind the scenes, visible only to those who venture into the kitchen or share a family meal.

From the fieldwork, it became evident that many Chinese families involved in the catering business choose to keep authentic Chinese dishes within the home. Sue, aged 21, articulated the difference between the meals served in her parents’ takeaway and those consumed privately:

Sue: What do we have in the shop? Well, chow mein and fried rice are definitely on the menu. There’s Sichuan cuisine, and then Kung Pao chicken, Beijing Satay chicken – usually, it’s the locals who order these because we’re catering to the British market. Chinese people rarely eat these, I guess. Chinese people do order takeaways. If you want to eat, it would be that typical Chinese dish, like Mapo Tofu or Fish-Flavoured Aubergine.

Keying: *Your parents' restaurant must also make these dishes, right?*

Sue: *Uh, they do make them, just not for sale. They cook them at home.*

Sue's account clarifies how she and her family effectively maintain a culinary boundary between the public image of Chinese food and a more private sphere of "real" Chinese dishes by reserving certain recipes for family consumption rather than listing them on the menu. This practice represents her ways of being, navigating between the demands of business and the cultural expectations of family life. This arrangement allows her to satisfy local demands while simultaneously preserving cultural traditions and sustaining a transnational identity. Such boundary-setting resonates with diaspora identity formation theory (Brah, 1996; Vertovec, 2009), which views diasporic identities as situated, negotiated, and often hybrid. It also aligns with Brubaker's (2005) reconceptualisation of diaspora not as a fixed entity or bounded group, but as a category of practice, a stance, or an idiom – a way of positioning oneself in relation to both "here" and "there". By treating the culinary boundary as a mode for enacting difference, Sue and her family perform diaspora as an ongoing process, rather than a static essence, shaping their place in the receiving society while retaining meaningful connections to ancestral culture.

Moreover, the notion of "real" Chinese food cannot be disentangled from debates on authenticity, which highlight the role of individual agency in the (re)production of culture. Conversations around what is "authentic" often emphasise the connections between food and memory, emotion, and localised knowledge, with cooking practices serving to preserve and re-enact one's cultural roots. Wu's (2017) research on Chinese migrants' food practices in Helsinki clarified that authenticity implies the "immutability" of cooking methods, such as strict adherence to ingredient choices, cooking implements, and techniques, in pursuit of recreating the taste of home as faithfully as possible, using, for instance, a "traditional wok" rather than modern equipment to retain the characteristic "layers of smoky flavours". This desire to replicate the "same taste" stems from taste memories forged in one's formative environment, functioning as a key benchmark for "authenticity". For Sue, therefore, authentic Chinese dishes like Mapo Tofu or Fish-Flavoured Aubergine hold profound significance for those who have grown up eating them. They symbolise tradition and evoke memories, providing a

tangible link to her cultural heritage even when she is physically distant from her ancestral home.

Ultimately, the ability to navigate FOH/BOH boundaries, shifting between adapted and authentic dishes, switching languages (for a detailed discussion on language, see section 6.5), and balancing commercial and cultural needs produces a situated transnational identity. This is reflected in Sue's wider manifestation of identity, as she explains how she chooses whether to be “Scottish/English” or “Chinese” according to her social background. She described in detail how she introduces her identity to others:

It just depends on who you're talking to. If you're talking to Scottish or British, then you definitely have to agree with them and say I'm Scottish or British. If you're talking to a Chinese person, then you definitely have to say I'm Chinese. It just depends on what scene you're talking about. Because if I say in front of the Scottish, I'm Chinese, then if they are not happy with that, it may happen exactly the same as my primary school racism, because if I say I am Chinese, they will bully me. On the contrary, with Chinese friends is also exactly the same, if I say, I am British or Scottish, then they may also say, “eh, you, why don't you support China? Yeah, betray your country, then fine, I'll bully you too”. So that means people like us. And we can't say we're singularly British, Scottish nor Chinese, it's just look at the situation, because we have to look out for ourselves.

Sue's account centres on a core identity outcome: situated transnational identity where her negotiation of “Scottish/British” and “Chinese” affiliations is not fixed but dynamically tailored to social contexts, emerging as a strategic response to the dual pressures of acceptance and exclusion from majority and minority communities alike. This identity, rooted in her transnational Chinese-Scottish experience, manifests through context-dependent shifts in self-presentation. Her statement “If I say I'm Chinese among Scots, they may bully me... If I say I'm British or Scottish among Chinese friends, they might say I'm betraying my country” lays bare the contextual constraints shaping this situated identity. Among majority Scottish peers, the risk of bullying compels her to downplay her “Chineseness”; among Chinese friends, the fear of being labelled a “traitor” forces her to emphasise it.

Sue's narrative reflects a situational form of identity performance oriented towards self-protection. It is a strategic practice through which she adapts to different social contexts and manages the risk of exclusion. Following Goffman's (1959) view of social interaction as performance, her identity expressions shift in response to setting and audience, turning transnational identity into a flexible and negotiable way of being.

The structural context of UK schools amplifies the need for this situated identity work. Whilst attending schools, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2004) identified that the majority of schools in the UK were predominantly white, and racial discrimination among primary and secondary school children has been well documented (Carroll, 2002; Connolly, 2002). The presence of racism in such formative spaces reinforces societal hierarchies and limits the ability of ethnic minority children to freely express their identities without fear of judgment or exclusion. However, unlike the approach taken two decades ago, which largely focused on describing the problem, since the Anti-Racism in Education Programme 2021 asserts that all black and minority ethnic children, young people, teachers and school staff have the right to experience an education system that is free from racism and intolerance and creates an increased variety of perspectives for everyone within it (Scottish Government, 2022). The strategy explicitly incorporates anti-racist education into school-age support systems, offering institutional protection for ethnic minority pupils, and redefines what an inclusive school entails. It includes training in recognising hate crimes and addressing racism, gender issues, sexuality, religions, etc. This shift raises important questions about whether the sense of exclusion and discrimination experienced by minority children improves as they grow older. Yet, early encounters with racism and cultural pressure continue to shape how individuals negotiate their cultural affiliations, often compelling them to adopt strategies of identity concealment, modification, or selective expression depending on the social context.

Crucially, this situated transnational identity is a form of cultural agency. Sue does not abandon her Chinese heritage to "fit in" with Scots, nor does she reject her Scottish upbringing to please Chinese friends; instead, she moves between the two, letting the context guide which part of her transnational identity to highlight. Such in-betweenness resonates with Bhabha's (1994) notion of cultural hybridity, illustrating how individuals strategically deploy their identities as both protective mechanisms and

forms of self-expression. It also underscores the powerful influence of racism, as early experiences of bullying in school not only deter open expressions of Chineseness in certain spaces but also reinforce the necessity of selective self-representation. The educational setting, often expected to foster inclusivity, can instead perpetuate social hierarchies and exclusionary behaviours (Carroll, 2002; Connolly, 2002), pressuring ethnic minority children to “choose” one identity over another to avoid hostility.

This negotiation of identity is not limited to external social interactions but extends into intimate family spaces, where cultural practices play a crucial role in shaping one’s sense of belonging. Among these, food holds particular significance as both a tangible link to heritage and a means of expressing identity within the family. The ways in which food is prepared, consumed, and discussed at home reflect broader cultural dynamics, shaping how individuals perceive and engage with their heritage. In the next section, food and food-related practices at home are discussed in greater detail.

4.5 “Walking hotpot” on the campus

A significant pattern emerging from this study is that, on school and campus, boundary work surfaces in lunch routines and seating: students change what they buy, where they eat, and with whom. Embodiment and the senses are central, as the smell of fried rice or hotpot cling to clothes, drawing comment and scrutiny. These mechanisms drive key identity outcomes: the hardening of cultural boundaries, where second-generation Chinese youth increasingly police their own cultural expression to avoid being marked as “other” in mainstream spaces. These practices produce ways of being through the adoption of sandwich/meal-deal habits and the avoidance of odorous foods at school time, and ways of belonging that are muted in public settings but affirmed at home, in takeaways, and in Chinese venues. Thus, these youth use food practices as a strategic tool to negotiate visibility and belonging in public versus private (home) spaces.

This mechanism involves active boundary management by avoiding bringing Chinese food to school, fearing its association with the smell of others, and instead opting for peer-aligned options like sandwiches or supermarket meal deals. Similarly, if they do bring Chinese food, they may choose to eat in less visible corners or with other ethnic

minority peers, reinforcing a spatial boundary between private cultural practice and public conformity.

Embodiment and the senses amplify this boundary work, turning food into a tangible marker of difference that hardens social divisions. The smell of soy sauce, sesame oil, or fermented ingredients clings to clothes and lingers in the air, becoming an olfactory trigger for scrutiny. Classen (1992) argued that smell serves as a critical indicator of moral, racial, ethnic, class, and cultural distinctions, playing a significant role in processes of exclusion and marginalisation. This sensory discomfort is visceral: it is not only about being seen as different, but also about being felt as different, which in turn embeds the boundary between “mainstream” and “other” into their physical experience of daily life, ultimately becoming a crucial instrument for managing visibility. Given this premise, the rejection of Chinese food in British mainstream schools by second-generation Chinese can be understood as a strategic response to balancing their ancestral food culture with the desire to integrate with peer culture.

Friendships also provide a dynamic social space where identities can be actively produced, performed, and reshaped (Haayden, 2016), further reinforcing these mechanisms by shaping social expectations around food. Peers’ unspoken norms about “appropriate” lunch choices create implicit pressure to conform, turning dietary adaptation into a prerequisite for inclusion. Youth learn that deviating from sandwich culture risks exclusion, so they align their food choices with peer groups, effectively hardening the boundary between British/peer-aligned and Chinese/ethnic food practices.

These practices produce ways of being through the adoption of sandwich/meal-deal habits and the avoidance of odorous foods in school time to minimise visibility and conform to mainstream dietary norms. Conversely, ways of belonging are muted in public settings but affirmed at home, in takeaways, and in Chinese venues. School (public) is a space for mainstream being, while home/takeaways (private/Chinese spaces) are for diasporic cultural belonging.

The interviews revealed that the smell of Chinese food at school generates discomfort, often attracting unwanted attention and causing embarrassment. Claire, an 18-year-old

university student, described how strongly scented food influenced her social interactions:

An experience almost all immigrant children have experienced is feeling embarrassed about the strong smell of their lunch to the white kids at school or uni. This is why we are apprehensive towards trends such as “using henna to create freckles, box braids, Asian fishing, ethnic tattoos or white people wearing ethnic clothes as Halloween costumes”.

Claire's reflection highlights how particular cultural practices, especially around food, can provoke individual and social tension. In predominantly white educational environments, lunches with unfamiliar, strong smells often highlight ethnic differences. This discomfort transcends the mere presence of food itself, reflecting broader anxieties about belonging, cultural authenticity, and racialised experiences in diaspora contexts. Manalansan IV (2006) explored how olfactory perceptions shape immigrant experiences in urban environments, describing smell as a strategic metaphor that reinforces racial, economic, and social hierarchies within global capitalist systems. He argued that, in twenty-first-century America, odour functions as a powerful symbol of class, racial, and ethnic differences. Asian American food practices thus become markers of marginalisation within dominant societal frameworks. Similarly, in school environments, the distinctive odour of Chinese food prominently marks students' cultural backgrounds.

Representing family cuisine and domestic life, food maintains a tangible connection with ancestral homelands but can simultaneously become a source of social discomfort in schools. Chapman and Beagan (2013) explained that traditional foods usually refer to the food of the homeland. Thus, when family dietary practices differ significantly from mainstream norms, people may hesitate due to fears of exclusion. Such tensions are particularly prominent in multicultural environments, where food visibly embodies cultural differences. Given the pronounced characteristics of Chinese cuisine, its noticeable sensory qualities markedly differentiate it from mainstream Western dietary preferences. As Sarah Pink (2015) argued in her work on sensory ethnography, the senses should not be treated as passive channels for receiving information, but as dynamic systems through which people actively and sensually engage with the world. In this context, the embodied experience of eating Chinese food – its textures, tastes,

and smells – not only marks ethnic distinction in public spaces but also reinforces a culturally specific way of knowing and being in the world. These sensory dimensions, often heightened in multicultural settings, are not neutral or universal but culturally situated and deeply symbolic. They shape how young people understand, negotiate, and sometimes struggle with their transnational identities, particularly when their bodily experiences of “home” food are misaligned with the dominant sensory expectations of the society around them.

Participants also expressed concerns regarding the visibility of Chinese food in social settings, particularly schools, as differences were quickly noticed and sometimes scrutinised. To mitigate this cultural visibility, they frequently altered their eating habits. Rob, a 21-year-old university student, recounted:

I remember once bringing fried rice to school and someone said, “What’s that smell? It smells awful”. Since then, I never brought lunch from home again. It’s just easier to bring sandwiches like everyone else.

This account demonstrates how sensory differences can induce self-regulation, showing food as more than mere sustenance but as an expression of belonging and identity negotiation.

Similarly, Joe’s experience illustrates how smell persists beyond the lunchbox into the individual’s body itself:

Last month, I went to class after hotpot, and the steam from the broth clung to my clothes. I remember walking into school, and everywhere I passed, there was this strong hotpot smell. I was like a walking hotpot. People sitting with me in the room kept asking what I had eaten, and I felt really awkward, like I wanted to leave immediately because the smell made me stand out. After that, I never ate hotpot before class again.

From Joe’s account, it is apparent that “hotpot” is not merely a type of food with sensory experiences but has also become a marker of ethnic identity and cultural difference in the public realm. He emphasises how the hotpot’s strong smell “clung” to his clothes, so that upon entering the classroom, he finds “everywhere I passed, there was this strong hotpot smell. I was like a walking hotpot”. This experience demonstrates how a

food's odour can continuously embody and reinforce cultural boundaries on a physical level, acting as an uncontrollable and intrusive ethnic marker.

Viewed through a diaspora lens, Joe's account illustrates how food transcends its material dimension to become both a metaphor and a tangible expression of home orientation. The pungent odour of hotpot permeates private and public spaces alike, marking Joe's second-generation Chinese identity in a subtle yet potent manner. His depiction of himself as a "walking hotpot" evokes the complexity of straddling two cultures: hotpot, emblematic of Chinese culinary heritage, follows him from home to school, rendering his ethnic background conspicuously visible and creating discomfort in the mainstream social sphere. This narrative also underscores the inherent instability and ambiguity of transnational identities (Anthias, 2002). Although Joe retains strong ties to Chinese food culture, he opts to conceal them in public spaces, reflecting how second-generation Chinese youth strategically negotiate identity expression and social adaptation (Brah, 1996). By avoiding hotpot before entering shared environments, he engages in a micro-level act of identity management to minimise perceived cultural differences.

Manalansan IV (2006) asserted that smell is critical for delineating immigrant identities and social boundaries. In the above example, the pervasive smell of hotpot defines Joe's difference in the wider school community, placing him at a "sensory boundary" that makes his cultural background impossible to conceal. In this way, he is involuntarily marked out and exposed. The othering of certain odours is evident in the experiences of both Rob and Joe. Their food smells are perceived not as neutral but as alien, reinforcing a distinction between "us" and "them". As Anderson (2013) argued in her discussion of immigration control and national borders, the state is engaged in producing and policing the boundaries of a so-called "community of value" – a moralised, racialised, and often classed framework that determines who is deemed to belong. Although her analysis focuses on formal citizenship, her insights extend to how everyday cultural signifiers, such as language, behaviour, and sensory experiences, are mobilised in the social sorting of individuals. Manalansan IV further argued that smell not only fosters belonging but also becomes a means of exclusion and distancing (p. 44). As Drobnick observed, it is "a mechanism for demarcating self and other and underpins the prejudice that sustains these boundaries" (p. 14). Rob's classmates

remark, “What’s that smell? It stinks”, when he “brings Chinese fried rice”, making him acutely aware of his cultural distinctiveness at school – precisely the visibility he wishes to avoid. He ultimately opts for sandwiches over home-cooked Chinese meals, a choice shaped less by individual taste than by a need to conform to mainstream olfactory norms. For him, food smells are not confined to taste alone; they cling to bodies and clothing, becoming involuntary cultural signifiers. Once these signifiers penetrate the public sphere of school, a sensory clash ensues, “walking hotpot”, signifying that his body carries the cultural aroma, “contaminating” the public environment as he moves and prompting him to modify his behaviour to avoid unwanted attention (Kikon, 2008).

Similarly, because Chinese cuisine often carries a strong aroma, John opts for the same meals as his peers at university in order to blend in and gain their acceptance:

As for meals at uni, I usually go with friends to buy sandwiches, just a meal deal from Tesco, with a drink and a snack. I wouldn't bring Chinese food there because it has a strong smell, and the food container is big, requiring a lot of space. No, not taking Chinese, just eat Chinese at home or at takeaway shops.

John’s choices are not purely about convenience, they also serve as a way of performing identity within different social contexts. His preference for mainstream foods in the university environment reflects how individuals perform belonging to peer groups by imitating friends eating practices in order to avoid being labelled as “other”. Although he does not completely eschew Chinese cuisine, his selective engagement with it reveals that his cultural expression is largely confined to particular settings. This supports Massey’s (1994) contention that space is not merely a backdrop for social interaction, it actively shapes behaviour, identity, and the visibility of cultural norms. John explicitly states that he only eats Chinese food at home or in takeaway shops, and instead opts for a Tesco meal deal at university, sandwiches, a drink, and a snack aligning himself with the dietary habits of his British friends. This distinction points to a clear demarcation of cultural practices based on location: at home, he can comfortably enjoy traditional dishes without scrutiny, whereas in public, he conforms to more socially accepted norms.

In John's case, he perceives the university as an environment where bringing Chinese food would be impractical or unsuitable, partly due to its strong smell and the space required for larger containers. His cultural food becomes a social object that is subject to the judgements of others, and the mention of spatial constraints underscores his awareness of how food occupies and interacts with its social surroundings. Easthope (2009) noted that, rather than remaining static, identity shifts along with the places people inhabit. John's eating habits exemplify this fluidity: he modifies his identity in different contexts, selecting portable, inconspicuous meals at university while maintaining cultural continuity at home. The practicality and low visibility of a Tesco meal deal contrast with the pungent aroma and bulkier packaging of Chinese dishes, perceived as intrusive in both spatial and social dimensions.

John's account of his dietary choices and social activities illuminates how he negotiates food choices within a mainstream school setting. His multifaceted engagement with food illustrates the ways in which individuals with transnational identities adapt their behaviours and choices to varying social contexts and cultural milieus. Just as John's different food choices in different social settings demonstrate his sensitivity and adaptability to cultural differences, they also reveal his effort to preserve his cultural identity while seeking harmonious social relationships across diverse cultural backgrounds.

Friendship here occupies a powerful social domain, where young people endeavour to establish identity recognition and project themselves through interactions with others. John's dietary choices are informed either by a social network that may be predominantly non-Chinese, or by social scenarios in which he chooses to align with his friends' eating preferences in the pursuit of a sense of belonging. This often entails obscuring or adjusting cultural traits to integrate. In the same way that John and his friends purchase identical Tesco meal deals, Mike, a 21-year-old fellow university student, recounted his own experiences of dining with friends at school:

I usually eat with my friends in the canteen or buy sandwiches or wraps from Greggs or Sainsbury, and we all pretty much eat the same things without having to make any special choices.

In this context, food functions not merely as a source of nourishment but also as a social tool, one strategically negotiated between maintaining friendships and personal cultural heritage. Drawing on Haayen's (2016) study of the links between identity and friendship among second-generation Mexican immigrants aged 14-18 in Pleasant Park, Dallas, it becomes clear that peer groups not only help individuals establish a sense of identity but also shape how they present themselves to the outside world. Thus, peer groups serve as a social space where individuals continually adjust their cultural expressions to integrate into mainstream contexts. Mike's decision to share the same food choices as his friends ensures that he maintains a sense of belonging to his friendship group, avoiding being labelled as "different" or attracting undue attention.

Therefore, his food choices embody both a compliance with mainstream social norms and an adaptive expression of identity across different spaces. Through friendship, he strikes a balance between mainstream culture and his own cultural identification, successfully integrating into the social circles of campus life while continuing to preserve his cultural roots in more private settings.

In summary, the smell, texture, and presentation of Chinese food, particularly in school and university contexts emerge as potent sensory markers that differentiate participants from their peers and expose them to the risk of othering. By selectively consuming Chinese food in private domains such as the home or ethnic restaurants and opting for socially "neutral" alternatives like sandwiches or supermarket meal deals in public, these young people draw informal yet powerful boundaries between cultural belonging and social acceptability.

This sensory negotiation aligns with Anderson's (2013) concept of the "community of value", revealing how olfactory and embodied cues, like food smell, are used to police who is perceived to belong. Manalansan IV's (2006) theorisation of smell as a racialised and classed sensory register is equally resonant here, illustrating how the sensory field becomes a terrain of cultural and social contestation. Through the lens of sensory ethnography (Pink, 2015), this chapter has further shown that food practices are deeply affective and embodied sites where young people actively engage with and reinterpret the cultural meanings passed down through family and shaped by social environments. Such practices draw and reinforce the boundary between Chinese food in private and

sandwiches or meal deals in school. In so doing, they produce ways of being through the adoption of sandwich/meal-deal habits and the avoidance of odorous foods in school time, and ways of belonging that are muted in public settings but affirmed at home, in takeaways, and in Chinese venues.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter elucidated how food practices shape the transnational identities of second-generation Chinese youth in Glasgow across family dining table (compare with London), family-run takeaways/restaurants, and schools – by analysing interlocking mechanisms including boundary work, embodiment and the senses, and digital mediation. Across all sites, the primary identity outcomes are ways of being (tangible, context-specific behaviours rooted in food practice) and ways of belonging (emotional and cultural connections to heritage or mainstream communities) and situated transnational identity. These differences in situated ways of being and belonging shape distinct transnational identity trajectories for Chinese youth in the two cities.

For Glasgow's, their collectively behaviours, communal sense of belonging and avoid being othering foster an integrated transnational identity anchored in family, community and friends. Their ways of being exhibit characteristics of collective adaptation. They follow consistent Chinese dining etiquette at the family table, engage in adopt-authentic dietary switching between the front and back of house in family-run takeaways and restaurants, and opt for odorless mainstream food at school. All these behaviors revolve around integrating into the family and community collective, aligning closely with the cultural practices of both. In terms of ways of belonging, the sense of belonging of Glasgow's youth is collective, rooted in shared dietary traditions with their families and consistent cultural practices with the community, and grounded in cultural alignment with the friends.

In contrast, participants in London develop a more agentic and negotiable transnational identity through their individually negotiated ways of being and personalised sense of belonging. Their families prepare specific food separately for them, and they also independently create innovative mixed dishes, retaining the core of Chinese cuisine

while highlighting individual preferences, so exhibiting dual flexibility in adapting to mainstream culture and upholding culture heritage. The sense of belonging of London's is individual, derived from their families' social class and acceptance of individual dietary differences. This autonomy frees their sense of belonging from rigid communal norms, grounding it in familial emotional acceptance instead, and enables them to construct a transnational identity that is both rooted in heritage and responsive to London's diverse, cosmopolitan environment.

Three original insights follow. First, a sensory-ethnographic focus on smell reveals how olfactory cues operate as involuntary ethnic badges that must be tactically muted or accentuated depending on space and audience; this extends to current migration studies, where the senses are typically treated as background atmosphere rather than as constitutive social forces. Second, the analysis pushes Bhabha's (1994) third space from an abstract metaphor towards a grounded, practice-based framework: second-generation actors continually toggle between "Chinese" and "Scottish/British" positionalities, not in a vacuum but while packing lunchboxes, seasoning hot-pots, or deciding what "can" and "cannot" leave the kitchen of a takeaway. Third, the family takeaway as a simultaneously commercial and domestic node demonstrates that migrant businesses are intergenerational places where culinary knowledge, notions of authenticity, and transnational attachments are negotiated and sometimes contested. In other words, the shop counter doubles as a diasporic site.

Glasgow, as the urban context for this research, profoundly influences the boundary work and transnational identity formations of second-generation Chinese youth through its inclusive policies and diverse culinary ecosystem. In the post-Brexit era, cultural boundaries within British society have become increasingly fraught. Their transnational identity is no longer a fractured compromise, but rather a flexible form of boundary-crossing within a framework of accommodation. To investigate how second-generation Chinese youth navigate their identity in London, the next chapter discusses music practices among participants living within the cosmopolitan and multicultural contexts of both cities.

Chapter 5: Music and Sonic Strategies: Performing Transnational Identity Through Musical Practices Across Spaces

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how listening, musical performance, and soundscape navigation function as everyday practices of visibility management and social positioning. It traces mechanisms such as boundary work, positioning, embodiment, sensory engagement, and, where relevant, capital conversion across private listening, peer interaction, intra-diasporic scenes, and urban performance spaces. Across both cities, second-generation youth treat diaspora as a flexible resource rather than a fixed identity, London participants tend to enact more strategic and publicly visible, alliance-based performances of identity, whereas Glasgow participants more often live belonging as an affective, low-visibility, and collectively grounded everyday enactments of transnational identity.

It then examines their effects on second-generation Chinese youth's ways of being and ways of belonging, and it extends the sensory dimension of identity-making into the auditory realm, focusing on everyday musical practices, sonic strategies, and performative engagements in urban contexts. It argues that these practices constitute a form of sonic adjustment, concealment, or curation – navigating both the cultural expectation from mainstream society and within their own diaspora communities. In doing so, these youth cultivate a situated, flexible, fluid, and collectively shared sense of transnational belonging.

The chapter unfolds across several analytical dimensions. First, it lays the theoretical groundwork: sonic politics. Following this, it turns to Pan-Asian music and K-pop, examining how world music and transnational artists such as those affiliated with Riz Ahmed foster a sense of shared resonance among Pan-Asian audiences. It also considers how the “girl crush” aesthetic in K-pop empowers Chinese diasporic female to resist gender stereotypes. Thirdly, it investigates sonic strategies of resistance, including the

use of headphones to create private “auditory bubbles” (Bull, 2007) that shield people from public sonic hegemonies and familial cultural authority. It then further explores the selective display of music tastes in peer interactions to balance pressures of integration, and the appropriation of hip-hop culture to challenge the Chinese community’s cultural expectations while asserting a localised identity. Fourth, it focuses on urban performative settings, such as the strategic use of Chinese-inspired fashion as a cultural resource in specific social scenes, and the embodied expressions of identity at concerts and carnivals. These events offer opportunities to temporarily suspend identity markers, illustrating the contextual and fluid nature of identity performance. Finally, this chapter conclude with identity outcomes of participants living in different cities and original insights.

The music/sonic material in this chapter draws on 11 first round interviews as initial data and 10 follow up interviews (9 in Glasgow, 12 in London; 13 females, 8 males) as supplementary data that contained media, leisure and musical content, along with site observations at concerts, KTV, bars/clubs, festivals, and street scenes across London. Private settings were recorded or noted with prior consent. Public events (concerts/carnival/street) were treated as public observations; individuals are not identifiable in notes. Semi-private venues (KTV, clubs) were observed only after verbal consent from the host/party, with opt-outs honoured; no audio recording took place in venues unless permission was granted.

5.2 Sonic strategies as boundary work and positioning

The globalisation-induced dissolution of genre boundaries has provided fertile ground for the articulation of hybrid identities. Homi Bhabha’s concept of the third space (1994) proves illuminating here: cultural encounters do not merely reproduce a binary opposition of “indigenous versus foreign”, but rather give rise to an intermediary realm defined by multiplicity and fluidity. This space challenges the essentialist illusion of single culture, foregrounding hybridity as the driving force behind the reconstruction of meaning. In Britain, this dynamic is exemplified by two-tone ska’s fusion of Jamaican rhythms with British punk energy, which Paul Gilroy (1993) identified as part of the Black Atlantic’s transnational cultural formation that disrupts racialised

boundaries through musical syncretism, redefining where cultural belonging begins and ends.

Sonic politics frequently encounters what Stoeber (2016) terms the “sonic colour line”, a racialised auditory regime that marginalises non-white expressions as foreign noise. It draws an auditory boundary line between local and non-local. In London, for instance, municipal regulations have targeted Bangladeshi community music as a “nuisance”. Back (2007), in *The Art of Listening*, further documented how such auditory hierarchies enforce symbolic exclusion. Sonic politics here is about how sound, including music, speech, noise, and silence, shapes power relations, social identities, and political dynamics. It explores how sound is deployed as a tool of governance, resistance, and cultural expression, often intersecting with issues of race, class, gender, and colonialism. For second-generation Chinese youth, music is a tool to express themselves and offers them the power to shape their social relations. This framework further lays bare the intimate connection between sensory perception and power: who is entitled to speak, whose voices are legitimised, and whose are excluded.

DeNora (1999) drew on Foucault’s definition of “technologies of the self,” i.e., practices through which individuals actively shape their own subjectivity – to shift her focus to how music endows individuals with agency. She contended that music is a resource proactively mobilised by individuals: through a set of actionable practices, it serves to sustain self-construction and allows individuals to engage in the “work of self-formation”. This chapter focuses on participants’ musical practices, spanning private, small-group, and large-scale musical activities which offer an ideal lens to observe music “in action”. Specifically, it examines how music is integrated into the transnational identity construction of second-generation Chinese youth, operating as a form of aesthetic subjectivity.

5.3 Hybrid identities in sound: pan-Asian and K-pop musical resistance and reinvention among second-generation Chinese youth

In this section, I show how second-generation British Chinese young people take music as the core of boundary work and use it as a positioning mechanism to shape identity,

with obvious differences in ways of being/belonging and situated identity outcomes due to gender and music type.

Second-generation Chinese youth's musical preferences and sources show music acts as boundary work and positioning: it demarcates "us" (pan-Asian groups, transnational K-pop communities/fan clubs) from "them" (mainstream white British culture) via a preference for Asian artists/music, linking them to other diasporic groups with shared migrant roots. This positioning mechanism turns music-embedded narratives (racial experiences, gender perspectives) into personal identity references, integrating Asian groups' common struggles (e.g., racial microaggressions, intergenerational rifts) into their self-perception to align with the "pan-Asian" collective.

These two mechanisms generate two interrelated identity outcomes. First, participants construct their own ways of being through music consumption; second, they develop a sense of belonging that transcends geographical locations or single diasporic groups, instead taking the form of multi-diasporic communities' connections by emotional resonance and cultural identity. The other outcome is a situated transnational identity that deeply embedded in the specific context of mainstream British exclusion, Asian group alliances, and transnational cultural flows, and characterised by the dual traits of locality (grounded in local experiences) and transnationality (connected across borders).

The fieldwork findings indicate that second-generation Chinese young people's access to music is highly dependent on active sharing among peers and friends. This sharing behaviour is significantly influenced by factors such as their friends' ethnicity, family backgrounds, and cultural identities. Notably, all close friends of the participants living in London were born and raised in the UK and had Asian heritage, including those with parents from India, Pakistan, Palestine, and Japan. Participants generally tended to exchange playlists with these friends, as Jane from London explained:

I exchange playlists with my friends, and they all enjoy listening to artists with an Asian background, because they are all Asian themselves – Pakistani, Thai, Japanese – who were born in the UK but whose parents come from Asia. Artists like NIKI, Charlene Su, and some London-based singers originally from China,

Korea, Singapore, Vietnam... There's a song by NIKI in particular, where she talks about her origin in Jakarta. It represents us somehow.

Similarly, Amy, also from London, said:

I would say I tend not to make any British friends in general, because with lots of British things, I just don't have much in common. I tend to lean more towards Asian things, you know, like Asian songs, Korean music... more on the East Asian side. It's like I'm making my own way of navigating life in Western society. I consider myself more generally British Asian, because we are all in one genre.

The narratives of Jane and Amy reveal two interrelated themes. Firstly, both are inclined to consume music by artists with an Asian background. This preference is not merely a matter of taste but symbolises a shared cultural space and transnational identity among global Asian communities. Here, music is a medium through which Asian groups define the boundaries of “us” (Roy, 2002). This “us” includes not only second-generation Chinese youth but also extends to a wider transnational Asian cultural collective. Both statements express a sense of distance from mainstream British culture (“British things”) and highlight how Jane and Amy use Asian cultural consumption to mark this boundary. As Hebdige (1979) observed in his work on youth subcultures, cultural practices often function as subtle forms of resistance, challenging full assimilation into mainstream culture by “leaning towards Asian things” and distancing themselves from “British things”, and drawing boundaries between Asian background music and UK music.

Sharing a similar musical orientation to Jane, Larry from Glasgow further elaborated on this collective sense of “us” as not only defined through music consumption but also reinforced through the everyday sharing of experiences, humour around racial encounters, and the collective memories of growing up in Asian households:

And it's the same with my other friends from different cultural backgrounds, Indian, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Hong Kong. That's why it's very easy for me to make friends with people from other descents. We can talk about racist comments that people say to us, and it's fine. I could say something about my experience, and they'd share theirs, it's kind of mutual. That's probably why we connect, they also

experience similar things, like growing up here, finding it hard to talk to their parents, or going through the typical “Asian household” kind of stuff. That’s why it’s easy for me to bond with them.

Larry’s account illustrates how diasporic youth from different backgrounds in the UK construct friendships through their everyday interactions. He highlights how bonds are formed with friends from other Asian households through shared experiences of growing up and the humorous reframing of racial remarks, and shared class personalities. By joking with one another and turning racism into something they can laugh about, they not only reduce the emotional burden caused by racial prejudice but also strengthen an affective sense of community among Asians and other minority groups with similar experiences. This cross-border sense of community is rooted in the shared circumstances of diasporic identities. Most participants in this study, like Larry and his friends (of Indian, Pakistani, Kazakhstani heritage), grew up in working or lower-middle-class households in areas when they were very young, like Glasgow’s Govanhill (a neighborhood referenced in Smith et al., 2021 as a site where poverty is routinely racialised). Their shared experiences of “Asian household struggles” (e.g., intergenerational rifts, financial constraints) are not merely ethnic but deeply classed. They exchange playlists, joke about racial microaggressions, and bonding over pan-Asian music is thus a form of “counter-aesthetic” (Smith et al., 2021. pp.107) that merges racial and class solidarity. For second-generation Chinese youth, these peer networks are not just Asian diaspora alliances but class-based communities. They share similar cultural background and social positions in receiving society and turn to pan-Asian music as an alternative space to validate their dual marginalisation. As Cohen (2008) noted in his study of diasporic communities, groups with similar or comparable migratory backgrounds often form emotional alliances through shared experiences in the host country, with such alliances fundamentally centred on collective social positions in term of race and ethnicity. Music becomes the medium through which these youth reframe their classed, racialised everyday lives as a source of collective strength.

This cultural orientation and friendship network resonates with Chinese Londoner George’s preference for Riz Ahmed’s “Englistan”. George explained that this song captures the social positions of a shared collective identity as second-generation Asians living in England:

This song was shared with me by my friend, he's Pakistani, but like me, you know, we've been in London for so many years, and there are always people calling for their identities, talking about the diversity of the city. There's always a voice reminding you that you are Chinese, that you're still a minority in this place. For example, in both my secondary school and high school I was the only Chinese. In the lyrics Riz mentioned about racist beef and tea. All of this is in the place where I live, politeness with violence.

The lyrics are as follows: *This is England...Where we're all surviving, Politeness mixed with violence, this is England, the bridge we're living in... Racist beef, cakes and tea, all go together like a do-re-mi... Is Britain great? Well, hey, don't ask me, but it's where I live and why my heart beats.*

For George, Englistan is not merely a song but a code of recognition, a way of positioning him and his Asian friends in London to articulate their marginalised experiences and shared narratives. All second-generation Chinese youth participating in this study shared discriminatory experiences in London. For example, George recalled, “I was the only Chinese student in both my secondary school and high school”, Andy shared, “When I was a kid, people would often throw things at our windows, and we never knew who it was”, and Lily reflected, “I had no friends when I was in primary school”. These shared narratives can be found in the songs, allowing listeners to recognise their common predicament of living in the UK yet being perceived as “others”. In this way, fragmented individual anguish coalesces into the collective experience of the pan-British Asian community. This aligns with what Kalra et al. (2005) emphasised in *Diaspora and Hybridity*: cross-ethnic solidarity among British Asians stems from a shared awareness of the same set of mainstream exclusionary mechanisms. Although groups of South Asian, East Asian, and Southeast Asian heritage differ in terms of cultural backgrounds, they share the context of being regarded by the mainstream as “non-British others”, and it is within this context that they have developed an identity-based need to resist singular ethnic labelling and build a pan-Asian alliance. Similarly, when Larry shares experiences of “intergenerational rifts in Asian households” with friends of Indian and Kazakhstani heritage, and reframes racist remarks through humour, he is expanding his identity from “Chinese” to “a member of

the pan-Asian community” through these “shared diasporic experiences” – including the cultural adaptation struggles of migrant families and the identity anxieties of ethnic minorities. Thus, Riz Ahmed’s song offers an expression for their collective experiences, situating their personal struggles within a wider Asian marginalised narrative. These practices echo Lowe’s (1996) account of Asian diaspora identity: pan-Asian identity is not a cultural community, but rather a dynamic alliance forged through shared political and cultural practices within specific historical contexts.

In this study, most female participants expressed a strong interest in K-pop, a form of pop music from South Korea. This interest not only reflects their consumption habits regarding East Asian popular culture but also reveals an ongoing process of identification with it. Here, boundary work surfaced in K-pop’s pan-Asian traits (e.g. Chinese drums/flutes in songs, pan-Asian cultural symbols), “girl crush” style (tomboyish outfits, assertive stages), and private media like headphones for K-pop, all of which mark challenges to Western-centric traditional gender norms and mainstream aesthetic pressure. The positioning mechanism is anchored in K-pop’s hybridity (such as WANNABE’s autonomy lyrics and tracks with Chinese elements) to move beyond exclusive Chineseness, and in transnational fan practices (group singing/dancing, cross-background discussions) to forge collective bonds. This further builds their situated transnational identity (critical, K-pop fan, pan-Asian) and shapes their ways of being/belonging (living through K-pop consumption, belonging to borderless fan affective networks).

The “de-nationalised” and “pan-Asian” characteristics of the Korean Wave (Jin, 2022) offer these youth a third space for negotiating their transnational identities. K-pop, as a cultural form that transcends China, Korea, and Japan while circulating globally, embodies elements of Chinese culture while incorporating Western musical styles. It represents a pan-Asian transnational culture that allows second-generation Chinese young people to step outside the binary of “Chinese versus British”, seeking belonging within the broader and more flexible category of “Asia”.

Moreover, their recognition of values such as independence and confidence promoted by female K-pop stars and their music also signifies a space in which to challenge the traditional gender stereotype. The K-pop industry has restructured the representation of

femininity and the participation patterns of female audiences (Dans, 2018), giving rise to a new genre that subverts traditional paradigms – “girl crush”. Characterised by autonomy, self-confidence, and even assertiveness and non-conventional dispositions, the “girl crush” style not only challenges traditional gender stereotypes (Wang, 2025) but also provides a path of identification for young women, enabling them to empower their own female strength more firmly through K-pop cultural practices. The “girl crush” aesthetic and narratives of female strength embodied by K-pop girl groups have therefore become tools of resistance against such social pressures.

Equally as important, the transnational fans community cultivated by K-pop provides these young women with a sense of belonging. Through music, idol images, and fan communities, K-pop links fans from diverse backgrounds into an affective network. Female fandom, in particular, offers dual value: first, it creates a public space for the discussion of gender issues, fostering cross-fan group interactions that nurture belonging, enhance self-esteem, and evoke positive emotions (Lee, 2013; Laffan, 2021); second, it challenges traditional gender norms (Oh & Kim, 2018). This transnational resonance allows fans to find a sense of belonging that is not tied exclusively to places but is instead grounded in multiple cultural connections.

The rapid rise of K-pop in the twenty-first century, together with the diversity of boy and girl groups, provides diasporic youth with a platform for identification that transcends national boundaries. For example, Lily, a 19-year-old from Glasgow, decorates her bedroom with numerous posters of Korean idols and highlights the impact of K-pop in the UK and its appeal to second-generation Chinese youth:

It's those Korean groups, Blackpink, New Jeans, Twice. Blackpink even came to the UK for a concert, they are so popular. It's both Asian culture and international in its aesthetic. Compared to the traditional Chinese culture of our parents' generation, K-pop is closer to what we imagine as modern Asian trends, you know, it's a blend of so many elements.

Lily's comment underscores K-pop's cultural hybridity, which combines symbols of Asian identity with the production techniques and visual aesthetics of global mainstream music, such as hip-hop, R&B, and EDM (Shin, 2009).

Similarly, Jia from Glasgow explained her perception of K-pop:

Some members of Korean girl groups are Chinese, and some songs have Chinese elements, like drums or flutes, or the costumes. But it's not just about China, because Asian countries share a lot of similar cultures. Plus, it's really popular, sounds great, and looks beautiful – the music videos are so fancy. I think this is the kind of style we like.

As Lie (2015) argued, K-pop is the result of repackaging various Asian cultural elements. Through its polished production, transnational idol imagery, and strong digital media presence (YouTube, TikTok, Weibo, Instagram), it has become a global cultural symbol (Jin, 2016; Lie, 2015). This amalgamation of Asian cultural elements provides participants with a decentring of “Chineseness”, enabling second-generation Chinese young females to define their identities not through an exclusive claim to Chinese culture, but through resonating with broader Asian cultural narratives (Choi & Maliangkay, 2015).

When discussing their preference for K-pop girl groups, participants frequently mentioned the deeper meanings conveyed by the songs: independence, female strength, and a challenge to traditional gender stereotypes. Ivy's experience illustrates the emotional resonance of K-pop in individual identity formation:

I'm not too sure how the general public perceives girl crush. From what I've seen, the overall vibe is quite positive. On the one hand, I can draw feminist strength from my favourite idols; on the other, their work prompts me to reflect on and understand myself better. Take ITZY's “WANNABE” as an example – the song gives me a sense of power, it has such a strong rhythm, it makes me want to dance. Some of my friends and I all like these songs, and we sing and dance together – it's like we're gaining energy.

The lyrics of “WANNABE” emphasise female autonomy and agency: *You're nagging non-stop / But I'm my own boss / Gotta let me work it out for myself / Don't need your guidance / I do what I wanna / Just leave me to own my own mistakes / And let me breathe, I need a little freedom / To make big girl decisions.*

This experience aligns with Lin and Rudolf's (2017) observation that female idols' images and performances not only offer society freer modes of female expression but

also generate a sense of empowerment. Similarly, Lee (2013) explained that K-pop fan communities provide spaces for women to discuss gender issues and form emotional connections, and the collective dancing practices described by Lily and her friends suggest this form of collective empowerment.

Alice further commented on how the girl crush style subverts traditional femininity:

I like them because now this “girl crush” concept is very popular. They’re not like the old female idols, overly feminine, cute, wearing tight skirts and high heels. Now many groups have opted for tomboyish or aggressive styles in their fashion and makeup. I can also feel that the kind of female power they convey is strong. You know, all those traditional stereotypes of Asian women, but they show something different, a bit rebellious. I really like that.

Through Lily and Alice’s accounts, it is evident that girl crush serves as an important cultural space for female participants to reinterpret feminism and resist stereotypes. This underscores K-pop’s value as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), allowing young women not only to gain recognition among peers through trend-conscious cultural consumption but also to develop a more agentic identity through gendered expressions aligned with postfeminist discourse (Gill, 2008). Moreover, fan communities offer them a sense of emotional belonging that transcends borders and ethnic boundaries. For second-generation Chinese women, K-pop becomes a source of female strength that is neither nation-centric nor dictated by white cultural norms. Their identification with K-pop thus becomes both de-nationalised and pan-Asianised. It’s more about shared affect, embodied experiences, and a collective resistance to structural biases.

Nevertheless, participants were aware that K-pop is marginalised within British society. As Kalra et al. (2005) noted, in a media landscape dominated by Western-centric narratives, cultural products such as K-pop are often regarded as “ethnic media”, sidelined by gatekeepers. As 25-year-old Maya remarked:

When I recommend a K-pop group to my friends, the next thing they say is how much they love Spice Girls & Little Mix. There's a stigma attached for some reason, and I often think they might just be racist.

Ruby from Glasgow further reflected:

UKers love their traditional girl and boy groups, it's something that has been ingrained in our music scene. I genuinely think that if some groups were promoted properly here, they would take off. Also, more shows here would be fantastic, but that might just be me being greedy.

Their observations touch on sonic politics, in that musical taste operates as a contested terrain of auditory citizenship. Maya's confusion about the contrasting reception to Spice Girls and K-pop reveals that aesthetic preferences in British society function as a tool for reinforcing racial boundaries. This aligns with Sara Ahmed's (2000) argument that difference is not an inherent trait of identities, but something actively produced through biased processes of perception.

British and Western academia have long debated how racialised standards of "authenticity" are employed to evaluate "non-Western" popular music (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000; Bakrania, 2013). K-pop is frequently documented within Western academia and journalism as "an inauthentic other pop" (Yoon, 2017), "niche and manufactured" (Huq, 2003), highly polished (Hutnyk, 2000), and a high-functioning bubblegum machine (Glasby, 2018). This perspective undoubtedly stems from a judgemental master-viewpoint. Is it white people who determine authenticity, or someone else? Those labels are continually reinforced by a white-dominant cultural discourse. Smith et al (2021) were pointed out that dominant aesthetic judgments mobilise signs of disorder as rationalisations for differential inclusion that obscure both racial and class hierarchies. This framing places second-generation Chinese women's music practices in a state of marginalisation; even if their musical preferences are global and mainstream elsewhere, they may still face scepticism about the legitimacy of their tastes.

Faced with such inequalities, second-generation Chinese young women carve out a transnational identity with critical consciousness: they mark boundaries with

mainstream norms without retreating into a diaspora, forging their own third space within these cultural tensions. Through their collective consumption of Asian music, participants like Amy, Ruby, and Maya build a sense of “we belong to the same scene” and position themselves as K-pop fans by using music as a means of solidarity.

Echoing this, participants such as George, Larry, Jane, and Amy similarly use music as a medium to transform individual experiences of marginalisation into collective expressions. Their preference for pan-Asian artists and musical forms consolidates a sense of “we” that transcends ethnic boundaries, an affective and practical bond forged through shared efforts to mark boundaries amid marginalisation.

Together, these practices shape their situated transnational identity: an identity deeply rooted in the specificity of their British context which entails navigating white-dominant cultural hierarchies, confronting the “others” of Asian popular music, and negotiating marginalisation, while retaining transnational ties to pan-Asian cultural flows and global fan communities. Thus, this thesis challenges the notion that transnational identity needs to be tethered to “home” or the parental homeland. Instead, it demonstrates that the transnational identity of second-generation Chinese youth can be home-unbound, but grounded in their local experiences of inequality, yet it also refuses to be confined by Britain’s racialised boundaries, as they draw on K-pop’s global reach and pan-Asian solidarity to claim a space that is both “British” (in their lived context) and “transnational” (in their cultural affiliations). This ultimately expands transnationalism’s analytical scope to question whether transnational connection needs reference to a specific motherland, or can instead emerge from the urgent, agentic work of claiming a sense of belonging in the face of marginalisation.

For the female participants, this identity is further inflected in their positioning through K-pop’s “girl crush” narratives, which adds a layer of female empowerment, making their situated transnational identity a rejection of intersecting gendered and cultural oppressions. Ultimately, it is an identity that is both contextually rooted and expansively connected. Among London-based participants, transnational identity tends to crystallise as a more explicitly articulated pan-Asian positioning, sustained through dense multi-ethnic Asian peer networks and the everyday navigation of a highly diverse yet persistently racialised metropolitan environment. Here, music functions as a

recognisable code of affiliation that enables participants to name themselves as part of a wider diasporic community and to locate belonging within an alliance-based Asian collectivity. For participants in Glasgow, transnational identity emerges in a more affective and practice-based manner, grounded in everyday interactions, shared humour around racial experiences, and intimate forms of cultural consumption such as K-pop fandom. Pan-Asian belonging here is less frequently claimed as an explicit label and more often enacted through lived solidarities, emotional resonance, and gendered forms of empowerment.

Meanwhile, findings suggest that Glasgow participants often prefer or accept broader and more flexible descriptors rather than fixed or highly specific national labels. These include “British Chinese”, “Chinese background”, “British born Chinese”, “second generation Chinese”. As Ruby from Glasgow said:

“I prefer a more general term, and when most people ask me, they ask if I’m British rather than using the word “Scottish”, because the connotation of that word just doesn’t feel quite natural. It’s fine to say “second generation”, as my mum puts it, or “BBC” (British-born Chinese), as you or other Chinese people might say.”

Her acceptance of terms such as “second generation” or “BBC” suggests that these labels were recognisable within family and community contexts. However, her preference for a more “general” description allowed her to avoid overly narrow national, regional or ethnic classifications.

Although Ruby lived in Glasgow, “Scottish” did not function for her as a neutral geographical label. It carried racialised and cultural assumptions about appearance, accent and belonging. As Claire, from Glasgow, said: *“when you say you’re Scottish, people automatically assume you look like that and speak like that. Although I know not all Scots are like that, it just feels a bit odd when I say it myself.”* This suggests that “Scottish” is an identity category laden with mainstream expectations, stereotypes and embodied norms. Participants’ appearance, family background and linguistic and cultural experiences lead them to feel that there is a mismatch between themselves and this label. That’s suggest that “Scottish” did not fully accommodate her embodied experience as a Chinese-background young person raised in Britain.

Here, the variation in participants' accounts reinforces the need to treat "second generation" not as a shared identity, but as a structural and analytical descriptor containing diverse and sometimes conflicting forms of self-understanding. This can be linked to participant, Sue who shared how she responds to questions of identification differently depending on who is asking. As discussed in Chapter 4 Section 4.4, Sue shows how identification is performed relationally and strategically in response to different audiences, expectations and forms of recognition, by describing herself as "Scottish" when speaking to Scottish people, but as "Chinese" when speaking to Chinese people.

The London cases reveal a related but different form of boundary work, participants tend to emphasize their London experiences. Alice, who is from London, said in response to the question of how she describes herself:

"I wouldn't just say 'English'; I'd say I grew up in London, or that I've lived in London with my Chinese parents."

Alice's account suggests that "English" felt too narrow or culturally loaded, while "British" and "London" offered more flexible ways of positioning herself. Similarly, George, who frequently travels between China and London, explained how he explains himself in different countries:

"In China, I say I grew up in London but my parents are Chinese; in the UK, I say I live in a Chinese family but have always lived in London."

George's self-description changes depending on audience and location. In China, he emphasises his London upbringing. In Britain, he emphasises his Chinese family background because this explains his connection to Chineseness within a British context. His account therefore shows identity as relational positioning rather than as a fixed category. He adjusts his self-description in response to the assumptions attached to different social settings.

These accounts show that they negotiated different scales of belonging depending on where they were, who they were speaking to, and what assumptions they were responding to. The description used here, such as "British Chinese", "Chinese

background”, “BBC” (British-born Chinese), or context-specific explanations of family background and upbringing appear in participants’ everyday accounts. Here, “second generation” is used to describe a shared sociological position from which participants negotiated belonging through music, friendship, racialised experience and cultural consumption.

Taken together, participants’ musical preferences and attachments therefore help explain why participants often described themselves through broad and flexible terms, rather than through narrower national labels such as “Scottish” or “English”. Their music practices show that identity was not experienced as a fixed ethnic or national category, but as a situated process of identification. Through Asian music, K-pop fandom and pan-Asian peer networks, participants created ways of being that were locally grounded in Britain but culturally and affectively connected to wider Asian and transnational worlds.

5.4 Auditory marking boundary practices and in-betweenness

This section shifts from examining what second-generation Chinese young people listen to, to exploring how they consume music across the tube, their homes, cars, and KTVs, and with different social groups (family, peers, strangers). The aim is to unpack how these young people navigate their identities in varied contexts through everyday music practices.

During this process, boundary work surfaces in auditory isolation between personal taste and family and diasporic expectations, peer negotiation, and public sonic norms that mark their being and belonging in the world contextually. Embodiment and the senses anchor these boundaries in the use of headphones and speakers to carve out a private zone. Positioning operates in these space-specific music practices, as the young people actively align themselves with (or distance themselves from) particular identity groups through consumption. These mechanisms shape their situated transnational identity.

5.4.1 Auditory bubbles as auditory boundary making

This section starts by discussing how participants often create private auditory spaces using headphones and speakers to draw boundaries with the dominant sonic sphere such as the underground or subway, Sainsbury's, and home kitchens dominated by parent(s). By actively selecting Chinese and Korean songs, K-pop, and English hip-hop within a private auditory space, one positions oneself in a middle ground neither fully aligned with British mainstream culture nor the cultural heritage of one's parental homeland, thereby asserting a sense of distinctiveness.

These spaces reveal the “in-betweenness” of their identities, how the second generation is stuck between cultures and therefore prone to occupy a marginal position in the migration society (Gans, 1992; Heath, Rothon, & Kilpi, 2008; Portes & Zhou, 1993). In public spaces, British mainstream culture exerts aural governance through English Christmas songs, underground announcements, and other forms of sound hegemony, which compels participants to play their preferred music through their headphones, creating a deliberate contrast. Within the family sphere, the 1990s Mandarin music of their parents represents significant cultural and generational authority tied to the ancestral homeland. By contrast, participants construct private soundscapes with English hip-hop or K-pop, distancing themselves from parental cultural memories. Their dual “unruliness” towards both soundscapes is a sonic articulation of the “neither-here-nor-there” nature of transnational identity. The “auditory bubbles” (Bull, 2007) they construct with headphones and bedroom lighting provide the technical means to negotiate this identity.

Young second-generation Chinese subtly mark the boundary of the city's auditory power structures by constantly adjusting volume, language, and rhythm in their everyday lives. This dynamic is often reflected in the tension between privately consumed music and public soundscapes. Music and sound inherently reflect unique social hierarchies. As Born (2012) argued, discussing music or sound within public and private spheres inevitably invokes multiple mediations of sociality embedded within sound – encompassing both hierarchical and antagonistic dimensions. For instance, Rally from London shared: “I'll listen to anything in headphones, but sometimes what

you listen to in headphones can't be playing through speakers, you know." In this context, headphones create a private zone, and music becomes a tool for personal reflection and identity expression.

Kate, a 20-year-old living in Westminster, contrasted her private playlists with the soundscape of Tesco:

I rarely listen to English, it's all Chinese and Korean songs. Probably the only time I listen to English songs is when I walk inside Tesco or Sainsbury's. They play English songs. Especially at Christmas time, they play, uh, the Christmas song, and it's just, it's just played every year.

Similarly, Selena, 22, described her experience on London's public transport system: "Even when I'm blasting loud songs through my headphones, I can still hear the classic 'see it, say it, sort it'." The sonic presence of the urban security apparatus thus becomes a symbol of control, surveillance, and discipline, constantly reminding participants of their location within the city.

These accounts reveal two overlapping yet opposing soundscapes: one is the playback of pop sounds in their headphones, signifying a private, culturally affirming identity practice; the other consists of institutionalised, cyclical English songs, such as Christmas tunes in supermarkets, or popular music in underground stations. It represents how British mainstream culture enforces spatial control and cultural dominance through sound, reminding second-generation Chinese youth that their bodies and living spaces are embedded within the aural governance of British society.

Such boundary making shapes their transnational identity into an actively negotiated and self-shaped third space (Bhabha, 1994), where they understand mainstream soundscape rules but simultaneously create a sphere of their own.

Furthermore, Jacky from Glasgow highlighted his resistance in the family environment, where his mother sets the aesthetic tone:

Sometimes my parents will play those outdated Chinese songs in the car. I don't understand them, I find them noisy, so I put on my headphones to listen to my own music... I listen to Korean songs and English.

Rally from London described his own aesthetic negotiation at home:

At home, my mum has more say. She decorates the living room and kitchen, and she controls the kitchen speaker. She cooks while playing the 90s oldies she loves. If I want to listen to my music, I have to go back to my room, because my songs are about women, money, sex, swear words, they can't stand it. At the end of the day, it's my mum who's "setting the dinner mood" and I'm in my room blasting my music crazy loud.

Jacky's use of headphones and Rally's bedroom listening habits are, in effect, acts of boundary making against the cultural reproduction of the family. Through media devices, they embed private soundscapes within shared domestic spaces, rejecting the aesthetic norms of the older generation. At the heart of this boundary-defining work lies an auditory distinction: parents' classics are categorised as the narratives of others, while one's own musical choices are defined as expressions of self. This constitutes an auditory contest for generational cultural authority.

As illustrated by DeNora (2000), the ways in which music is used and interpreted constantly draws boundaries, defining a sense of "I" and "we" and shaping experiences of distance between self and category (music and identity). For instance, estrangement from others' tastes, norms, and values generates a sense of non-belonging, a lack of identification with those "immersed in" certain music. This can create a deeper sense of alienation, an estrangement from the social conditions and background that produced that music (Negus & Velazquez, 2002). Participants, unlike their parents, have not lived through the lyrics' historical or cultural contexts. Without a social experience aligned with the music's conditions of creation, the melody loses its emotional anchor, leaving only perceptible formal differences ("old-fashioned", "dragging", etc.). What follows is not mere "dislike" but a profound sense of "I don't belong to this story". As Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins (2000) observed in their study of London's Turkish community, watching Turkish television programmes does not necessarily foster a

sense of connection or belonging to the homeland, but can instead evoke feelings of alienation and ambivalence. However, this study emphasises that second-generation Chinese youth define their identity as unique, autonomously invoking a sense of belonging.

In summary, through private listening practices, participants draw an auditory boundary against institutional sound control and domestic aesthetic authority, constructing an “auditory third space” that lies between mainstream and marginal, public and private. This space accommodates subtle retuning’s of cultural identity and reconfigurations of intergenerational relations. Bhabha (1994) suggested that this is no longer a fixed physical location but a cultural process of continuous negotiation and redefinition of “who I am”, manifested in sonic form. Second-generation Chinese youth are neither mere reproductions of their parents’ musical and cultural heritage nor passive recipients of the British urban soundscape; instead, they actively construct their own spaces of auditory filtering, emerging as hybrid formations grounded in self-selected cultural elements that blend diasporic influences, experiences of the receiving society, and pan-Asian cultural encounters. This hybridity lies at the heart of their transnational identity, woven autonomously within the interstices of alienation and connection, resistance and negotiation. Moving away from family contexts and public space, the next section discusses contexts with friends that do or do not have a Chinese background.

5.4.2 Positioning in peer negotiation

With friends, boundary work involves strategically concealing or displaying music (beyond mere aesthetic preference) to construct boundaries between private space and cultural norms publicly shared among peers. This allows participants to position themselves as contextually appropriate and integrated across different peer settings. Such practices are best understood as everyday performance, such as routine, repeated, strategic choices and situated acts of self-presentation embedded in the mundane rhythms of social interaction. For instance, actively concealing Chinese or Korean songs from British peers while sharing them openly with Chinese-background peers constructs a deliberately negotiated, contextually adapted transnational identity. By

choosing to play, skip, or remain silent in specific situations, participants enact an identity of “in-betweenness” through sound.

Maya (London)’s sonic practice illustrates this selective engagement:

I'll listen to Chinese or Korean. I don't listen to them when I'm with my friends or any other time, but we do talk about music or singers... from the UK or America, Spain, and other places. Because they are foreigners, they don't know Chinese, and they don't know Chinese celebrities It's my own private pleasure.

In this sense, sonic practice becomes a routine yet consequential form of everyday self-management of frontstage and backstage. Her description of Chinese and Korean music as private pleasure points to a backstage space of identity, where cultural affiliation is experienced affectively but withheld from public performance.

Beth, a 23-year-old participant, shared her experience of listening to music while driving. This highlights how she deliberately modulates the expression of her sonic strategy depending on who is in the car:

When I listen to songs by myself, like driving by myself, there's a list of everything, English songs, Chinese, Afrobeat, new pop, whatever. But if there's someone else in the car, I usually skip the ones that... are not in English... Not really, I'll skip Chinese and Japanese, no one knows it. Play hip-hop and pop English songs a little bit more. And I think listening to Chinese songs is like a secret for me, kind of, yeah, not when... my friends are in car. It's like being seen in my underwear. It's not awkward, just, I don't know, feel like the music shouldn't be with us when we are both in the same car, you know. Just not for us.

Beth’s metaphor of comparing Chinese songs to “underwear” captures both the vulnerability and privacy she associates with Chinese culture, while simultaneously reflecting a desire to align with the musical tastes expected by her peers. Yet her continued private engagement with these songs suggest that she consciously controls the audibility of her Chinese cultural belonging. This suggests that musical taste is not

simply possessed, but performed for an audience, with participants actively calibrating what aspects of the self are rendered audible in shared spaces.

Daniel, for example, described how his social interactions with Chinese and British friends often involve distinct cultural settings and performances:

Like me and my friends, we go out drinking, clubbing a lot, but don't think Chinese people do that much. And the places we went to, the settings, music and everything .. are English style or European. With Chinese, we just go out for food or watch a movie or something. Sometimes for Chinese film, I don't watch that much, and we will talk about some Chinese singers, I don't really listen, you know. Yeah, it's a bit different.... It keeps me connected to the Chinese side.

What emerges is a dual-modulated landscape in which participants selectively conceal or display musical and cultural preferences. This is not only about aligning with mainstream cultural norms but also a social performance shaped by asymmetrical dynamics of race, class, and peer belonging. This observation resonates with Baker's (2023) argument that sonic choices often serve as a boundary-marking mechanism, particularly for diasporic individuals and their descendants who "tailor their cultural outputs to anticipated audience reception" (Baker, 2023, p. 46) as they navigate an ever-shifting social environment. Daniel's account further demonstrates how identity is performed differently across social scenes, with distinct sonic and leisure practices mobilised to sustain different relational identities. This patterned switching reflects a learned competence in navigating everyday social expectations across racialised and intra-ethnic contexts.

In sum, the sonic practices of second-generation Chinese youth in peer contexts constitute a deliberate form of boundary making between cultural groups and identity positioning that is aligned with peer cultural expectations – a process that uses music to negotiate a situated transnational identity. It also analyses sonic practices as everyday performances, through which second-generation Chinese youth selectively enact, conceal, and negotiate transnational identities in peer contexts. For instance, they know which sounds dominate in certain contexts and which kinds of music are acceptable to be heard. With British peers, Chinese music may be deliberately hidden, whereas with

peers of Chinese heritage, their cultural background might be emphasised. This flexible deployment of strategies as a situational identity navigation avoids being excessively “othered” in mainstream settings while also avoiding being rigidly categorised as “traditional” or “inauthentic” within diaspora communities. The next subsection discusses how participants exhibit a mainstream cultural orientation when they are with people from a Chinese background who are of the same age.

5.4.3 Karaoke Hip-hop song as a tool of intra-diasporic sonic boundary making

When participants encounter or are with Chinese diasporic members such as Chinese students, the boundary work surfaces in hip-hop-related sonic strategies (singing rap music selection) and translanguaging and positioning, delineating identity boundaries from Chinese international students within the Chinese diaspora community and subverting intra-ethnic expectations of cultural authenticity. This ultimately cultivates a locally rooted London existence and a way of belonging that transcends fixed categories, and a contextualised transnational identity that is both locally grounded and cross-culturally attuned.

A fieldwork episode in a London karaoke bar (KTV) illustrates how language and music choices become forms of sonic resistance within intra-diaspora interactions. During my fieldwork, I accompanied a participant to a karaoke night attended by several Chinese students. One participant, Eric, a second-generation British Chinese DJ raised in London – spoke exclusively in English and performed hardcore rap tracks by artists like Eminem, Kendrick Lamar, and Central Cee. Some of the Chinese students initially greeted him in Mandarin, but Eric responded only with a brief wave and curt English replies. When one student spoke Chinese to Eric, Eric retorted, “Sorry, I speak English”. The remark caused visible discomfort, with the students displaying clear signs of embarrassment. Eric distanced himself for the remainder of the evening, avoiding interaction with them entirely.

Existing literature suggests that KTVs among British Chinese communities’ function not only as social spaces for bonding but also as sites of cultural performance and

embodied collective identity (Pascaccio, 2021). These venues serve dual functions: maintaining interpersonal relationships and reinforcing communal belonging through shared cultural practices, such as language use and music selection. Within these settings, performers and audiences are often implicitly bound by communal expectations – whether through song choices or modes of interaction – which aim to reinforce group cohesion (Lum, 1996).

Eric's actions, however, directly subverted these expectations of communal solidarity that bind individuals through shared cultural codes like Mandarin use and Chinese-language music (for a detailed discussion of language practices, see the following chapter). Instead, he deployed hardcore rap in place of Chinese-language music, and English in response to Mandarin to redefine his identity. It was a performative distancing from the “Chineseness” the students assumed he would embody, a deliberate rejection of the diasporic cultural norms that frame shared language and music as markers of co-ethnic belonging. This performance embodies performativity, Eric did not merely “express” his difference from Chinese students, he made that difference real through repeated, embodied acts. In doing so, he developed a situated transnational identity that served to claim the differences between himself and Chinese students. This positioning gave rise to a situated transnational identity – one that did not erase his Chinese background, but instead used his language and musical choices to claim and amplify the differences between himself as second-generation Chinese and the Chinese students. This identity was not abstract; it was forged in the moment of interaction, tailored to the specific context of the KTV, and focused on making his distinct local experience visible.

Similar patterns emerge in other encounters where second-generation Chinese youth resist cultural expectations imposed by Chinese peers. In London, 22-year-old Jamie remarked:

They [Chinese people] expect you to know Jay Chou or something. I've never listened to him. Like, never. I grew up on Skepta, Stormzy, and drill. That's what we played at school, that's what I listen to. If I told them I don't listen to Chinese songs, they look at me weird... like I'm rejecting something. But I'm not, I'm just from here. London, live my whole life here.

Jamie's statement offers valuable insight into how second-generation Chinese youth use music, language, and sonic strategies to negotiate cultural expectations within the Chinese community, resist homogenised notions of identity, redefine boundaries of belonging, and assert their sense of local rootedness. It highlights, first and foremost, that musical taste operates as a tool of identity politics, used to express one's sense of belonging and to distinguish oneself from others; it serves as a declaration of local belonging.

As Song (2001) observed, second-generation Chinese in London often find themselves subject to authenticity tests within their ethnic communities – pressured to demonstrate fluency and loyalty to ancestral cultural norms. Wong (2004), writing on Asian American musicians, similarly argued that rigid intra-diasporic expectations often impose narrow definitions of what constitutes a Chinese identity. In response, some youth choose to resist such classifications through the strategic use of music, language, and deliberate non-conformity. For instance, Jacky from Glasgow noted: “I got sick of being told I wasn't Chinese enough”. Second-generation Chinese youth often feel compelled to signal their local British identities to the Chinese community, using sound and language as cultural markers (Nguyen & Brown, 2010). At its core, this is about broadcasting a localised cultural affiliation to others, including those within their own diasporic group.

On a deeper level, these vocal strategies represent not only a disruption of intra-diasporic expectations of linguistic or cultural unity, but also an assertion of local belonging. For instance, Jennie from Glasgow described how, when encountering Chinese students in public, she and her friends would often switch from Mandarin to English:

Sometimes walking on the street, if we see some Chinese students coming our way and we're speaking Mandarin, we switch to English... it's like, we're different, I'm from here, Scotland.

Similar to Jamie, Jennie's narrative embodies a performative declaration of “being from here”. This performance is found in its immediacy and routine space, and happened in the split second of language switching, Jennie enacts her from Scotland, drawing a

boundary between local and foreign Chinese students without explicit words. As Smith (2014, 2021) noted, everyday practices are deeply tied to the phenomenology of belonging. Here, the street as a mundane space becomes a site where sonic and linguistic performances simultaneously differentiate these youth from other diasporic subjects and actively produce a sense of rooted local belonging. Guarnizo and Smith (1998) highlighted how local experiences not only shape transnational practices but also inform the production of local identities. Likewise, Brickell and Datta (2011) argued that identity formation does not solely take place at the national level but is constantly negotiated within cities, neighbourhoods, and everyday spaces. Thus, what appears as a simple act of language switching is more than a distancing from co-ethnic peers; it is a performance of inhabiting a third space.

Caught between the auditory scrutiny of mainstream society and the cultural expectations of the Chinese community, these second-generation Chinese youth inhabit a hybridised third space that is both relational and situated (Bhabha, 1994). For instance, Jia, from Glasgow, described her sense of identity as follows:

I feel like my culture and values are a mixture of here and China. So I have my own way of doing things, and I feel quite comfortable in my own world, even being on my own is fine.

Through connections across different places, she creatively develops a hybrid identity that embraces multiple influences, achieving a dynamic harmony between selfhood, relationships, and emotional belonging.

This section thus reveals the mechanisms underlying the transnational identity construction of second-generation Chinese young people: boundary work and dynamic positioning and translanguaging facilitated by sonic strategies. In public spaces and within the family, they construct “auditory bubbles” (Bull, 2007), using headphones to isolate themselves from the UK’s dominant “aural governance” (such as English Christmas songs and tube announcements) and from the cultural symbols of their parents’ homeland. Through spatial segmentation – distinguishing between bedrooms and living rooms – they draw boundaries between their own cultural choices and intergenerational/mainstream norms, positioning themselves as “in-between” subjects who neither belong to the mainstream nor have a rigid attachment to the homeland. In

peer interactions, they adopt “selective sonic expression” (concealing Chinese songs and playing English hip-hop) to adapt to the expectations of different peer groups, echoing Baker’s (2023) argument that sonic choices serve as a boundary-marking mechanism. This enables a form of flexible positioning that avoids being excessively “othered” and prevents rigid categorisation within the ethnic community. Within the Chinese diasporic community, second-generation Chinese young people use hip-hop culture and translinguaging practices (responding to Mandarin greetings in English) to dismantle intra-diaspora “authenticity tests” (Song, 2001), drawing a clear line between second-generation Chinese born and raised in the UK and Chinese international students, and explicitly positioning themselves as London locals rooted in the city. These mechanisms are consistently defined by agency, serving as a dual response to both mainstream sonic hegemony and intra-diasporic cultural expectations, while highlighting the uniqueness of their identity negotiations. Ultimately, they give rise to a distinct situated transnational identity among second-generation Chinese young people: they can identify as part of a “pan-Asian” community in both local and global networks, while also being in the local context. This contextual and situated transnational identity is a dynamic construct shaped by their own agency amid sonic tensions. It enriches the theoretical dimensions of “agency” and “situationality” in the study of diasporic identities.

Taken together, while participants in both London and Glasgow construct situated transnational identities through sonic boundary making, the identity outcomes differ in form and emphasis across urban contexts. London-based participants tend to enact a performative ways of being, characterised by strategic concealment, audience-sensitive sonic choices, and explicit claims to pan-Asian or local London identities within a densely multicultural yet white-normative soundscape. Their ways of belonging are alliance-based and discursively articulated, grounded in shared recognition, playlist circulation, and collective narratives of marginalisation. By contrast, Glasgow-based participants more often describe transnational identity as something lived and enacted through self-selected cultural hybridity without deliberate performance. Their ways of belonging is less frequently claimed through explicit labels and more often forged through affective resonance, K-pop fandom, and routine acts of auditory withdrawal or engagement. In this sense, Glasgow participants situated transnational identities emerge

as more intimate, gender-inflected, and practice-based, while London participants' identities are shaped by heightened visibility and performative negotiation.

The following section now focuses on the urban space where transnational identities are performed, negotiated, and made visible in everyday life.

5.5 Contextual performances in urban space

Embodiment and capital conversion, anchored in Chinese-inspired clothing, act as visible identity signals in public spaces when deployed at concerts or carnivals—converting cultural symbols into recurring paid gigs. Rooted in embodied practices, contextual positioning balances cultural identification, social engagement, distinction, and escape from fixed identities. At its core, this is context-specific identity selection, aligning with implicit scripts: visible Chinese cultural identity for Chinatown settings, commercial memorability for bar stages, and shared fan identity for concerts. Within these contexts, this thesis argues that “home”, in the daily lives of second-generation Chinese youth, is not a mythic sense of belonging but a usable resource and a form of cultural capital. It helps them navigate performances in London and display their hybrid identity.

The section begins by examining their strategic mobilisation of Chinese-inspired attire, such as traditional clothing, qipao, or tai chi uniforms, and how these visual signifiers are transformed in contexts such as Chinatown festivals, nightclub parties, and commercial performances. The discussion then turns to large-scale collective music events, such as festivals and urban carnivals, to explore how these young people engage in sensory immersion, bodily expression, and shared affective experiences to temporarily suspend ethnic labels and social expectations. In these settings, identity becomes fluid, experienced through moments of escape and reconstruction, offering spaces in which participants can temporarily suspend identity labels and social discipline, thereby experiencing the fluidity of identity through escape and reconstruction.

5.5.1 Chinese-inspired fashion as a situational resource

When I observed participants' cultural performances in urban spaces, it became clear that they do not use Chinese culture and its associated elements to return to the “imagined homeland” (Anderson, 1994) or ancestral culture, but rather as cultural repertoire and cultural capital to empower themselves. This capital conversion led to their engagement in diaspora culture activities; however, they do not have a sense of belonging to the culture itself.

Drawing on Goffman’s (1959) theory of front-stage performance, people assemble and present particular versions of themselves according to the demands of the context and the expectations of others. A clear example of this can be seen during the Mid-Autumn Festival, when Millie and her friends chose to perform the guzheng (a traditional Chinese instrument) in London’s Chinatown while dressed in traditional Chinese clothing (see Figure 1). As she explained:

It is a tradition, so wearing this kind of traditional costume creates more of a Chinese cultural image and visual effect. I think people rarely see this kind of scene, and the guzheng itself is a Chinese instrument. The clothes are also beautiful. I’d never worn them before, and it felt like a formal stage performance, long sleeves, dresses, a special experience.



Figure 1: Millie and her friends performing guzheng in Chinatown, by Keying

Millie's performance suggests that wearing traditional clothing during cultural festivals is not merely a conventional accompaniment, but rather a ritualised, event-based expression of belonging. Her intention to "create an atmosphere" and "let people see" indicates a conscious effort to evoke recognition of Chinese culture through visual performance. This act of "being seen" reflects a deliberate mobilisation of identity, through which embodied cultural symbols are transformed into symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984), enhancing the performance's social and cultural value. Traditional dress, in this context, becomes a visual marker of cultural difference, a distinction that serves to attract attention, generate uniqueness, and confer symbolic meaning upon the performance.

Similarly, Ivy, a live singer who performs in bars, often chooses to wear clothing with Chinese elements – such as a qipao – to enhance her visual presence on stage. She explained:

I wear them often.... It creates a good impression on the bar and the customers. And personally, I just think qipaos (a Chinese traditional dress) and outfits with some Chinese elements look beautiful. It also helps people remember me. Being memorable will make the chance I'll be invited back, that's what I call "pretty privilege".

Ivy's choice is not merely aesthetic, it also reflects a commercial strategy and the commodification of culture. It is a targeted conversion of cultural capital into economic capital. She combines Chinese culture features with recognisable cultural symbols, using her appearance as a point of memorability to increase her chances of being rehired. In this process, Chinese culture is no longer positioned as a source of innate belonging, but as a selectable, operable, and marketable cultural resource.

Taken together, the practices of Millie, Lewis, and Ivy illustrate a key feature of transnational cultural identity: for second-generation Chinese youth, Chineseness is no longer seen as an unshakable heritage or a sentimental tie to ancestral homelands, but rather as a situational performance and a resource that can be contextually mobilised. As Nguyen and Brown (2010) highlighted, visual and auditory cultural strategies are central to how children of migrants navigate public space, assert identity, and seek

visibility. Crucially, this mobilisation of culture does not signify loyalty to ancestral heritage, but instead represents a pragmatic response to situational, economic, and affective logics. This repositioning of culture as a resource rather than belonging echoes Bourdieu's critique of essentialist views of culture (Fowler, 1997). Cultural capital is never neutral, nor is it tied to fixed identities. Instead, it is a strategic tool shaped by the demands of the field. For second-generation Chinese youth, their marginal cultural capital (Chinese symbols) becomes a flexible asset. Ivy's cultural capital requires deliberate curation (combining "recognisable" Chinese features with marketable aesthetics) to be legible and valuable in the field. This reflects Bourdieu's argument that cultural capital is always context-dependent (1986), its value is determined by the field's dominant norms, and individuals need to adapt their capital to these norms to succeed.

These performances should not, however, be reduced to superficial displays of identity. As Glick Schiller (2004) contended, ways of being and ways of belonging do not always align. What matters here is that participants are not engaging in cultural performance out of sustained or profound attachments to ethnic belonging. Instead, they selectively activate cultural references in specific moments and spaces to construct a temporary, performative self-image.

This highlights an important dimension of transnationalism as a selective process. As posited by scholars such as Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), transnational practices are not constant or evenly distributed across all areas of life; on the contrary, they are fragmented, episodic, and shaped by context. In this case, participants transnational identity displays its characteristics as contextual, selective, and performative expression.

5.5.2 Concerts and festive events as spaces of escape: identity detachment

If we are to focus on the body and performance, then we also need to attend to the moments that extend beyond the body. For instance, sensations of detachment from the body, the feeling of being drawn out of oneself, or the experience of music penetrating inward (Middleton, 2000). Given the transience and ephemerality of musical experience, music offers the possibility of such intuitive engagement. Bergson (2006)

argued that music is a continuous flow of rhythm, melody, and emotional resonance. It is precisely within this unified and flowing musical time that individuals may experience emotional shifts, embodied transformation, and a temporary loosening of fixed social identities.

Festivals and live concerts provide participants with “temporary stages” for escaping the disciplinary scripts of everyday identity. According to Negus and Velázquez (2002), musical practices do not merely reproduce identity, they also enable moments of identity release. In everyday life, second-generation Chinese youth are often expected by wider society to perform as one of them (as shown in section 4.3, where Sue talked about expressing her identity as Scottish to Scottish people, and Chinese to Chinese people), while simultaneously being urged by Chinese diasporic communities to maintain Chinese culture. They are frequently caught between two regimes of discipline, compelled to perform different “roles” in different contexts. Festivals and music events offer blurred boundary spaces in which they can experiment with new roles that do not belong exclusively to any one cultural framework. These are situated, performative identity practices, actively enacted within specific moments and spaces.

For instance, Jennie, from Glasgow, attended a Blackpink concert in Hyde Park with her friends. Blackpink, a four-member K-pop girl group, has garnered major global traction. With diverse backgrounds – one Australian-raised, one New Zealand-raised, one Thai, and one Korean – their music is globally oriented, featuring mostly English lyrics. Jennie described her feelings about the concert:

We sang along to every song. Sometimes when the fan chants were so loud, I couldn't even hear myself shout. I'm not joking, I was in the same row as Dua Lipa... and the diversity of the audiences at the concert was amazing. Also, being away from my parents, they didn't care what I wore. No one assumes where you're from. I mean we're all Blackpink fans, here for their music.

In this space, she was momentarily free from the expectations of both worlds. Through performance, she could position herself beyond parental control and communal boundaries. In this sense, large-scale concerts can partially dissolve the regulatory force of ethnic and cultural affiliation, producing a locally grounded, affective sense of

belonging anchored in shared musical taste. What matters is not where one is from, but what one is doing in that moment.

Similarly, Alice's experience at the Notting Hill Carnival illustrates a strategy of identity performance. A major multicultural street festival in London rooted in Caribbean culture, the Notting Hill Carnival is defined by vibrant celebrations where attendees express themselves through bold, sensory-driven attire and performances. It functions as a situational space that loosens everyday identity constraints. Here, identity is recognised via embodied signs (like Alice's sequined, gem-adorned outfit), aligning with the carnival's expectation of performative, unconstrained self-presentation. Alice deliberately dressed in dazzling attire, with crystals, gemstones, sequins covering her whole body. This is not only a personal style choice, but a response to the performative expectations of the carnival space. In such a place, identity is recognised through the signs performed by the body. As Alice put it: "I needed a moment like this to escape the boxes of everyday life, even if just for a short time."

At the same time, the repeated call from the sound system: "It's YOUR Carnival!" acted as a kind of ritual invocation, inviting every participant to release themselves and join the collective rhythm. In this moment, Alice's identity was not defined by any terms or norms, but by what her body was doing: dancing, wearing sequins, and immersing herself in grime music. As Negus and Velázquez (2002) observed, "When you dance to music, you do not necessarily affirm a 'we' feeling, that it is 'our' music and that you are a poor working class immigrant of a particular 'ethnic group' nor that you are a privileged middle class accountant of a liberal disposition who likes world music – you forget it" (p. 144). The experience of music can sometimes lead to a temporary suspension of identity labels, such as social class, or ethnic, race, enabling people to become immersed in pure sensation and emotion. It is precisely through bodily movement, expressive dress, and sonic resonance that people are granted access to an experiential self; one that leans towards liberation and does not require fixed forms of belonging.

George offered the following reflection on the Notting Hill Carnival:

It's not a "Black festival" – it's a celebration of Black London culture that's been embraced by all kinds of communities in the country.

This highlights how the carnival functions as a ritualised urban space of multicultural participation, inviting young people from various backgrounds to enter, perform, and resonate. Within this context, second-generation Chinese youth are escaping the disciplinary frameworks of race and ethnicity and claiming their right to participate in multicultural urban culture through the body and the senses.

For second-generation Chinese young people, such live events serve as a space for being centred on escape – one that allows them to break free from the social and cultural expectations surrounding the labels imposed on them. In this context, transnational identity is no longer defined by a rift between the homeland and mainstream society; instead, it becomes a fluid, generative self-practice shaped by rhythm, embodiment, and affective resonance.

As seen in Jennie’s experience at the Blackpink concert, she was no longer “the Chinese daughter” or “an ethnic minority”; rather, through expressive dress, collective echoing, and idol identification, she actively entered a new identity space grounded in emotion and music. Crucially, in that moment, traditional social categories such as family, race, and nationality were temporarily suspended – replaced by a fan identity built on sensory immersion and shared affect. The experience allowed her to briefly inhabit a state of “I don’t have to be what others expect of me”, and it was within this performance that she was able to negotiate and reimagine her transnational positioning.

Taken together, these examples reveal that transnational identity is activated in context. It emerges, pauses, and is re-coded as social settings and cultural contexts shift. These temporary, emotional, and sensory-driven “spaces of escape” not only offer moments of relief but also point to a reconfigured identity logic: identity can be a posture, a strategy, a performance, or a momentary withdrawal and reinvention. This very act of escape illustrates the elasticity of transnational identity, which need not be permanently anchored in ancestral homelands or sustained transnational ties but may also emerge through affective and embodied engagement in globalised cultural spaces. These transient experiences can produce a fleeting sense of unburdened selfhood, reflecting a form of transnational belonging that is felt rather than inherited.

This section illustrates the situated transnational identity practice of second-generation Chinese youth: contextual performance, a flexible mode of cultural expression driven by situational dynamics. Based on specific contexts (space, intent, and social actors), these participants engage in dynamic enactments of identity by strategically mobilising or temporarily suspending cultural symbols such as clothing, music, and embodied behaviours. They negotiate the tension between social expectations and personal agency through a balance between visible expression, being seen, and momentary withdrawal.

This is a practice that emphasises identity fluidity: it is a continual negotiation of questions such as “Who am I?” and “How do I want to be perceived?”, achieved through a shifting interplay of deliberate performance and temporary detachment. Ultimately, this strategy serves a deeper need: to secure a sense of belonging and selfhood within the pluralistic fabric of the contemporary city.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter systematically analysed how second-generation Chinese youth in London construct situated transnational identities through four interwoven practices – boundary work (aligned with wider Chinese diasporic communities and K-pop transnational clubs), repositioning, situated performativity, and selective participation in musical practices that transcend China-Britain binary cultural frameworks – while also examining their negotiation of sonic politics (via private “auditory bubbles” like headphones/bedrooms and resistance to sound-based power dynamics across family, public, and ethnic spaces).

By synthesising cases of second-generation Chinese young participants from Glasgow and London, significant differences between the two groups emerged in terms of identity, music practice scenarios, use of cultural symbols, and logics of auditory negotiation. First, London participants tend to proactively incorporate the “London” regional label into their identity narratives, anchoring their local British identity through “growing up in London” or “having a London accent” and leveraging the city’s multicultural attributes to endorse their transnational identity, while Glasgow

participants use the “Scottish” label to emphasise national identity. Second, London participants rely on diverse public settings like Chinatown festivals, bar performances, and the Notting Hill Carnival, treating music and Chinese elements (e.g. Hanfu, qipao) as tools for identity negotiation, attention-seeking, or economic goals, whereas Glasgow participants’ music practices are concentrated in private spaces (e.g. bedrooms, solo driving) or small Asian circles – serving mostly as emotional identity carriers or small-scale social bonds, with a lack of strategic public practices (a study limitation due to insufficiently diverse fieldwork sites in Glasgow). Third, London participants proactively turn Chinese elements and pan-Asian music into situational resources, while Glasgow participants engage with cultural symbols through passive emotional resonance. Finally, London participants focus on resisting dominant auditory hegemony in public spaces, while Glasgow participants’ auditory negotiation centres on family intergenerational conflicts.

In the bigger picture, their identity outcomes diverge markedly in ways of being and ways of belonging. Among London participants, identity practices are strongly performative. In a city shaped by dense multiculturalism yet governed by white normative soundscapes and scripted urban expectations, participants develop modes of being centred on strategic visibility management. This includes the selective concealment and display of sound, as well as embodied performances tailored to specific urban settings such as Chinatown, nightlife venues, or carnivalesque events. Their mode of belonging is alliance-based, anchored in multi-ethnic Asian peer networks and sustained through playlist circulation, shared narratives of marginalisation, and recognisable sonic and visual symbols. As a result, London participants situated transnational identity is characterised by a dual anchoring in both pan-Asian affiliation and local London rootedness, negotiated through highly visible and strategic performance.

By contrast, Glasgow participants’ identity practices are grounded in affective, everyday ways of being that correspond to a context where exclusion is less overt. In the absence of strong mainstream sonic dominance or rigid intra-diasporic authenticity tests, their mode of being centres on immersion in self-selected cultural hybridity rather than overt performance. Their sense of belonging emerges through implicit emotional ties and everyday solidarities, including shared racialised humour and gendered

empowerment within K-pop fandoms. Accordingly, Glasgow participants situated transnational identity is anchored transnationally through affective resonance and cultural mixing, and locally through everyday Scottish life. Rather than prioritising visibility and performative negotiation, this identity is lived as a felt, comfortable in-betweenness sustained through emotion, routine, and gentle boundary making.

This chapter then examined the notion of “home” in second-generation transnationalism and highlighted its core contribution: for these second-generation youth, “home” no longer equates to a mythicised longing for the ancestral homeland. Instead, “home” can take the form of deployable cultural resources, activated, adjusted, or even suspended according to situational needs rather than being bound to innate emotional ties. Does diaspora, for these young people, function as a rigid “box” to be ticked – one that demands adherence to fixed markers like fluent ancestral language, frequent return visits, or strict cultural orthodoxy? The answer, rooted in their practices, is a resounding no. Diaspora, for these youth, is not a static checklist of “Chineseness” to fulfil, but a fluid field of possibility. They do not “tick” diaspora; they negotiate it. A young person might rarely visit China but still claim diasporic belonging through pan-Asian musical affiliations (e.g. bonding with Korean friends over K-pop’s “girl crush” aesthetic); another might struggle with Mandarin but redefine diaspora through embodied acts like teaching peers to use chopsticks. In this sense, diaspora becomes something they do on their own terms, not something they must be to fit a preordained category.

At times, this negotiation even leans toward loosening or unmaking traditional diasporic boundaries. Global cultural flows, digital connectivity, and the pluralism of British urban life (particularly in London) mean their identities no longer hinge on tight adherence to a discrete “Chinese diasporic community”. A second-generation youth might prioritise friendships with British-Indian peers over Chinese community events, or frame their identity as “Londoner first, Chinese-British second” – diminishing the centrality of diaspora rather than centring it. This is not a rejection of their roots, but a reframing: diaspora ceases to be a defining label and becomes one of many resources they draw on. Such looseness or “unmaking” does not erase their transnational ties; instead, it challenges the conventional diaspora narrative that ties belonging to unwavering loyalty to a homeland. It reveals that for the second generation, diaspora is

not a fixed state of being, but a flexible practice – one that bends to their needs, rather than forcing them to bend to its rigid norms.

Chapter 6: Everyday Translanguaging and Transpositioning among Second-Generation Chinese: Insights from London and Glasgow

6.1 Introduction

This chapter treats the everyday language practices as the final domain within the integrated framework. It examines how do translanguaging/transpositioning and interactional positioning structure roles and belonging across home, community education, work, and public space, and how do classed resources (capitals) and local opportunity structures shape the capacity to sustain these practices and belonging. By tracing mechanisms of translanguaging/ transpositioning, capital conversion, embodiment and the senses, and boundary work across key everyday spaces including family environments (contrasting Glasgow and London households), Chinese language schools, family-run Chinese takeaway shops/restaurants, and urban street spaces. Shaped by limited familial linguistic capital, Glasgow participants perform belonging through role switching and context-bound alternation between Chinese and British spheres, whereas London participants, drawing on stronger bilingual and cultural capital, negotiate belonging through fluid translanguaging and integrated, strategically deployable bicultural identities.

The chapter is divided into five parts. First, a theoretical overview explains how translanguaging and transpositioning illuminate identity formation among second-generation youth. The second part turns to the home, comparing parents' linguistic repertoires in London and Glasgow and showing how the FLP is negotiated through everyday power play and affective needs. Part three focuses on Chinese weekend schools to illustrate how people weave auditory, visual, and tactile resources into cross-lingual practice, thereby reshaping transnational identity. Part four explores how meaning making in Chinese restaurants and take-away shops is negotiated through language shifting and semiotic resources, analysing the FOH/BOH kitchen language split and how kitchen smells and clattering utensils blur the local-non-local boundary in ongoing identity negotiation. The final section explores public space, focusing on

street space, “Ni hao” encounters, and the use of Chinese as a “secret language”, and shows how participants respond by ignoring, switching to English, or deploying humour to assert their own subjectivity under the public gaze.

This chapter draws on 36 interviews – 30 of which included language episodes suitable for analysis – alongside observations conducted at multiple sites and six months of fieldnotes documenting interactions in Chinese schools, family-run takeaways and restaurants, and street/public-space encounters. My role varied by setting throughout the research process: at home, I acted as observer; at Chinese schools, I acted as a helper/observer in classrooms; in takeaways, I served as a participant observer, working both front-of-house and back-of-house; and in public spaces, I adopted the role of a non-intervening observer.

6.2 Translanguaging and transpositioning as tools to analyse translinguistic practices and identity negotiation

As discussed in section 2.5.2, translanguaging and transpositioning serve as language mechanisms to analyse the transnational identity of second-generation Chinese youth. Translanguaging, framed as a “practice-oriented theory of language” (García & Li, 2014) that rejects rigid language boundaries and conceptualises linguistic practice as the mobilisation of one’s entire semiotic repertoire for meaning-making, reveals the fluidity of identities in everyday multilingual interactions, linking language use to feelings of belonging and the imagined construction of “home” (Brah, 1996). Complementing this, Li Wei and Tong King Lee’s transpositioning (2023) conceptualises identity as a continual, negotiable process rather than a fixed label, enacted not just through words but also semiotic resources, prosody, gestures, and context, illuminating how youth dynamically reposition themselves across cultural and social settings. Despite growing scholarship on second-generation language maintenance and identity shift, few studies have integrated these two concepts to explore how translingual and embodied practices jointly drive identity negotiation. Thus, this chapter focuses on second-generation Chinese youth’s everyday translanguaging in families, Chinese schools, takeaways/restaurants, and street spaces, examining their hybrid Chinese-English expressions and embodied displays to unpack

how these practices function as key mechanisms for negotiating transnational identity.

6.3 Home as a site of language and care: gendered translanguaging and family policy

To better understand how translanguaging practices shape the transnational identities of second-generation Chinese youth, this section discusses the home language policy (FLP) in participants' homes in Glasgow and London, and contextualised within the class and culture capital of Chinese immigrant families. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) multi-dimension version of class, economic, cultural, and social capital of immigrant parents shapes their FLP practices, beliefs, and management (King et al., 2018). For Chinese immigrants in Glasgow with limited economic and linguistic capital (low English proficiency and Mandarin) compels their eldest children to take on language brokering and caregiving roles, embedding translanguaging in familial labor division. By contrast, educated and skilled families (potentially more visible in London) possess fluent English and Mandarin as cultural capital, enabling their children to engage in flexible translingual practices, framing FLP as a tool of class reproduction.

The section reveals boundary work, translanguaging/positioning, and capital conversion at work in the agency of participants within the FLP, which challenges the notion that language planning is solely the domain of parents (Fogle & King, 2013). The contention of this thesis is that second-generation Chinese youth strategically deploy language to redraw the boundaries of intimacy, generational power, and transpositioning during the conversations, creatively manipulating their multilingual resources to reposition themselves socially and emotionally within the family. It also challenges the idea that home language use is always associated with respect, obligation, or cultural preservation. Instead, it is constantly reshaping the family's linguistic order.

6.3.1 Glasgow: linguistic agency and caregiving for younger siblings

The section shows how boundary work surfaces in English and is used between siblings to create a private space (hiding conversations from parents). For participants who are the oldest child, Mandarin also allows them to take on a broker role with their parents.

Translanguaging and transpositioning assist in shaping family roles, such as the eldest child repositioning themselves as broker and carer through language. English is transformed by children into peer group capital, while Mandarin and the parents' language serve as functional linguistic capital. This divides belongings into duty-based belonging to the family and social belonging within British siblings.

A distinct pattern emerges in Chinese households in Glasgow in that participants are the oldest children in their family, and their parents have limited English proficiency, hence they are usually fluent in dual or even multiple languages. They are often positioned as linguistic intermediaries and interpreters. This functional positioning shapes a layered set of language practices: Mandarin is used to fulfil obligations to parents, while English becomes the emotional currency among siblings. In some cases, these languages are strategically deployed to manage information, build intimacy, or subtly resist parental authority, revealing the complex interplay between language, power, and relational positioning within immigrant family life.

This limited English proficiency is but a reflection of their class position as working-class Chinese immigrant. Most Glasgow participants' parents migrated to the UK with limited educational capital, linguistic capital and little access to mainstream English-speaking contexts as they working in catering business. Bourdieu (1986) argues that linguistic capital is a form of cultural capital, whose value is determined by the dominant class. The lack of English renders them rely on their children's bilingual resources to navigate institutional spaces (e.g., hospitals) and daily life. This dependence not only reshapes the familial power dynamics, but also embeds the class-based division of labor into language practices. Children become the language broker who bridge the gap between their parents and the dominant society.

For example, Ming described the language practices of her family as follows:

I speak English with my younger siblings, but we always speak Mandarin with our parents. They speak Chinese, but they don't understand English. And we don't understand Fuzhou hua, so we just use Mandarin.

Jane and Rob also shared: “We speak English with our siblings and Mandarin with our parents” because “our parents don't speak English”, or “we don't understand Fujianese” or other dialects. Parents often lack proficiency in English, while their children are raised in British society, making English the dominant language in their daily lives. Mandarin thus becomes a bridge crossing the generational gap, but it is essentially a more formal and functional language rather than a tool for intimate communication between siblings (but not parents).

Participants use English within the family as an informational shield to carve out private spaces of their own. As Josh explained:

My parents used to speak Fuzhounese, and my brother and I would speak English... but sometimes when we had our own little secrets and didn't want them to understand, we'd switch to Mandarin – they didn't understand it.

This account subverts the intuitive understanding of Mandarin as the parental language; instead, it becomes a secret language for the participants and their siblings. Here, English and Mandarin are not merely a medium of expression, but a mechanism for constructing internal boundaries of knowledge, and negotiating power dynamics within the family.

Rob's narrative further reveals how language can function as a tool for intergenerational boundary erosion: “They thought we didn't understand Fuzhounese... but actually we knew what they were saying, and we'd joke about it in English.” This demonstrates how Rob's multilingual repertoires enable him to navigate and even invert the conventional power dynamics within the family. Alongside this, he takes the active step of breaching the generational linguistic boundaries set by his parents, dismantling them to reveal how children subvert intergenerational power through language and proactively shape the linguistic order within the family.

On the surface, this appears as a humorous anecdote. Yet beneath the humour lies a layered practice of transpositioning (Li & Lee, 2023) in which Rob repositions himself from the passive role of a child subjected to parental authority to an agentive figure who covertly reclaims interpretive power. By allowing his parents to believe he lacked

comprehension of Fuzhounese, Rob maintained access to a private flow of adult discourse that was subsequently recontextualised through English for sibling commentary. This covert understanding not only destabilises the assumed hierarchy of linguistic knowledge in the household but also transforms English from a dominant societal language into a subcultural code of intra-sibling solidarity. The switch to English is boundary-making, carving out a discursive space that is inaccessible to the older generation. By speaking English to distance themselves from parental authority, or using English as a “secret language”, children reshape the FLP from within.

Notably, these linguistic practices are deeply entangled with the everyday responsibilities of care, particularly for eldest daughters. Female participant Jia offered a detailed account of how differing linguistic preferences among siblings intersect with caregiving roles. This revealed how the eldest child’s intermediary function sustains their Mandarin proficiency, while younger siblings may gradually lose it due to their reliance on her as a translator:

We’re three siblings, and I’m the eldest. I’m more Chinese, I tend to speak Chinese, Mandarin or Cantonese, since I can talk to my parents and understand Chinese culture better. My parents speak a dialect, but their Mandarin they can just speak a little. Sometimes they’ll ask me to tell the others what to do; for example, to help my sister with her homework. And if they’re upset about something, they’ll tell me. I usually speak to my brother and sister in English. My sister is somewhere in between, she switches between Mandarin and English with me, but no Cantonese at all. But my brother, the youngest, leans towards English. He doesn’t speak Mandarin, so when we (my sister and I) talk to him, it’s in Mandarin, and he responds in English. So, I’m the one passing messages between my parents and siblings. I also have to take care of them – like they say, “the eldest daughter is like a mother”.

Jia’s narrative offers a striking example of how translanguaging practices are deeply entangled with caregiving responsibilities, birth order, and sibling dynamics within immigrant families. Her positioning as the eldest daughter “more Chinese” in her words does not merely reflect personal preference, but points to a broader expectation of linguistic and emotional labour (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

Crucially, this transpositioning is not equally distributed across the siblings. Jia's sustained use of Mandarin and Cantonese is not only a reflection of her personal linguistic repertoire but is maintained and reinforced by her familial role. Her brother, the youngest, shows clear signs of language attrition, responding in English even when spoken to in Mandarin, which reflects a gradual erosion of Chinese proficiency as caregiving and translation responsibilities shift upward in the sibling hierarchy. As both Curdt-Christiansen (2009) and Tannenbaum and Berkovich (2005) suggested, such uneven language retention is a common pattern in multilingual immigrant households, where eldest children are often called upon to mediate both linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Jia's comment that "the eldest daughter is like a mother" makes explicit the gendered nature of this intermediary labour, which is intertwined with class position and power dynamics. Her narrative points to the convergence of language brokering and care work, both of which are feminised and often rendered invisible within immigrant family dynamics (Orellana et al., 2003). Her translation work is not confined to information transfer; it extends to emotional regulation ("if they're upset... they'll tell me") and educational support ("help my sister with her homework"), roles that sustain both familial cohesion and linguistic continuity. As Bourdieu (2001) notes, gender operates as a form of symbolic capital when gender-specific traits, behaviors, and roles are converted into social recognition, status, prestige, and power. Women are often assigned to reproductive labor that maintains the family unit, for working-class immigrant daughters like Jia, her parents' position as lacking linguistic, and social capital in the receiving society means they cannot afford to outsource care or translation work, so they rely on the cheapest, most accessible form their eldest daughter's unpaid, gendered labour. Translanguaging, in this context, becomes not only a communicative strategy but a form of relational labour (Song, 2010), shaped by social expectations and family hierarchies.

Similar dynamics of mediation and caregiving were also evident during participant observation. During a family dinner with male participant Jacky, his mother, and his 15-year-old sister, Jacky was observed frequently switching between English and

Mandarin, negotiating the gap in intergenerational language proficiency while simultaneously fulfilling his role as a familial caregiver.

Jacky (to his sister): *This one is spicy, I know you can't eat it, but it tastes great, do you want to try it? 试一下? (try?)*

Sister: *No, ask mum. Just can't escape spice from Chinese. Tell me whenever you taste something good.*

Jacky then turned to his mother and said, “Mom, 这个, 好吃。” (Mom, this one, good.)

His mother: “好的。” (OK)

A moment later, Jacky's sister nudged his arm and pointed towards a dish slightly out of her reach, indicating she wanted some.

Jacky then said to his mum, “可以帮我拿一下那个吗?” (Can you help me get some of that one?)

His mother served some of the dish onto his plate and said, “哥哥照顾一下妹妹吃饭。” (*take care of your sister's meal*)”

Jacky replied, “谢谢 xiexie” (thank you) and passed the food to his sister, who said “谢谢 xiexie” (thank you).

In this interaction, English emerges as the primary medium of communication between siblings, indexing their everyday lives as British-born youth, while Mandarin is reserved for exchanges with the mother, functioning predominantly within formal and polite registers. This linguistic pattern reflects an implicit One Person One Language (OPOL) strategy (Lanza, 1997): Mandarin with parents, English with siblings. This, while not a typical case of translanguaging, nonetheless enables dynamic role negotiation within the family. Although linguistic boundaries are, to some extent, maintained (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004), this very separation facilitates transpositioning (Li & Lee, 2023) whereby speakers reposition themselves relationally through language use. Jacky thus performs the role of a respectful, culturally grounded son in Mandarin, and an easy-going, locally embedded peer in English.

Jacky is simultaneously positioned by others as “older brother” and “carer”, while also re-positioning himself as “son” and “language broker”. He navigates affective maintenance and task management, translating his sister’s non-verbal cue into a verbally mediated request for his mother, and then materialising the mother’s response into a caregiving act of passing food. Jacky, Jia, Josh, and Ming’s ability to navigate between Mandarin and English according to interlocutor and context demonstrates how second-generation Chinese youth actively shape the linguistic norms of their households. In doing so, they engage in transpositioning, using language to reconfigure roles and responsibilities related to age and gender within the family, thus revealing the agentic role of children in sustaining both linguistic continuity and relational balance across generations.

In sum, through the boundary drawing of English, the positioning and cross-positioning of different roles, and the conversion of bilingual capital, participants’ mode of existence manifests as a constant switching between distinct roles. It is also a negotiation of class-based power dynamics through language. Language triggers repositioning and shapes FLP, and its social meaning is conditioned by the family’s class position and internal capital distribution. The resulting relational networks within the home are bounded by inequalities of capital (linguistic, emotional, labour) mapped onto gender and birth order. Consequently, the home is revealed as a primary site of capital conversion. Chinese families in Glasgow frequently rely on the unpaid linguistic and care labour of eldest children to offset parental capital deficits, while enabling younger siblings a privileged focus on mainstream capital accumulation. In this way, participants are active agents in negotiating and reproducing class inequalities through their bilingual capital, whether by “secret codes” or sustaining (via caregiving) familial class structures. The following section will contrast these patterns with those observed among London-based, often middle-class participants, further exploring how divergent class positions produce distinct logics of bilingual capital conversion and language-mediated class reproduction.

6.3.2 London: translanguaging flexibility and class-shaped FLP

This section examines how two mechanisms: linguistic capital conversion and transpositioning/translanguaging, shape second-generation Chinese youth's translinguistic practices within London households. Unlike the rigid generational language boundaries seen in Glasgow, London households lack strict demarcations as all family members are bilingual or multilingual practitioners. Here, linguistic capital conversion enables these youth to constantly engage in translinguistic practices, which in turn foster their dual cultural belonging. Positioning drives their identity shift: they move from aligning with Chinese family socio-cultural norms and parental expectations to adopting British cultural stances.

Throughout this process, the FLP is closely shaped by family social class and parental educational background (King, 2016). Most London participants come from families who migrated for education or investment purposes. They often possess high proficiency in both English and Mandarin, and in some cases, other Chinese dialects such as Cantonese or Minnan, creating a rich multilingual context within the household.

The fieldwork revealed a recurring pattern among families with dual-Chinese parents: parents frequently switch between English and Chinese in their own daily communications, and their children adopt a similar communicative style, responding in English to Mandarin questions, or missing and shifting fluidly between languages in the same utterance. Language practices in the four mixed-heritage families (with one Chinese and one non-Chinese parent) are even more distinctive. English typically serves as the primary language of daily communication, while Mandarin is retained as a cultural heritage language, used during cultural festivals, family gatherings, or weekend Chinese language school. An example of this can be found in a family exchange involving Andy and his parents during a conversation about shou zhua bing (Chinese layered flatbread):

Mom : 快来吃啦, 这个手抓饼刚出锅, 你小时候最爱。 (*Come and eat - this shou zhua bing just came out of the pan. You loved it.*)

Andy (in Mandarin) : 嗯——其实它让我想到这边的 wrap, 只是我们的多一点层次。 (*Mm – it actually reminds me of a wrap here, just with more layers.*)

Dad : Wrap ? 那不就是卷饼 ? 你老是把东西跟洋人的对比。 (*Wrap? Isn't that just a rolled pancake? You always compare things to Western stuff.*)

Andy : 可不可以说这是 “Chinese pancake”? (*Can I call it a Chinese pancake?*)
 Mom (interjecting in accented Tianjin dialect): 讲什么 pancake? pancake 是焦黄一片, 这个才叫层次。 (*What pancake? Pancake is just one flat yellow sheet – this has layers.*)
 Andy (switching back to Mandarin) : 对对, 我知道。我跟我朋友说这是 “layered Chinese flatbread”, 还教他们撕着吃。 (*Right, right, I know. I told my friends it’s a layered Chinese flatbread, and I even taught them to tear it by hand*)
 Dad : 他们会撕吗? (*Can they tear it properly?*)
 Andy : Surprisingly, yes! 他们觉得 texture 很 amazing. (*Surprisingly, yes! They feel amazing about the texture.*)
 Mom : 就像你小时候, 撕得到处都是屑。 (*Just like you when you were young – crumbs everywhere.*)

Andy’s comparison of shou zhua bing with the British wrap is more than a surface-level linguistic equivalence, it represents a form of cross-cultural understanding and transpositioning as a bilingual, bicultural translator.

A similar pattern of Mandarin-English translanguaging is evident in George’s family during a conversation about piano practice:

Mom (Mandarin): 乔治, 你今天练钢琴了吗? (*George, have you practised piano today?*)
 George: Yes, 20 minutes.
 Mom (Mandarin): 钢琴不是玩儿的! 你都考到七级了, 再坚持一下把八级拿下, 才不辜负这么多年的努力。 (*Piano isn’t just for fun! You’ve already passed Grade 7, just push a bit more and get Grade 8. Don’t waste all those years of effort.*)
 Dad (Mandarin): 对呀, 弹琴多优雅, 坐那儿手指一动就演奏, 比整天踢球流汗轻松吧。 (*Exactly - playing piano is so elegant. You just sit there, move your fingers and make music. Much easier than sweating over football all day.*)
 George: No Dad, football I like, that’s serious business, piano 才是玩儿的。
 Mom (Mandarin): 妈妈不是要你当钢琴家, 只是想你有艺术修养。体育重要, 艺术也重要, 要 balance。 (*It’s not about making you a pianist – I just want you to have some artistic appreciation. Sports are important, but so is art. You need balance.*)
 George: I get it... Maybe weekend.
 Mom (Mandarin): 行, 但每周至少两小时, 别让手生了。 (*Alright, but at least two hours a week. Don’t let your fingers get rusty.*)
 George: Deal!

Notably, this family exchange not only highlights George's skill in managing his linguistic resources, but also reveals that his parents are themselves flexible bilinguals. Whilst they predominantly use Mandarin to convey values and emotional reasoning throughout the conversation, they remain receptive to George's responses in English, demonstrating a form of interactive language management. George's ability to switch fluidly between languages stems from his broader linguistic repertoire, which he draws upon strategically depending on the interlocutor and situational context. It is worth mentioning that piano practice and artistic cultivation are classic forms of middle-class investment in cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). For London's Chinese families, piano learning extends far beyond just a cultural habit, it is a strategic investment in their children's class mobility, and granting them access to elite social network and skills.

In Chinese discourse, 玩儿 (for fun) is often loaded with a "not taking something seriously" attitude and connotations such as unseriousness or lack of commitment, particularly in relation to academic performance or extracurricular discipline. By deliberately invoking this term, George activates a culturally embedded semantic frame that only his parents are likely to grasp fully. His choice of language here is not accidental but calculated, reflecting a nuanced understanding of the semantic dissonance between Mandarin and English, and serving as a means of responding to parental expectations while subtly asserting his own stance. In doing so, George repositions himself within the family through linguistic differentiation, simultaneously performing the role of a dutiful son who listens to guidance, and a self-aware young person who negotiates that guidance on his own terms.

Both Andy and George exemplify how young second-generation Chinese youth engage in translanguaging not merely as a linguistic strategy, but as a means of negotiating identity and relational positioning across cultural contexts. By crossing linguistic boundaries and disrupting cultural conventions, people are able to question dominant discourses, challenge language hierarchies, and strategically position themselves within diverse sociocultural contexts (Li, 2011). In George's case, a single hybrid utterance becomes a means of both responding to familial cultural expectations and asserting his own subjectivity. Similarly, Andy's family conversation about *shou zhua bing* demonstrates his ability to navigate fluidly between linguistic and cultural systems and

different positions. When he compares shou zhua bing to a wrap, and further rephrases it as a “layered Chinese flatbread”, he is not simply translating food across cultures – he is creatively constructing a channel of understanding between Chinese and British culinary frameworks. This negotiation is a privileged act of capital management, they mobilise their dual linguistic and cultural capital to construct a bicultural identity that is both socially valued and personally authentic.

However, transpositioning offers a more process-oriented and situated analytical lens. While the third space highlights hybridity and the coexistence of multiple cultural identities, transpositioning emphasises the performative and directional aspects of role-shifting within specific moments of interaction. It foregrounds how speakers actively reposition themselves across different cultural, affective, and power-laden terrains through their linguistic choices (Li & Lee, 2023). Thus, transpositioning not only captures the outcome of cultural hybridity, but also illuminates the mechanisms through which such hybridity is enacted in practice.

For instance, George, by saying “piano” along with the Mandarin term “for fun”, strategically uses language to shift from the role of an obedient son to that of a locally rooted youth asserting his own stance of emotional and cultural transpositioning. Andy, by rephrasing shou zhua bing from “wrap” to “layered Chinese flatbread”, demonstrates cross-cultural sensitivity and creative naming, repositioning himself within both Chinese and British culinary frameworks and engaging in the reproduction of cultural knowledge and identity.

This transpositioning reveals their deep sensory and experiential knowledge of both cultures and illustrates how participants are not just cultural intermediaries, but agents of interpretation and hybrid knowledge production. Their fluid movement between cultural frameworks reflects both linguistic dexterity and an ability to consciously and strategically reorient themselves between Chinese and British cultural positions.

Chinese families in London develop a biculturally integrated ways of being and ways of belonging through processes of boundary erosion, translanguaging, and transpositioning. In terms of ways of being, they centre their identity on the dual roles of bicultural mediator and autonomous negotiator. For example, George leverages

translanguaging to balance his parents' Chinese-style educational expectations (such as piano grade exams) with his own Western-style interests (like football), proactively negotiating his role rather than accepting it passively. This autonomy is a hallmark of middle-class parenting and expectations, where children are encouraged to develop individual interests alongside familial expectations. While other participants, who are often expected to prioritise familial labour over personal growth.

Parents, meanwhile, adopt the stance of bilingual caregivers and culturally inclusive police. They convey cultural values (e.g. valuing artistic cultivation) in Mandarin, yet accept their children's responses in English, and co-construct a bicultural family through mixed-language communication instead of seeking linguistic dominance.

At the level of ways of belonging, participants access the third space as conceptualised by Bhabha (1994) through translanguaging practices. Andy redefines the culinary term by referring to shou zhua bing as "layered Chinese flatbread"; neither cutting himself off from their Chinese heritage nor excluding British culture. This enables participants to develop a flexible sense of belonging to both family and social communities.

In sum, Chinese households in London and Glasgow display distinct linguistic practices, which further shape divergent transnational identities among participants. In Glasgow, strict intergenerational linguistic boundaries dominate: with parents having limited English proficiency, children use English among siblings (for solidarity and private spaces) and Mandarin with parents (to fulfil family obligations), making language a functional tool for separating generations and managing family roles. This gives rise to stratified transnational identities – ways of being are divided (eldest children act as family brokers/carers, younger siblings as passive dependents) and ways of belonging are split (balancing duty-based belonging to the Chinese family and social belonging to British local life).

London households dissolve such rigid boundaries, with language used as capital to bridge cross-cultural negotiation. Parents' bilingual proficiency eliminates the need for child language brokering, and their investment in dual linguistic capital (Mandarin and English) and skills fosters transnational identities, forming a cohesive bicultural belonging free from fragmentation. London's second-generation Chinese youth

constructing identities that are both culturally authentic and class based. That is to say, class and capitals capital shapes the practices through which individuals and families negotiate identity and maintain social status.

Although the family constitutes the initial field of linguistic socialisation for second-generation Chinese youth, these young people also enter community educational spaces such as Chinese schools and Chinese associations where they continue to encounter language negotiation.

6.4 Authority and affection: embodied identity negotiation in Chinese schooling

All participants from Glasgow and eight participants from London in this study reported having attended Chinese schools for several years, and they cited this experience as pivotal in preserving and developing their Mandarin proficiency. Against this backdrop, this section explores the linguistic practices taking place in Chinese schools, specifically focusing on how translanguaging and transpositioning shape emotional expression across different languages, as well as the role of embodied multisensory approaches in learning Mandarin.

6.4.1 Chinese as the official language, whilst English delivers emotions better

Drawing from my ethnographic fieldwork, an important mechanism of translanguaging and transpositioning takes place within the context of Chinese schools, lending participants a situated transnational identity. In private interactions, they often switch to English when offering emotional support and reassurance to fellow Chinese children who, like themselves, were raised in the UK. This form of transpositioning across both language and social positioning not only reflects a shift in identity performance when speaking different languages in different interaction contexts, but also directly challenges the claim that the home language is inherently more emotionally resonant or affectively charged (Pavlenko, 2006).

However, the experiences of second-generation Chinese youth suggest a more complex reality: emotional resonance does not necessarily reside in the home language, but emerges through the situated meanings and power relations embedded within each language. In this way, language becomes a cultural lens through which notions of home and belonging are constructed and serves as a bridge to the imagined and inherited world of grandparents and ancestral roots.

Kelly, who worked as a TA at a Chinese school in Glasgow, recounted an incident in which she comforted a distressed pupil from a Chinese household:

There was a little girl in class today who started crying, she didn't want to come in. I took her outside to talk, and of course we spoke in English. She said she wanted to go home, probably because she was upset, so I asked her what had happened.

Her use of the phrase “of course we spoke in English” signals an underlying affective logic that goes beyond linguistic convenience. Despite being situated in a Chinese school – a space ostensibly dedicated to immersion in the Mandarin language – Kelly instinctively resorted to English in a moment of emotional vulnerability. This decision reflects a broader pattern observed among second-generation Chinese youth in which English functions as the default language of emotional immediacy, relational comfort, and horizontal solidarity. This thesis thus claims that English delivers emotions better when participants are talking to people who share a similar background.

Indeed, Kelly’s approach reflects a broader pattern observed among young second-generation Chinese TAs in Chinese schools, where most of the pupils are, like themselves, also being raised in Chinese-speaking households in the UK. Their interactions with these younger students are shaped not only by linguistic familiarity but by an implicit understanding of shared diasporic experiences. Rather than enforcing parents’ language use at all times, TAs often adopt English as a means of building rapport and offering emotional accessibility.

Jia, who supported teaching in an upper-level class in Glasgow’s language school, noted, “I speak to them in English privately”, and added, “I wouldn’t joke in Chinese”.

Her comment highlights a common reluctance to use Chinese for casual or emotionally nuanced exchanges, reflecting the perception of Mandarin as a formal or performative code. Similarly, Jacky explained that he preferred using Mandarin when speaking with teachers because “Chinese feels more formal, it’s like the official school language”. Yet, in informal peer interactions, he typically switched to English: “English is what we’ve spoken since we were kids, it expresses feelings better.”

In this context, English is not merely a communicative tool but a socially meaningful register that helps collapse hierarchies and signal empathy. Drawing on Pavlenko’s (2006) critique of home language emotional dominance, this complicates the notion that one’s mother tongue is always the most emotionally resonant. Rather, it supports a growing body of scholarship suggesting that the emotional functions of language are shaped by lived experience, socialisation, and context-specific meaning-making (see also Dewaele, 2010). For Kelly and the child, English is the language of everyday life in the UK – the medium through which friendships are forged, emotions are shared, and support is offered.

These examples highlight participants’ flexible strategies for navigating identity through language in specific contexts. Chinese, particularly Mandarin, is often positioned as the authoritative and normative language of classroom instruction, carrying the symbolic weight of cultural heritage and formality. English, by contrast, becomes the preferred medium for expressing care, building trust, and fostering emotional closeness during informal or interpersonal interactions.

In this process, language use is a social practice, a dynamic mechanism through which individuals negotiate positioning and emotional connection within specific contexts. That is to say, language use embodies the speaker’s self-positioning, perceptions of others’ roles, and the shaping of interpersonal relations, and it enacts and constructs these positionalities and relations in the moment of speaking (Austin, 1962).

This performative policing of Mandarin arises precisely because its use is perceived as fragile and at risk of erosion within the diasporic context. In this sense, when participants serving as TAs use Mandarin during formal classroom instruction, they are not only conveying linguistic content but actively enacting a normative role shaped by

both institutional expectations and diasporic ideology. As argued by Li and Wu (2009), ethnic heritage language classrooms often operate as ideological spaces where language becomes a symbol of authenticity and cultural continuity. Mandarin, in this setting, functions less as a communicative tool and more as an authoritative discourse that signifies Chineseness, discipline, and intergenerational transmission. Its repeated use in the classroom is a form of ritualised performative practice that reproduces the diasporic ideology of heritage maintenance.

However, outside the formal classroom, during breaks, casual one-on-one interactions, or moments requiring emotional attunement, these same assistants frequently shift to English. This language choice is a socially meaningful act that reflects a repositioning of self. It marks a shift from the front stage of the Chinese classroom where TAs perform the role of cultural transmitter and institutional authority, to the backstage of informal interaction where they drop the performative mask of heritage defender and enact the role of empathetic peer (Goffman, 1959). By choosing English in the backstage, TAs refuse to be confined to the normative role of cultural inheritor and claim their own positionalities as second generation Chinese youth and empathetic peer.

This shift in language use exposes the underlying tension between ethnic language maintenance and the lived linguistic realities of second-generation Chinese youth. As argued by Pavlenko (2006) and García and Wei (2014), language choice in multilingual contexts is never neutral, it indexes affective positioning, relational intent, and broader ideological struggles. The transpositioning enacted by TAs therefore embodies a micro-level negotiation of identity, care, and belonging, while simultaneously responding to the macro-level pressures of heritage language erosion among the diasporas.

Articulated through language, transpositioning reflects an ongoing reconfiguration of both cultural identity and interpersonal relationships. When participants engage with students outside the formal classroom, particularly in moments requiring emotional support or relational sensitivity, they consistently shift into English. This is not merely a matter of linguistic intelligibility; it reflects a deliberate relational positioning grounded in a shared diasporic experience and background. In such moments, participants are not speaking from a place of authority but aligning themselves with the students' emotional world. Because they are conveying a relational stance: "I've been

there” (Jia, 20), “I understand you” (Jack, 22), “I’m from your generation” (Lily, 21), these expressions of empathy are shaped by their own biographies: like the younger students they support, they were raised in Chinese-speaking households while navigating British society and school life. They position themselves as culturally proximate and emotionally available.

This linguistic and relational shift is not incidental but forms part of a broader strategy of transnational identity negotiation. As TAs, they balance dual positionalities: on the one hand, they are tasked with upholding Mandarin as a heritage language and symbol of diasporic continuity; on the other, they are deeply embedded in the affective codes, emotional registers, and peer-oriented norms of British society. The classroom becomes a space where this duality is negotiated in real time.

Crucially, such moments of transpositioning from Mandarin to English, from formality to intimacy, and from authority to empathy, reveal a subtle yet powerful reorientation of identity and social roles. By stepping down from the elevated position of cultural instructor and adopting the persona of a caring older sibling, they demonstrate a form of linguistic and affective fluidity that allows them to navigate between two cultural worlds. This is not a passive experience of being “caught between” cultures, but an active performativity of hybridity, a situated, relational, and transnational subjectivity shaped by emotional attunement and cultural reflexivity.

This insight offers a better understanding of the emotional and identity-related experiences embedded in language practices. As Maya from London shared:

Speaking English feels more casual, but when I speak Chinese, I feel a bit, I don’t know, unable to fully let go.

Andy similarly noted:

When I talk to Chinese people, I unconsciously become more polite and considerate of their feelings because that’s a cultural default in a Chinese environment, like with my Chinese family side. But when I switch to English, my expression becomes more direct and at ease.

Josh from Glasgow expressed comparable sentiments:

I feel like when I speak English, I can have whatever attitude, but in my parents' language, I feel very restrained, very conservative, very polite, because that's what I usually talk to them in. Sometimes I'll use some English word order and grammar when speaking Chinese. It sounds a bit odd. I don't know, but I feel like that's not the real me.

Lily's comments explicitly link language to her transnational identity: she said that speaking English made her feel "relaxed" and able to "say whatever comes to mind", but when speaking in Chinese, she "becomes that person who goes back to China" and "becomes shy and timid". Mandarin accent also contributed to participants' sense of distance from the language. As John put it:

You know, both places. It makes me speak Mandarin with a foreigner's accent and different word order, which makes me feel awkward.

These narratives reveal a common pattern: for many second-generation Chinese, English carries connotations of the everyday, the natural, and the informal – it extends into their everyday identity and is the primary code for backstage performativity of intimacy and solidarity. Conversely, switching to Mandarin often invokes associations with family, cultural heritage, and discipline. It serves as the frontstage performative of cultural legitimacy and intergenerational deference.

Pavlenko (2006, 2008) argued that language serves as a carrier of emotional memory and socialised experience. Each language is acquired within specific social contexts and therefore comes embedded with the emotions, role expectations, and behavioural norms of those contexts (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2004). For Josh, Chinese is not just a language, it is his "parents' language", symbolising familial discipline and the version of himself that exists within the home. The language itself triggers ingrained emotional responses and behavioural patterns formed in interactions with his parents. In these moments, he is no longer simply "the speaker", but becomes the role invoked and shaped by the language. Linguistic performativity in transnational contexts shows that the language enacts a specific "self-in-culture", a version of the self that is constructed through early socialisation and repeatedly performed in interactions with others (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2004). For Lily, performing Mandarin enacts the shy and timid self-associated with interactions with elders in China, while performing English

enacts the "relaxed and authentic self" associated with growing up in British society. By continuously switching between English and Chinese, participants adjust their positions between being cultural inheritors and localised subjects, responding to the demands of heritage while simultaneously creating new, everyday modes of belonging.

Moreover, this study challenges the assumption that the "mother tongue" typically understood as the language of the parents is inherently tied to emotional depth and affective intimacy (Baker, 1988; Miller, 2017). Among second-generation Chinese youth, emotional comfort and empathetic connection are frequently expressed in English, their so-called "second" language. Their language choices signal intimacy, solidarity, and shared generational experience, and are often articulated through statements such as "I've been there" (Jennie) or "I understand you" (Jia).

This pattern reveals a need to move beyond essentialist assumptions about emotional resonance being naturally located in the mother tongue. As suggested by Dewaele (2010) and Kramsch (2009), emotionality in multilingual settings is not fixed but socially and contextually constructed. For second-generation Chinese young speakers, emotional attachment to a language is shaped by how, when, and with whom the language is used, rather than by the mere fact of early exposure. In this sense, English is not simply a dominant societal language but becomes a language of emotional practice, grounded in the everyday lived realities of growing up between cultures.

Thus, whilst Mandarin continues to function as a symbol of cultural legitimacy within formal educational spaces, English has become the affective medium through which care, support, and peer identification are performed. This challenges the literature on linguistic maintenance and affectivity to re-examine its affective assumptions and to recognise the shifting emotional economies of bilingual and transnational life.

6.4.2 Embodied, multisensory language learning and practice

Fieldwork conducted in both Glasgow and London reveals that Chinese schools are not merely sites of language instruction, but serve as multisensory cultural spaces, where visual, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and auditory stimuli coalesce to evoke an embodied

sense of Chinese culture. Within these settings, identity mechanisms operate in embodiment/senses as second-generation Chinese youth engage in festive customs and artistic activities such as dragon dances, calligraphy competitions, and handkerchief performances, thereby positioning themselves as receivers of Chinese culture. These schools facilitate second-generation Chinese participants' engagement with what Holliday (1999, 2010) might term small cultures as localised, practice-based groupings that exist within and across national cultures.

Whilst such performances risk reinforcing big culture stereotypes, namely essentialised notions of a unified, homogeneous Chinese culture, they simultaneously offer opportunities for intercultural belonging and emotional identification. As Kramsch (1998) noted, cultural experience is not only learnt but also felt, shaped by affective investments. The enactment of cultural practices in these schools, therefore, does more than transmit cultural heritage; it allows students to negotiate and co-construct a transnational identity grounded in cultural threads (Holliday, 2011) and personalised elements of culture that traverse borders and generations. This anti-essentialist perspective helps illuminate how these participants creatively inhabit cultural spaces that are neither fixed nor purely inherited, but continuously reassembled through experience, performance, and imagination.

In the auditory and performative dimension, poetry recitation offers a powerful example of cultural embodiment. Whilst the poem itself belongs to the canon of big culture, its enactment within a classroom of second-generation Chinese youth where it is rehearsed, shared, and emotionally inhabited transforms it into a small culture moment: a lived, relational, and evolving practice of transnational identity. Yee shared her experience of participating in a Mid-Autumn Festival celebration organised by the Chinese school in Glasgow, where she and her classmates recited the classical poem *Shui Diao Ge Tou* 水调歌头. This act served as both a form of cultural performance and a transnational cultural linkage – a moment through which they enacted and internalised a sense of connection to their ancestral homeland:

I've always found classical Chinese poetry beautiful, and once I understood the meaning behind it, it felt even more beautiful. Although my sister and I don't speak

perfect Mandarin, we really liked this poem. The line “但愿人长久，千里共婵娟” (May we all be blessed with longevity, though thousands of miles apart, we are still able to share the same moon together) really struck me. The poet is using the moon to express longing and hope for separated families and friends to be safe and understood. And I thought, my family who live in other places are also looking at the same moon. It’s so romantic.

The idea of “looking at the same moon” is more than just a poetic image. In practice, it becomes a cross-border emotional anchor, articulating both longing and imagined unity across geographical divides. From Holliday’s (2011) perspective, this can be understood as a cultural thread; an element of meaning-making that does not belong exclusively to a national or essentialised culture (big culture) but instead emerges within the lived and negotiated practices of individuals in specific contexts (small cultures). The moon here operates as a bridge that threads together diasporic experiences, enabling emotional continuity across space and time. Simultaneously, it symbolises the imagined homeland (Anderson, 1983) not as a fixed territorial origin, but as a shared emotional and symbolic space activated through ritual and language.

Similarly, in embodied writing practices such as Chinese calligraphy, participants engage with language intellectually as well as physically. Alex, for example, recounted his experience helping to organise a calligraphy display alongside his classmates:

At first we all thought it was fun, it was our first time holding such large brushes. As soon as we dipped them in ink, the strokes just turned into black blobs. We couldn’t write properly at all. Just writing the character for “water” was so hard. We had to follow online tutorials and then the teacher guided us step by step – it was really difficult. When you write English, you don’t really think about each stroke – it just has to be legible. But Chinese writing is about making it beautiful. The teacher told us that practising calligraphy is about calming your mind.

Through such activities, language learning becomes embodied and multisensory, understood through sight, movement, rhythm, and emotion. This distinction between writing English and Chinese draws attention to the aesthetic demands embedded in

Chinese writing, where each stroke must convey balance, rhythm, and intention. The teacher's remark that "practising calligraphy is about calming your mind" introduces a meditative, embodied dimension that links artistic form to emotional discipline.

This process reflects a moment of transpositioning: a shift in cognitive, cultural, and affective positioning as Alex moves between two writing systems with fundamentally different aesthetic and embodied demands. He is not simply learning another language; he is inhabiting a new position within a different semiotic and cultural logic.

Similarly, embodied transnational practices were also observed in Chinese schools in London. During my ethnographic fieldwork, I observed how a Dragon Boat Festival activity during a Mandarin lesson became a multisensory site of knowledge, emotion, and cultural transmission. One teacher brought in glutinous rice, red dates, bamboo leaves, chopsticks, and bowls. As the students learnt how to wrap zongzi (traditional sticky rice dumplings, see Figure 2, picture by Lily), the teacher projected onto the screen selected lines from *Li Sao*, the classical poem commemorating the poet Qu Yuan, who is honoured during the festival. The classroom was filled with the fragrant scent of bamboo leaves, while visuals of ancient Chinese scenes and recitations of poetry played alongside explanations of their deeper meanings.



Figure 2: Students in the Chinese language school in London learning warping zongzi, by Lily

Lily, one of the classmates, reflected on the experience:

Chinese poetry really is beautiful. Even though it's sometimes hard to read in Chinese school – we don't always recognise the characters – doing something like making zongzi while listening to the teacher talk about Qu Yuan's story and hearing lines like 路漫漫其修远兮(The road ahead is long and has no ending) made me feel his sense of not giving up. The smell of the leaves was really nice, kind of sweet. In our usual schools here in the UK, we don't often get to learn this way of doing something while learning it. And Chinese poems are different from English ones; they sound more like singing, with rhythm and meaning. The teacher explained the poem in English too, so I understood better why it connects to the Dragon Boat Festival. It felt like we weren't just learning Chinese, but also a whole culture and history.

Lily's sensory and emotional engagement in the zongzi (rice dumpling)-making activity, accompanied by recitations from Li Sao and bilingual explanations of the poem's meaning, offers an illustration of both transpositioning and translanguaging in an educational context. Crucially, this transposition is not enacted through language alone, it is multisensory: Lily engages with the textures and smells of bamboo leaves and glutinous rice, the rhythm of poetry that “sounds more like singing”, and the visual imagery of ancient China.

In conjunction with this, translanguaging plays a pivotal role in enabling Lily to access, interpret, and emotionally connect with the content. She notes that the teacher “explained the poem in English too, so I understood better”. This fluid movement between Chinese and English is not simply about translation – it constitutes a translanguaging space (García & Wei, 2014) where the interplay of languages enables meaning-making across multiple epistemic and emotional registers. The lesson becomes a hybrid linguistic ecology in which poetry, story, explanation, smell, and taste are woven together to create an accessible and affective learning experience.

Overall, these accounts align closely with Werbner and Fumanti's (2013) formulation of diasporic aesthetics as sensuous participation: the making of beauty, distinction and

sensual pleasure as participatory performance, embedded and re-embedded in social worlds (p. 1). In Alex's case, calligraphy becomes a diasporic aesthetic practice, one that is lived and felt through the texture of ink, the rhythm of the brush, the emotion of failure and eventual mastery, and fosters inward-looking emotional belonging. Werbner and Fumanti (2013) argued that such practices allow diasporic subjects to "transform ugly concrete structures, school and community halls... into pleasurable, homely places" (p. 8), hence Chinese school becomes a site of transnational emplacement through embodied ritual and sensory participation.

This spatial reinvention makes the Chinese school not just a language learning institution but the provider of a diasporic taste of the homeland. Taste (such as red dates and bamboo leaves), smell (glutinous rice and the aroma of steamed leaves), sound (recitations of poetry in both Chinese and English), sight (images of classical Chinese paintings), and bodily action (wrapping zongzi – as with Lily, or practising calligraphy – as with Alex) are woven together to produce a rich, multimodal cultural experience.

This means that transnational identity is a perceptual and embodied experience: the trembling of hands, the scent of ink, the standard of aesthetics. This embodied experience gives the "Chinese" identity an everyday palpable reality, thus enhancing the inherent solidity of transnational identity. In addition, Werbner and Fumanti (2013) suggested that Chinese aesthetics can transform everyday space into a transnational social field, making it a sensed place. Alex, Ming, and Lily have participated in various activities in Chinese schools in the UK, an act not only of performing culture, but also of actively transforming the environment to give it a flavour of home, and shaping a sense of transnational belonging to Chinese culture.

In the following section, I turn to the everyday linguistic and cultural negotiations that occur in Chinese takeaway shops, where translanguaging interactions become central to identity performance between front-of-house and back-of-house.

6.5 Takeaway shops and restaurants as translanguaging zones

The takeaway shop is a site where two key mechanisms, translanguaging and transpositioning, shape the transnational identity of second-generation British Chinese youth. A core feature here is the back kitchen door: which acts as a critical “switch” for translanguaging and transpositioning; once they cross this door, their identity roles shift immediately. Inside the back kitchen, embodiment intertwines with the sounds, smells, and language of this space; the kitchen itself also functions as an identity boundary. These translanguaging and transpositioning practices carry a dynamic, negotiable quality: they leave the youth in an “in-between” identity state, while also forging a context-specific sense of belonging. This form of identity is precisely what is referred to as “situated transnational identity”. It is an identity continually performed and constructed through everyday translanguaging and boundary-crossing FOH/BOH practices in the takeaway shop.

In the family-run takeaway businesses of the research participants, a clear pattern of translanguaging emerges: English is typically used for front-of-house service and communication with customers, while Chinese is retained in the kitchen for coordination and internal interactions. The kitchen door thus functions as a spatial-linguistic boundary, demarcating the front and backstage, public and private spheres, and signalling a shift in sensory perception, particularly in terms of smell and touch. Each time participants cross this boundary, they reposition themselves between language codes and social roles and switching from the linguistic and behavioral scripts of a frontstage performance to those of a backstage performance.

In most of the Glasgow-based families taking part in this study, participants grew up helping with the family business, carrying out tasks such as cashiering, answering phone calls, or delivering dishes. Unlike the cultural practices discussed in the previous chapter – such as calligraphy and classical poetry, which carry aesthetic and symbolic significance – the takeaway shop grounds identity in practical, routine, and labour-oriented activities. As Alex explained: “We take orders in English, then tell the kitchen in Chinese what to cook.” Similarly, Lily noted: “I write down the customers’ English orders in Chinese and pass them to the kitchen.”

A conversation held by Hannah through speaker phone illustrates more vividly the dimension of the interaction between language and identity.

A customer calls on the phone (with a strong Scottish accent):
Customer: “*Hello? Eh... 你好! Can I get, eh, one sweet 'n' sour pork, large chips, and... 谢谢!*”

Hannah (smiling): “*No problem! One sweet and sour pork, large chips...anything else?*”

(She turns and walks into the kitchen, and her voice can be heard): “*一个咕嚕, 一份大薯条!*”

Similar scenes frequently occurred in the takeaway shops I visited, where shifts in both roles and language often took place upon crossing the threshold that connects the kitchen and front-of-house. This door is not merely a physical structure, but also a symbolic boundary of identity and cultural space. As noted by Lamont and Molnár (2002), boundaries delineate cultural differences and social positions between groups. Here, the boundary separates the “front-of-house”, a hybrid space rooted in both British and Chinese cultures, from the “kitchen” as a private diasporic Chinese enclave, prompting participants to switch their identities and languages between the two cultural contexts. In the dining area, participants are expected to engage with customers in standard English, embodying a service persona recognised by mainstream British culture. Their behaviour conforms to the politeness norms, discursive styles, and service logics of the majority society, resembling Goffman’s (1959) notion of a front stage performance. Conversely, in the kitchen, they retreat into a more communal space dominated by Chinese, where they can express themselves more naturally and casually, forming a sense of Chinese community with colleagues and elders, a backstage performance.

Crossing the kitchen door entails not only a shift in language and social roles but also a transformation of sensory experience. As Jennie describes, within the kitchen there is a “chaotic mix of sizzling oil, clashing metal, and overlapping voices: ‘It’s like a war zone – you have to shout several times just to be heard... Out here, it’s quiet, so I have to adjust my voice.’” Similarly, Joe remarks: “Every time I step inside, the smell is intense, the noise is very loud, you have to raise your voice, or the chefs won’t hear you. Once the door closes, it’s quiet again.” These sensory contrasts render the spatial division palpable, extending the meaning of the “door” beyond its physicality to a

cultural marker, a subtle cue that reinforces the difference between two cultural spheres. Thus, language use becomes a form of identity labour shaped by smell, sound, and embodied routines. This boundary sharpens participants' awareness of their "in-betweenness" within British society. Joe's reflection on his role captures this tension:

When the shop gets busy, I have to manage both sides. With so many orders, it's hard not to make mistakes. Sometimes, I can't satisfy either the chefs or the customers. It's tough being the middle person.

Here, "middle person" functions as both a literal job description and a metaphor for cultural identity: neither fully integrated into Britishness nor a direct extension of traditional Chinese family culture, but a hybrid identity constantly negotiating and switching between two cultural worlds. Joe belongs neither fully to "the customers' world" (British society) nor to "the back kitchen' world" (the diasporic Chinese familial space). His position epitomises the third space – a hybrid arena born of cultural encounters and intersections.

This also resonates with Jennie's self-description:

Half human, half ghost. Half half. I often tell myself this, because if I were living in China, I definitely wouldn't know as much as the people there... And here, compared with the locals, they know more about their own country. So I'm in the middle... I just know a little bit of both sides, that's how it is.

This highlights how second-generation Chinese youth are often caught in the middle. Such phenomena have been widely documented in studies of second-generation individuals. For instance, Brocket (2018), in his research on second-generation Palestinian Americans, noted that they frequently occupy a state of "in-betweenness" where they would be viewed as "outsiders" in the US due to their ethnicity, religion, or appearance, yet regarded in Palestine as "Americans" or "not authentically Palestinian". Similarly, Moftizadeh et al. (2022), in their study of second-generation Kurds in London, found that participants often experienced "othering" and a pronounced sense of being caught in the middle.

These studies reveal that the second generation actively constructs new forms of identity, assigning greater permeability to the boundaries of belonging. In response to dual forms of exclusion, they negotiate their sense of self through everyday discourse, practices, and reflexive positioning, thus forging what Brocket (2018) terms “positioned belongings”. This concept underscores how the second generation, through self-reflection and comparison with “others”, creates a dynamic sense of belonging that is neither fully aligned with the mainstream nor wholly with the ancestral homeland (Brocket, 2018, p. 14). The notion of being “half half” from Jennie exemplifies this positioned belonging: she recognises her cultural heritage linked to China, yet, through contrasts with “locals” or “those over there”, she also acknowledges how her upbringing in Britain affords her perspectives distinct from those of both British locals and the Chinese community. This results in a sense of belonging that is not bound to a single national or ethnic narrative. As Alex emphasised: “I am Chinese, but I was born and raised in Britain, with different cultures and experiences from yours.” Similarly, others stress their difference from both Chinese and British groups, as highlighted in Chapter 5’s discussion of distinct music performances within diasporic and local peer communities.

Further exploration into the scope of a sense of belonging reveals that participants from different cities use different wordings to describe their identities. Participants in London often emphasise their London experiences and local identity. For example, Harry said, “If someone in the UK asks, you know, I would just, I grew up in London, and they’re usually quite happy, like obviously because I have a British accent”, Vincent stated, “Like I grew up in the UK, London, but my family is from China, I just say that all the time”, and Maya said, “I don’t say, English, that’s emmm, I just say I grew up in London”.

Participants in Glasgow, on the other hand, preferred a broader description. For instance, Sue explained, “I prefer a more general term, like British Chinese, and most people ask if I’m British. They don’t usually use the word Scottish because it doesn’t feel natural”. Claire said, “I’m not calling myself Scottish Chinese. Calling myself Scottish feels a bit exaggerated. When you say you’re Scottish, people assume you look like that, and talk like that. While I know not all Scots look like that, it still feels a bit strange when I say it myself”.

The differences in identity expressions between participants from the two locations reveal distinct strategies of identity negotiation shaped by urban contexts. First, the cosmopolitan cultural logic of London affords residents the legitimacy of holding diverse identities. Participants here can construct hybrid and accepted identities by drawing on their urban experiences and dominant cultural symbols such as accents. For instance, Harry deliberately emphasises his British accent as a form of “linguistic capital” (Bourdieu, 1991): by leveraging the authenticity of the dominant language, he gains cultural authority and reduces the cost of identity negotiation. Second, participants in Glasgow avoid the “Scottish” label as a strategy to blur geographical boundaries, thereby evading geopolitical risks in a region with active nationalism. This constitutes a practice of boundary work. The localness inherent in Scottish identity is often tied to male-dominated working-class culture (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2014), exposing second-generation Chinese youth to the risk of cultural incompatibility – one that motivates their avoidance of region-specific labels.

Combining the discussions of transnational identity and transpositioning in takeaway FOH/BOH, participants are performing situated transnational identity coupled with a different urban context. In family-run takeaway shops in Glasgow, participants transposition through translanguaging, embodied labour such as smell from the kitchen, voice adjustment between front- and back-of-house, and orders taken with pens. They constantly cross the kitchen door which serves as the boundary of their positions, leading to a contextual and situated transnational identity. Regarding their description of identity, participants in London situate the anchor point in London rather than the nation, while those living in Glasgow shift the anchor point of belonging towards the broader identity of British rather than focusing on “Glasgow” or “Scotland”. This positioning and sense of belonging among second-generation Chinese youth reveals a marked sense of agency and context. The former group transforms London's multicultural attributes and their Chinese background as capital into identity advantages, while the latter finds a secure counterpoint between their Chinese background and local acceptance by broadening their scope of belonging. These outcomes stem from participants' proactive negotiation and self-presentation within urban power structures and cultural environments, ultimately converging towards the shared goal of flexible dual belonging.

Beyond the takeaway shop and out on the city streets, second-generation Chinese youth no longer enjoy the same degree of spatial autonomy. Body visibility, rather than language, becomes the primary marker, and racialised gazes frequently precede any spoken exchange. The next section therefore shifts the lens from the workplace to Britain's public spaces, examining how second-generation Chinese youth, exposed to the scrutiny of strangers, negotiate the more hostile environment of street racialisation through linguistic tactics, calculated silences, and subtle bodily cues.

6.6 Public space and linguistic racialisation: “ni hao” encounters and Chinese as a secret language

Although Britain, especially London, used to be portrayed as a highly diverse and multicultural context, since Brexit it has seen a marked turn towards bordering and migration control. Contemporary London is portrayed as a polity structured by “hostile environment” measures (Griffiths & Yeo 2021; Reynolds et al. 2024). Within this country, racism works intersectionally through colour, language, ethnicity, and religion (Song, 2018; Grosfoguel et al., 2015). My fieldwork and interviews reveal that 10 out of 18 participants in London reported being approached by strangers with the greeting “Ni hao” (hello) after COVID. Six participants living in Glasgow reported using Chinese or Fujian dialect as a secret language when they talked privately in a public space.

This section highlights the following mechanism: in public settings (frontstage), second-generation Chinese young people explicitly position themselves as London locals with a sense of belonging – either through self-positioning (e.g. “Sorry, I was born here”) or interacting in English to resist the “outsider” assumption. By contrast, in private/ethnic settings (backstage), they switch to Chinese or dialects (Gumperz's (1974) “we-code”). Alongside this, boundary work manifests in two forms: language (English as a “symbol of mainstream belonging” and Chinese as a “marker of internal boundaries”) and the racialised bodies of these second-generation Chinese young people. The eventual identity outcome is a situated transnational identity.

Being hailed by strangers with greetings of “Ni hao” (hello) or “China!” relates to the racialised body. By yoking appearance to a presumed mother tongue, they cast the addressee as an outsider and reaffirm an implicit consensus over who qualifies as a legitimate member of the national community. The passer-by thus wields what Bourdieu (1991) calls symbolic power, making “Ni hao” (hello) less an innocuous salutation than a speech act that polices the boundaries of belonging. Moreover, it uses language itself as the basis for identification and judgement, linking certain languages or accents with the logic of power based on racial hierarchy (Hill, 2008). Naming, as Butler (1997) reminds us, is never neutral, here it materialises the social belief that Chineseness equals foreignness.

Confronted with such encounters, participants typically adopt three tactics: deliberate silence, replying in English, or occasionally defusing the moment with humour. Silence operates as both avoidance and refusal; while an English riposte disrupts the foreigner’s presumption and re-positions the speaker as a local Londoner. This can be read through Cameron’s (1995) notion of verbal hygiene: by editing, filtering, or rejecting particular linguistic forms, speakers cleanse the interaction to protect self-presentation and resist othering.

Sometimes participants replied in English by saying “Sorry, I was born here”, or simply remaining silent, which functions as an act of resistance. The response repudiates people’s unilateral definition and, through the dominant code, re-asserts a local identity. Shifting back into Chinese in more intimate exchanges then creates an information barrier within the public sphere, restricting conversation to an insider “we-code” (Gumperz, 1974, 1982).

An experience of being racialised on the street occurred during my fieldwork in London when I was walking and talking with a participant named George. A white man suddenly greeted us with “Ni hao” (Hello). We paused, exchanged glances, and chose to ignore him.

Lewis’s experience was even more blunt: outside a bar a drunken man shouted “China!” at him. Lewis likewise said nothing and walked on. Such incidents are by no means

isolated. Millie, 22, recounted in her interview that two white men in a London Underground station repeatedly yelled “Ni hao! Ni hao!” at her, even bowing theatrically. She emphasised that episodes like this are common; phrases such as “Ni hao” or “I love Japan” are often deployed in pubs or other public spaces as “banter” or pick-up lines, leaving her feeling reduced to a cultural curio and triggering self-doubt: “I even felt ashamed of my identity.”

Such remarks reveal that Chinese can be a tool to racialise people and create a boundary; by presuming the identity of their targets, they fix Millie and Lewis within a box of outsiders. This language reduces their identities to racial and cultural stereotypes, constituting a typical act of “othering”. Furthermore, the process of bordering establishes social hierarchies and order. Borders not only divide space but also categorise, organise, and govern groups of people.

Another participant, Eric, spoke of the prejudice and hostility he perceived in London after COVID: “People suddenly became aggressive ... I honestly felt sad.”

Selena shared similar feelings. Once regarding London as a “safe space” and her “lovely diverse culture hometown”, she began to lose faith after several racist incidents in 2020 and beyond: “Isn’t London supposed to be diverse? I’m starting to lose faith in humanity.” These accounts show that even in a cosmopolitan city like London, the practice of marking ethnicity through language remains commonplace. Furthermore, it is not exclusive to second-generation Chinese youth but migrants in general, particularly those with racialised bodies and who speak exotic languages.

Amy’s reflections on people approaching her illustrate this:

I try to assume goodwill when someone says “Ni hao”, I believe most of them mean friendly. Usually, it’s maybe the only Chinese phrase they know, and when they see someone who looks they want to connect, to be friendly. But they may not realise that even that gesture comes out of an assumption about who I am, based solely on my appearance. When they welcome me in what they are imagine is my mother tongue, Chinese, they unconsciously mark me as an outsider, someone who doesn’t truly belong here. This is a powerful, to “othering” people. And it isn’t only white people who do it. I’ve seen Chinese people greet anyone who looks white with

“Hello” or “Ni hao”, they learnt from textbooks or somewhere. These words and actions may look okay, but it’s the same racialised logic. So I usually ignore them, or smile but give no verbal response.

As Amy notes, this seemingly innocent gesture rests on a racialised assumption that a “Chinese face” naturally pairs with Chinese as a mother tongue. Her physical features have already been racialised, serving as markers of otherness. When language is used to reinforce this assumption, the racialisation is not only confirmed but amplified, further positioning her as a “non-native” outsider. As a result, such greetings are not neutral acts of politeness but rather subtle forms of identity construction, constituting a form of non-malicious yet alienating language-based racial labelling. From the perspective of othering, this process separates second-generation Chinese youth from the mainstream “us”, implying their position is that of an outsider in everyday interactions.

Such assumptions not only overlook participants’ complex and hybrid identity being both deeply rooted in British society and connected to East Asian heritage, but also denies the possibility that individuals can navigate multiple cultural spaces without losing a sense of wholeness. Thus, these ostensibly friendly gestures of saying “Ni hao” reinforce and magnify the racialisation of the body through language, continually othering second-generation Chinese youth and tacitly reasserting cultural boundaries and asymmetries of power in society.

The most common tactic is deliberate silence: by ignoring the greeting, they avoid being drawn into an unwanted exchange. As Amy put it, “I usually just ignore it”. George and Eric adopt the same non-response. Selena elaborated on this:

It’s best to ignore them. If you start explaining who you are, it becomes exhausting. They already assume you’re a Chinese, why prove it? As long as you know who you are, that’s enough.

Tom, 25, replies in English to anyone who approaches him with “Ni hao”: “Sorry, I don’t speak Chinese, I was born here.” Andy responds casually with “Not bad.” By responding in English, they both contest the linguistic assumption and issue an explicit identity assertion: being British Chinese, they should not be cast as outsiders solely on

the basis of appearance. Their choice of the majority language rejects the equation of race with culture and reasserts their local belonging as Londoners, deliberately distancing themselves from the label of “non-locals”.

To illustrate this, I borrow a quote from Ming who lives in Glasgow, who likens English to “the plastic wrap I put around myself when I’m outside” and says that, once at home, “speaking Chinese” lets him “peel off that plastic”. English, then, is more than a necessary yet unnatural shell of identity, it is linguistic armour donned in public to fit in, be invisible, and “look local”.

As Piller (2002) reminded us, language is a resource through which individuals display and negotiate social boundaries. Tom and Andy deploy this resource by stressing that they were “born here”, using an English reply to delineate their boundaries and affirm their London identity. In an English-dominant city, the very act of choosing a language carries identity-political meaning, reiterating their lived experience and sense of belonging as Londoners. Although their bodies mark them as outsiders, Harry once mentioned that “a British accent usually make things easier”. This illustrates that languages and accents can be cultural capital that grants people varying degrees of social recognition and convenience in specific social environments, reducing the risk of being questioned or othered in public spaces. Moreover, by refusing Chinese in English, they stage a quiet yet powerful negotiation of self, resisting racial stereotyping while avoiding cultural self-denial. Such everyday calibration of the self against others’ expectations is central to their ongoing construction of a transnational identity.

Boundary work and embodied mechanisms remain embedded within the interaction between racialised bodies and linguistic choices. East Asian appearance, perceived by mainstream society as a symbol of the “other”, serves as the visual starting point for boundary demarcation, while language acts as the core vehicle for both enforcing these boundaries and negotiating identity in reverse. Whether resisting the “outsider” presumption through English in public settings or maintaining ethnic bonds via Chinese in private spheres, both fundamentally employ language as a tool to delineate “in-group” and “out-group” distinctions. This simultaneously enables the mutual construction of “racialised bodily perception” and “linguistic identity expression”, ultimately crystallising into embodied identity practices. Second-generation Chinese youth in

London have developed a strategy of linguistic avoidance: they refrain from speaking Chinese in public to reduce the risk of unwanted scrutiny, misrecognition, or harassment. As a consequence, these experiences have shaped their transnational identities: in response to the city's heightened urban hostility in the post-COVID era, the youth assert their lived London experiences – using this claim to anchor the “local” facet of their dual belonging.

The logic of embodied identity is not confined solely to London's hyper-multilingual context. Among the Chinese participants in Glasgow, Mandarin or the hometown dialects passed down by their parents (such as Cantonese) similarly serve as “we-code” (Gumperz 1974, 1982) and carry out boundary-working, translanguaging/positioning functions. Their practice manifests more intensely as the use of a secret language – a linguistic choice that perpetuates the core logic of using specific languages to demarcate insiders and outsiders, excluding those unfamiliar with the language from communication, and further deepens embodied experiences. When they switch to Chinese on streets, in shopping centres, or social settings, they not only erect privacy barriers within physical spaces but also, through the coordination of language and body (still perceived as “East Asian features”), reaffirm their connection to the Chinese diaspora community. Through the interplay of bodily perception and secret language boundary-making mechanisms, a third space has been created for London and Glasgow's participants to express their dual sense of belonging.

A clear pattern emerges for children of Chinese immigrant families in that Mandarin or the parents' regional dialect becomes an intentionally encrypted channel, a secret language in English-dominated spaces. It safeguards privacy while enabling speakers to enact a micro-scale, transpositioning between “Britain” and “China”. As observed by Gumperz (1974, 1982), multilingual communities often deploy distinct codes to differentiate “we-codes” from “they-codes”. Such boundaries create an information barrier, opening the conversation only to insiders, strengthening shared identity, and excluding outsiders. For bilinguals, a minority language becomes a tool for defining who is “inside” and who is “outside”, enabling them to construct identity and privacy in complex social arenas. This resembles the language practices in takeaway shops: English is used at the front stage to interact with customers, while Mandarin or dialects dominate the back stage, creating exclusivity among the diaspora group.

George illustrated this dynamic in London:

In certain situations, say, when we talk about something personal, speaking Chinese feels safer because people around us can't understand it.

Similar tactics appear in public places. Daniel, for instance, recalled shopping with friends:

When we're in a mall or restaurant discussing prices, service, or product quality, we naturally slip into Chinese. Then we can speak freely without worrying that staff or other customers understand.

In such moments, Chinese acts as an information filter, a strategic tool for controlling the conversation and avoiding eavesdropping. It thus creates an invisible translanguaging space in public, granting bilingual speakers both freedom and privacy.

George also recalled how, during a badminton tournament in London, his father would covertly coach him in Chinese:

If I want to say something others can't understand, especially mid-match, my dad just switches to Chinese. No one else has a clue what we're saying. We do it all the time. It never feels awkward; if you need to whisper, you whisper.

The same logic shapes everyday outings for two Glasgow-based sisters, Amy and Sue, who love shopping together:

When we're walking down the street and want to keep something private, we switch to Chinese.

Amy added:

If we're out with younger cousins, we'll whisper in Cantonese. People can't understand us, so we come across as a bit mysterious, and we quite like that.

Here, translanguaging is not merely a shield for private information or a source of mystique, it sustains sibling intimacy and communicative freedom in public space. By switching instantly into Chinese or a home-dialect, participants carve out a translanguaging space, a third space that transcends any single linguistic regime inside an English-dominated space. In this pocket, second-generation Chinese youth flexibly

juggle codes to decide who is “us” and who is “them”, embedding a mobile, transnational Chinese identity into London’s streets, shops, and social scenes. The moment they speak Chinese they remain physically in London yet emotionally return to their family language space. Language lets them be here and there simultaneously, sharpening their control over a situationally performed transnational identity.

This oscillation between translinguistic practices exemplifies a form of transposition, a continual repositioning of self across social and cultural boundaries. When confronted with racialised greetings such as “Ni hao”, second-generation Chinese youth often position themselves as a local, London-based identity by responding in English, often with a British accent, to resist being cast as outsiders. By contrast, with friends or within intimate community spaces, switching to Mandarin or a regional dialect serves as a form of “we-code” (Gumperz, 1974, 1982). Through such context-based switching, second-generation Chinese youth inhabit the role of a confident local while simultaneously nurturing ties to Chinese community, affect, and heritage. The meaning of language here lies not in its form but in who uses it, why it is used, and in what context. This dynamic balance lies at the heart of the continual formation and negotiation of their transnational identity.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has deployed translanguaging and transpositioning, boundary work, embodiment and senses, and capital conversion to examine how language shapes second-generation transnational identity in different cities across sites. I found out the ways of being/ways of belonging of second-generation Chinese youth are shaped by the intersection of linguistic capital disparities rooted in class of family and their own agency.

Glasgow participants are characterised by boundary-driven role performance shaped by limited familial linguistic capital and clear language divides. Within the home, eldest children are often act as unpaid linguistic brokers, mediating between parents with limited English proficiency and siblings and even wider British society. This role switching extends beyond the household into takeaways and public spaces. Participants

move between relaxed, inward-facing roles within back kitchens, tightly regulated performances aligned with British service norms in front-of-house settings, and restrained and contextually perform in public spaces.

London participants display an integrated form of bicultural negotiation, benefited from higher levels of familial bilingual proficiency and cultural capital. They use flexible translanguaging practices to actively negotiate family roles, balancing parental cultural expectations and their own lifestyles. When encountering racialised othering, participants draw on their bilingual and bicultural resources as forms of identity and social capital, asserting local belonging through English while maintaining connections to the Chinese community through Mandarin or regional dialects. Across domestic, work, and public settings, their role performances are fluid and cohesive.

The ways of belonging among Glasgow participants is contextually bound. Within the familial sphere, belonging is rooted in duty-based affiliation to the Chinese family unit, whereas in peer and social spheres, it is built on social affiliation to a local British identity. These two ways of belonging are perceived as mutually exclusive and incompatible. To mitigate the cultural and geopolitical risks associated with negotiating identity, participants deliberately avoid the region-specific label of “Scottish Chinese” and opt instead for the broader, more ambiguous identifier “British Chinese”. In public spaces, they further retreat into an intra-ethnic belonging by using Mandarin or Chinese dialects as a “secret language”. What appears as “dual belonging” is thus not an organic, cross-context integration of identities, but rather a situational alternation between separate belonging frameworks, each activated according to the perceived demands and risks of a given social arena.

The ways of belonging among London participants take the form of an integrated, capital-oriented dual belonging that transcends specific contexts. Within the familial sphere, translanguaging practices act as a bridge connecting Chinese and British cultures, forging an affectively grounded, bicultural sense of belonging. Drawing on the logic of London’s cosmopolitan culture, they directly anchor their identity to being Londoners, converting their Chinese heritage into a form of multicultural identity capital. While simultaneously maintaining their ties to the Chinese community via Mandarin or dialects used as a secret language.

This chapter elucidated how multisensory experience intersects with language to contribute to a semiotic repertoire that expands our understanding of language beyond words. Moreover, it demonstrated how linguistic practices are always embedded in racialised bodies, urban spatialities, and institutional power structures. The hostile context of reception in London plays a role in shaping the form and function of translanguaging, and how second-generation Chinese youth develop situated strategies to deal with various intentions.

Chapter 7: Return Visit as Strategic Practices to Maintaining Transnational Family Bonds

7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how are transnational family ties sustained, repaired, or thinned through return visits, digital co-presence, and material exchange? And how do classed resources (capitals) and local opportunity structures shape the capacity to sustain these practices, and with what consequences for the density/fragility of belonging? It traces the use of mechanisms such as embodiment and senses, along with digital mediation operating in emotion work, to build and repair relationships with transnational family members. Capital conversion surfaces in transnational material anchors including housing, and gift exchange, independent return visits, and education strategies. Boundary work operates in dysco-presence management, which refers to a mediated state of ambivalent resistance or distancing within digital co-presence (Ou & Lin, 2023). This identity outcome leads to participants in Glasgow ultimately forming a fragmented, low-emotional-density transnational family belonging, whereas those in London, they maintain transnational family ties, while develop educational connections beyond the family sphere, such as violin coaches. This chapter emphasises that second-generation youth are not passive receipts of parental capital but exhibit agency in maintaining transnational familyhood.

The chapter is divided into five sections. It begins by revisiting the role of emotion work as a key practice through which second-generation Chinese youth maintain transnational family ties. Following this, it analyses the role of digital technologies in sustaining cross-border connections, contrasting performative presence with experiences of genuine intimacy. The next section examines transnational material exchanges and independent return visits. This is followed by a discussion of transnational educational strategy as an expression of both agency and class-based aspirations. Finally, the chapter concludes by evaluating the significance of return visits in shaping transnational identities and familial relationships.

7.2 Return visits as emotion work and repairing work

This section discusses emotion work as embodiment practices and performance, such as playing mah-jong with elders, eating together, and digital meditation to build and repair relationships with extended families. The ways of belonging exhibited by second-generation Chinese youth are characterised by a dynamic cycle of estrangement, restoration, and dissipation, requiring active construction rather than innate possession.

Baldassar (2008) identified emotional work as a core practice for maintaining cross-border relationships in transnational families, one driven by longing and enacted through discourse, bodily practices, actions, and imagination. However, this thesis reveals that, during the initial stages of return visits, participants often face the dilemma of being physically present but emotionally absent. In other words, the kinship identity conferred by blood ties cannot compensate for the emotional void caused by the long absence of interaction, shared memories, and cultural resonance. Many participants feel alienated by their relatives' emotional expressions, lapse into silence due to the lack of a shared communicative foundation or lack a sense of belonging.

To navigate this challenge, second-generation Chinese youth actively construct a sense of “familyhood” through a circulation of care rooted in the interplay of emotional, cultural, and material co-presence (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) and establish a sense of belonging through actively “doing family”. Their experiences demonstrate that kinship is fluid: alienation is not an immutable fate but can be reworked and repaired through deliberate, embodied interactions. Moreover, it adds a practical dimension: everyday interactional rituals (such as playing mah-jong and cohabiting) and the performative enactment of cultural identities (e.g. filial piety) can swiftly activate a sense of belonging.

Yet, once back in the UK, these re-forged connections often erode due to mundane obstacles such as time-zone differences, academic pressures, and conflicting rhythms of life. Although digital tools can create “ambient co-presence” (Madianou, 2016), they cannot replicate the emotional depth and intimacy embedded in physical co-presence,

ultimately leading to a weakening of ties. Sustaining cross-border family relationships, therefore, depends on a continuous and reciprocal investment in emotional work.

For instance, Jacky, from Glasgow, described feeling estranged when witnessing an emotionally charged reunion between his mother and her siblings:

When we landed, my mum's sister and her son were waiting. When they saw my mum, they just cried and said nothing. I didn't know what was going on, I was surprised, because my mum's sister and I didn't know each other.

Similarly, Alex recounted:

When we first arrived in China, nobody knew each other. I didn't talk much because we had never really met or spoken before.

Jia's reflection was particularly poignant:

Every time I go back, I don't feel close to them. I go with expectations because it's been a while, but they feel more like acquaintances. After all these years, they probably don't even remember me... It's like I'm in this home, but it's not my home.

Such accounts underscore a recurring theme of emotional distance and a lack of belonging within transnational family relations, rooted in the rupture of shared experiences and emotional ties. Mingbouphe (2018), drawing on Granovetter's (1973) concept of absent ties, highlighted that second-generation Chinese youth often maintain superficial, low-impact relationships with relatives in China. Similarly, Huang et al. (2018) found that when visiting their parents' hometowns, second-generation immigrants typically had the lowest emotional attachment to these towns. Furthermore, second-generation Chinese often experience physical closeness but emotional detachment (Maruyama, 2017). This is not merely because they have not seen each other for a long time, but also due to other factors, such as language barriers. Tomas (20 years old) shared the challenges he faces when communicating with his grandparents:

There are also often language-related issues, as they speak Min Nan dialect. Well, I can only understand it, not speak it. So we might not be able to get very close because we can't communicate very....

Language barriers thus emphasise the gap between the diasporic self and the cultural insiders. In essence, while disillusionment and disappointment are common in second-generation return visits, second-generation Chinese young people's active engagement in familial practices often transforms these visits into overall positive experiences, as they deliberately engaged in emotion work to rebuild or repair kinship. For instance, Jia described how she integrated into family life during her stay in Fuqing:

I stayed for about a month with my parents and grandmother, living and eating together, just like the New Year. Every night we played mah-jong, drank tea, and talked about my life in Glasgow. I really felt like I belonged.

Similarly, Andy, who stayed with his grandparents in Nanjing, recalled:

I went to my grandparents' house every day, bought groceries, and cooked for them because they're getting old. I could take care of them while I was there.

These accounts demonstrate the emotion work of reigniting and maintaining familial ties during return visits. Baldassar (2008) defined kin-work as encompassing discursive, bodily, and imaginative practices, which ranging from verbal communication and symbolic gestures to cohabitation and shared daily activities. For Jia, these daily rituals of eating together, chatting, playing mah-jong, and drinking tea compensate for the estrangement caused by geographic distance and cultural difference, and help her (re)embed herself in the family structure. As she noted: "I really felt like I belonged." This sense of belonging is not innate but is produced through sustained emotional labour, integration, and co-presence.

Andy's narrative highlights intergenerational caregiving. His routine of cooking and shopping for his grandparents not only provided practical support but also embodied the Confucian ethic of filial responsibility. His seemingly mundane tasks of "buying groceries" and "cooking" enacted his role as a grandson, which is a performance of kinship identity. In East Asian cultural contexts, particularly under the influence of Confucian values, xiao (filial piety) remains central to family ethics (Yeh, 2003; Ikels, 2004). Acts of care are seen as a practical expression of intergenerational responsibility, serving as a concrete way for descendants to express respect, gratitude, and reciprocity

towards their elders. As Yeh (2003) pointed out, filial piety is the moral core of East Asian family structures, emphasising the expression of reverence and obedience to elders through actions (rather than merely emotions). Within this framework, “cooking” and “caring for” are not merely service-oriented labour but also part of moral self-cultivation. Through these daily actions, the younger generation reinforce family bonds and affirm their familial identity. Ikels (2004) noted in his study of filial piety culture in contemporary China and East Asia that filial piety is not only manifested in economic support for parents but also includes daily physical and emotional interactions, such as companionship, dining with elders, and caring for their everyday needs. This physical companionship and action embody a living filial piety, a continuous, action-based family emotional order.

From this perspective, Andy’s act of cooking for his grandparents is not merely a response to family obligations but also a performance and reaffirmation of cultural values. These practices enable him to reassert his family belonging and cultural belonging within the diasporic context. In other words, through the embodied enactment of filial piety during his short return visit, Andy actively participates in the process of “doing family” (Morgan, 1996), which narrows the emotional distance between him and his grandparents. Even when ongoing care is unfeasible due to distance, such periods of intensive involvement serve as moments of emotional repair and reaffirmation of responsibility.

These practices illustrate how second-generation Chinese youth actively define, negotiate, and perform their roles within transnational families. Through collective rituals (e.g. Jia’s mah-jong sessions) or intergenerational care (e.g. Andy’s household contributions), they reshape and extend familial emotions. Kinship is fluid, sustained not only by digital technologies (calls, video chats) but also by a willingness to remain emotionally invested. Although short visits generate intense feelings of home and belonging, these are difficult to sustain once back in the UK. Jia reflected on this difficulty:

But when we got back to Edinburgh and tried to stay in touch... maybe it was the time zone difference, or something, but they took a long time to reply, and eventually we just stopped talking.

Sue, another participant, echoed this:

In that month in China, I really felt like we were a family. But when I came back to the UK, with essays, exams, and everything, I just didn't have time to keep contact with my grandma.

These examples highlight a key challenge: despite the ubiquity of platforms such as WeChat, maintaining emotional ties across borders still requires sustained emotional labour, and technology alone cannot produce intimacy. Baldassar's (2008) work on Italian migrant families reflects a deep awareness of physical absence, an emotional longing intertwined with the loss of everyday care. Although digital tools offer a form of ambient co-presence, second-generation Chinese youth face structural barriers, such as academic demands, mismatched daily rhythms, and the eight-hour time difference, that make it difficult to maintain such ties.

This reflects a fundamental tension in transnational caregiving (Baldassar, 2008): virtual co-presence requires significant time and emotional investment, often competing with the demands of daily life in the host country. Research shows that cross-border families must carefully manage "contact time", juggling time zones, schedules, and the desire for attentive communication (Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 108). For young people, academic pressures frequently overshadow these emotional commitments. As Jia and Sue's accounts suggest, the intimacy built through face-to-face rituals, eating together, sharing space dissipates quickly when communication reverts to fragmented digital exchanges.

In sum, these narratives reveal a distinctive pattern of rebuilding kinship through affective labour during return visits. The cycle of initial estrangement, gradual familiarisation, and post-visit disconnection is common among second-generation Chinese youth. Unlike the first generation, who maintain strong cross-border emotional ties, the second generation must actively reconstruct connections through interactive practices such as mah-jong, shared meals, and caregiving. Whilst these moments of kin-work create a sense of belonging, structural barriers such as time zones, and academic pressure lead to rapid emotional dissipation after returning to the UK. This transition from intimacy to disconnection underscores the limits of digital connectivity in

replacing the embodied co-presence necessary for sustaining family bonds and moral obligations.

From the perspective of care circulation, these cases reveal that return visits can activate emotional ties, but geographic distance, competing priorities, and temporal constraints hinder their sustainability. Care is not merely about action (e.g. cooking, helping) but also about affective labour by showing concern, responding, and maintaining bonds. Gendered dynamics further shape this work (Hochschild, 2003): women like Jia and Sue often shoulder much of the domestic and emotional labour during visits, but these roles are difficult to sustain from afar.

Although digital technologies offer channels of communication, they raise a crucial question: can platforms like WeChat truly foster meaningful family co-presence, or do they merely keep individuals “online”? In the context of China’s unique “polymedia environment”, shaped by domestic technological ecosystems (Xiong & Liu, 2023), this question becomes even more complex. Whilst WeChat’s multimedia features (text, images, voice notes, video calls) create new forms of connectedness (Chen et al., 2018), the extent to which digital co-presence can substitute for the depth of traditional family interaction remains uncertain. The next section examines how WeChat shapes transnational family relationships and asks whether technology can genuinely bridge the emotional void created by geographical distance.

7.3 Role of digital technologies: performative presence vs. real intimacy

This section traces the mechanisms of digital mediation and boundary work in managing ambient co-presence, which leads to dysco-presence and ritual belonging rather than real intimacy. An emerging pattern that arises concerns the role of digital technologies in shaping transnational family networks. Continuous connectivity through polymedia fosters ambient co-presence, enabling migrants to stay peripherally informed about the daily lives of significant others and to feel always connected despite physical distance (Madianou, 2016; Baldassar, 2008; Baldassar & Merla, 2014). All participants maintain ties with extended relatives via WeChat, which has become the key medium of transnational interaction. As a social media platform, WeChat provides

two dominant spaces: group chats, which organise collective interactions among selected members, and Moments, a semi-public feed similar to Facebook or Instagram which enables self-presentation and cross-border connection (Chen et al., 2018; Child & Westermann, 2013).

WeChat facilitates low-intensity, ritualised digital connections through features like group greetings and red-envelope exchanges. Nedelcu and Wyss (2016) used the term “ritual co-presence” to refer to the brief, regular, digital contact among transnational family members in which the content is not significant, but “the fact of communicating is significant per se and has a crucial emotional and relational importance” (p. 209). Such co-presence cannot replicate the emotional resonance of everyday physical interaction. Instead, it sometimes accentuates structural separation, reminding migrants of their inability to care for distant relatives and amplifying feelings of absence or guilt. Through content filtering, moments blocking, and strategic invisibility, they balance kinship obligations with protecting personal autonomy (e.g. hiding tattoos).

Digital technologies and communication technologies enable participants to maintain connections with their extended families and places of origin, while also creating a desire for physical return. As Jia, who has not visited China for eight years, explained:

My uncle and cousin often send me pictures of Chinese food, like street snacks, you know, to try to tempt me to come back.

These fragmented visual cues forge emotional connections to distant places, fostering a form of mediated sensory belonging where familiar tastes and visual stimuli evoke imagined return. Xia’s reflections go further, exposing the limits of digital intimacy and revealing how emotional separations trouble transnational families, despite the sense of co-presence that digital practices generate:

I was mainly raised by my grandmother because my mum moved to the UK when I was about three. I was always with my grandmother, sleeping and eating at her house, and felt incredibly close to her. Now, whenever we video chat, they urge me to visit, saying they miss me. When they ask me to go back, I start thinking, “When will I visit again?” Staying in touch feels important, and sometimes I miss them.

This feeling was stronger when I first came to the UK, but over time it has lessened. Yet, I still want to go back to see them, especially now that they're getting older.

Digital intimacy thus simultaneously produces both the comfort of presence and the pain of absence. Although numerous scholars have highlighted the role of technology in sustaining transnational family ties (Madianou, 2016; Urry, 2003; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002), the ambient co-presence afforded by digital tools can also obscure structural separation and emotional strain (Baldassar, 2014; Madianou, 2016). In particular, technologies have limited capacity to alleviate the feelings of loss, guilt, and sadness caused by separation. Xia's awareness of her grandmother "getting older" underscores this emotional tension, as she can offer only mediated care through video calls. Baldassar and Merla (2011) captured this condition by showing that care at a distance is influenced by factors such as communication and mobility. Although Xia maintains emotional connections through video chat (communication technology), the limitation of only being able to provide care through a screen suggests that technology-supported care has its limits. Furthermore, each act of virtual reassurance is often followed by a deeper sense of remote guilt once the call or contact ends. Paradoxically, the ease of communication can also dull the urgency to return.

This phenomenon is not limited to younger generations. In their study of digital kinning and digital homing, Steven, Baldassar, and Wilding (2024) described Chinese elders in Australia experiencing distress and regret when they see online photos of friends gathering back in China, highlighting how digital visibility can amplify feelings of exclusion. Thus, whilst digital technologies sustain transnational ties and temporarily soothe longing, they can simultaneously accentuate absence and dislocation. WeChat, in this sense, provides a co-presence that may deepen feelings of loss and misalignment rather than alleviate them.

Similar patterns of digitally mediated connection are evident in WeChat family groups. For instance, seasonal greetings, particularly during Chinese New Year, render WeChat a space for low-intensity, ritualised communication. Family groups create a sense of ritual co-presence (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016): even during long periods of silence, the chat icon signals the constant availability of kin. These loose connections are briefly activated during festivals, where a few "Happy New Year" messages or symbolic red-

envelope exchanges reaffirm kinship ties, only for the group to return to dormancy. Alex captured this rhythm succinctly:

During Chinese New Year, those hidden family WeChat groups become active again. People just send a few messages like “Happy New Year”, maybe a red envelope or two, and then nothing more.

Josh’s comment underscores the low-adhesion nature of these interactions:

At New Year, everyone sends greetings and we say “Happy New Year” back, but then no one really talks. We don’t usually speak, and it’s been a long time since we went back.

In WeChat family groups, this form of connection is ritualised and strongly reinforced during moments of reunion like the Chinese New Year. This activation is embedded in the framework of Chinese cultural rituals. Supporting this, Nedelcu and Wyss (2016) found in their study of Romanian immigrants that festivals serve as triggers for interaction across time and space, functioning to fulfil kinship obligations through repetitive behaviour.

WeChat’s red-envelope function is deeply embedded in Chinese gift-giving rituals and networks of social obligation, enabling transnational family members to fulfil cultural duties digitally. Studies have noted how this feature allows users to engage in practices like sending monetary gifts during weddings or festivals, thereby sustaining reciprocal relationships and traditional etiquette (Chen et al., 2018; Negro et al., 2020; Xiong & Liu, 2023). For second-generation Chinese youth, this practice reinforces their position as junior or younger members within the kinship hierarchy. As Alex observed:

It’s always the elders who send the red envelopes, and we younger ones grab them. It gives a sense of participation.

Whilst this participation reaffirms familial structures and hierarchies through ritualised interaction, these exchanges, as Josh highlighted, rarely go beyond ritual. Once the festival passes, the groups return to silence, becoming what may be described as low-intensity, nodal emotional spaces. This suggests that WeChat family groups thus act as a platform for reunion but are limited in their capacity to sustain enduring intimacy. As Madianou and Miller (2012) remind us in their critique of the deficit model of mediated

communication, all relationships are mediated to some extent, but proximity does not guarantee quality. In this context, WeChat serves as a space for ritualised, low-density communication, enabling a form of digital togetherness that is both sustaining and insufficient.

Moreover, within transnational families, second-generation Chinese youth often describe WeChat as a space of constant surveillance. They employ selective (in)visibility management on WeChat Moments to tactically regulate digital distance from elders, thereby avoiding cultural discipline and moral scrutiny. For instance, Jennie, from Glasgow, shared:

I hide many of my posts from relatives because they used to call my mom about my photos, they think I'm not ladylike enough. They'd comment on my clothes, my hair not being black, or my tattoos. I just don't want to hear it, so I will hide some posts...from them.

Similarly, Jacky expressed:

I post photos with my girlfriend on Moments, but I don't share them with family back home because my girlfriend is Turkish. They want me to date someone who speaks Chinese and understands China.

Although social media reduces physical distance, it simultaneously enables forms of “remote monitoring” (e.g. frequent checking of posts and comments). As Madianou (2016) noted, media enable a heightened awareness of relatives’ routines. This digital gaze extends across continents, with the daily lives of second-generation Chinese youth in the UK closely scrutinised by family members in China. Such surveillance, often in conjunction with cultural expectations, leads some participants to disengage from familial co-presence. Madianou’s (2016) research on Filipino mothers similarly observed how social media is used to monitor distant children, ensuring they remain on the “right track”. Moreover, Marwick and Boyd (2014) argued that online privacy management is shaped by cultural norms and social pressures, reflecting both identity work and relational strategies.

In this context, second-generation Chinese youth deliberately curate their digital visibility as a response to familial scrutiny. Due to the semi-public nature of WeChat

Moments, they remain under the watchful gaze of kin, prompting them to conform to moral expectations in their visible interactions. This dynamic aligns with Finch's (2011) and Henze-Pedersen and Järvinen's (2021) argument that behaviour is often adjusted or "performed" under the gaze of others to secure recognition. As Butler (1990, 2004) argues, identity is constituted through repeated acts that cite and reproduce social norms. In this context, expectations surrounding femininity, sexuality, and filial propriety are reiterated through familial surveillance, rendering certain forms of self-expression. Child and Westermann (2013) suggested, when young people connect with relatives who hold authority in offline family hierarchies, these power imbalances extend into digital spaces, shaping behaviour further, and younger generations then respond through strategic privacy management (Fang & Gong, 2020).

Building on this, Ou and Lin (2023) described such dynamics as dysco-presence: a tension between connection and autonomy in which young people exploit privacy settings to redraw the frontstage/backstage boundaries (Goffman, 1959), mitigating the psychological burden of moral oversight. Visibility thus becomes fluid and strategic, allowing participants to create selective presence.

This strategy reveals how second-generation Chinese youth maintain digital ties while deliberately diluting the others' gaze. By reshaping the boundaries of frontstage and backstage, they achieve a form of partial co-presence: obedient and dutiful in front of transnational family members, yet assertively independent elsewhere. As Jia explained:

They expect you to be the good child, the good daughter. But when they can't see me, I still do things they think are taboo. As long as they don't see it, it's fine.

Here, Jia becomes the gatekeeper of visibility, managed her frontstage and backstage perform, controlling who sees what and negotiating familial boundaries by filtering her digital presence. Through such practices, Jia, Jennie, and Jacky perform visible filial piety while retaining invisible autonomy.

Thus, digital connectivity sustains a sense of family-hood (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002), but participants also rely on dysco-presence to navigate intergenerational power asymmetries and moderate the disciplining gaze of the family members. Their identity performance reflects a "half-embedded, half-detached" position, rooted in the ethical

and cultural expectations of the transnational family while simultaneously seeking moments of self-expression and autonomy in digital spaces. This indicates that the position of second-generation Chinese youth is constantly being negotiated between Chinese and British cultures. In order to pursue individual expression and freedom (such as tattoos and cross-cultural relationships) during the process of socialisation in British society, while simultaneously responding to the cultural expectations of transnational families and diaspora communities regarding “good” behaviour, they are forced to engage in selective visibility on WeChat Moments in order to screen and control how they present themselves to their relatives.

Whilst return visits are often idealised as opportunities to rebuild kinship, enact filial piety, and strengthen belonging, this study reveals that emotional investment in such ties varies significantly among participants. Some actively pursue reconnection, while others remain distant, ambivalent, or motivated solely by duty. This asymmetry is crucial for understanding how kinship is negotiated within transnational families.

For instance, Jia demonstrates strong attachment, engaging in everyday family practices such as playing mahjong, brewing tea, and chatting to “do family”. By contrast, Sue briefly felt a sense of unity during her visit, but quickly disengaged upon returning to the UK, lacking the motivation to sustain these ties. Jacky’s experience further illustrates emotional detachment; watching his mother cry and embrace relatives, he felt “like an outsider” with little desire to rebuild these bonds.

These differences reflect Baldassar’s (2014) critique of care circulation in that care does not flow evenly or effortlessly across transnational networks. Instead, as this thesis shows, the maintenance of kinship involves asymmetric reciprocity and selective practices of relatedness, shaped by structural conditions, cultural expectations, familial hierarchies, and personal choice. Care and intimacy emerge not as collective, balanced responsibilities but as negotiated acts, contingent on individual willingness and competing life priorities.

Digital communication technologies such as WeChat further complicate these dynamics. On the one hand, WeChat facilitates “ambient co-presence” (Madianou, 2016), a continuous low-intensity form of digital connection that sustains weak ties

over distance. Features such as WeChat groups, festive greetings, and red envelope rituals help to ritualise kinship during festive periods, offering symbolic belonging through momentary bursts of interaction. However, this mode of engagement is typically episodic, symbolic, and low-density, frequently reduced to standardised greetings, emoji reactions, or monetary gestures, as seen in Alex and Josh's accounts. Thus, WeChat becomes a space of emotional maintenance without depth, a digital façade of connectedness that may in fact mask emotional detachment or declining relational investment.

Crucially, this mediated environment also gives rise to asymmetric visibility and surveillance. Many participants engage in digital privacy management, selectively filtering their content through "friend circle" restrictions to avoid moral scrutiny from elders. As Jennie and Jacky noted, their decisions to block older relatives from seeing romantic relationships, tattoos, or unconventional clothing reflect a strategy of negotiating moral distance, resulting in "dysco-presence", a selective co-presence where participants actively curate who sees what, and when. This strategic invisibility highlights the emotional labour involved not just in displaying kinship, but in protecting one's autonomy within overlapping cultural regimes of visibility, morality, and authority. Taken together, it demonstrates digital platforms become sites where identity is simultaneously managed and normatively compelled, revealing the affective and moral labour required of second-generation Chinese youth as they navigate transnational family expectations.

Within the broader migration literature, such emotional dynamics challenge the assumption that familial belonging in the diaspora is either naturally sustained or uniformly experienced. As scholars such as Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) and Leurs (2020) have shown, maintaining transnational familyhood is an affective investment and form of work which is always in flux, often fragmented, and embedded in unequal power structures. The "care circulations" (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) that bind families across borders are not only gendered and classed but also emotionally asymmetrical, with differing levels of willingness, guilt, obligation, and resistance. The experiences of second-generation Chinese young people therefore foreground the micro-politics of transnational family life, where connection is not given but produced through uneven, and at times fragile, acts of emotion work and performance.

7.4 Performing transnational families through material anchors and independent return practices

This section focuses on how second-generation Chinese youth in the UK maintain transnational family ties through material practices and independent return visits, exploring the interplay between materiality, capital conversion, and agency. It first examines transnational material exchange, arguing that cross-border circulation of goods (such as snacks, medicine, and symbolic items like blessed pendants) constitutes an “affective economy” (Ahmed, 2004) where objects carry emotions, reinforce reciprocity, and sustain kinship bonds. It then discusses intergenerational capital transmission and conversion, where economic (property, travel funds), social (kin networks, community ties), and cultural capital (linguistic fluency, Chinese cultural norms) are materialised, activated and reworked into transnational practice. Notably, the uneven distribution of such capital reflects a transnational class differentiation shaped by geographic and generational economic accumulation, framing divergent possibilities for second generation Chinese youth’s independent return visit across the two cities. For instance, half of London participants and only one Glasgow participant holding property in China.

The circulation of transnational goods plays a crucial role in maintaining intergenerational emotional bonds and expressing care across geographical distance. This material flow not only reflects an enduring imaginative connection to “home”, but also constitutes an everyday strategy through which familial ties are sustained across borders. The exchange and circulation of goods as a form of affective economies (Ahmed, 2004) thus form a transnational affective economy, wherein love and care are transmitted among family members through both material objects and discursive practices. This circulation of affect actively shapes the “surfaces and boundaries” of belonging within transnational families (Ahmed, 2004; 2014).

Moreover, these exchanges are not unidirectional gifts but practices embedded in a logic of reciprocity. The younger generation often engages in reverse gifting, receiving affection (e.g. snacks, blessings) from elders while reaffirming their familial roles and

responsibilities (e.g. as “carers” or “family members”) through return gestures. This practice goes beyond mere emotional circulation, imbuing transnational kinship with an ethical dimension. Each act of exchange simultaneously reaffirms kinship obligations and expresses individual agency.

In these contexts, emotions are transformed into a form of capital, carrying symbolic value while functioning as a “repository of resourceful practices” and a marker of “transnational connectedness” (Leurs, 2019). This resonates with Ahmed’s assertion that emotions are not private, internal states but acquire value through circulation, gaining social efficacy by “sticking” to objects, words, and bodies.

These seemingly mundane exchanges of goods together form the emotional infrastructure of transnational families. Through their durability – snacks being slowly consumed or pendants being kept for years – they provide ongoing emotional anchoring. At the same time, this reciprocal practice reinforces the family as a “bounded and connected social unit”, ensuring that even across long periods of separation, the material “comings and goings” serve as a reminder that “we still belong to each other.”

Sue illustrated how the exchange of goods between herself and her grandmother during return visits became a tangible practice of transnational kinship:

Every time I come back to the UK from China, my grandmother packs a whole box of food for me to take, snacks and things you can’t buy here. I try to save them, you know, try to not eat them all one time, and look forward to bringing more next time I go.

The box of carefully selected snacks is not merely food; it symbolises a cross-generational emotional connection that transcends physical distance. In this context, food becomes a concrete vehicle through which dispersed family ties are sustained. It is not simply consumed as nourishment, but experienced as an extension of cultural memory and emotional continuity between grandmother and granddaughter.

Similarly, Sam described a reciprocal material exchange within his extended family during return visits:

When I go back, I bring medicine, perfume, and whisky for my uncle. And when I leave, they give me loads of food to bring back.

This reflects a two-way kinship support network, maintained through the cross-border flow of everyday items. Such exchanges that materialise care are not merely objects, but expressions of what Ahmed (2004) terms affective economies, where emotions circulate through objects, binding people across time and space. Ahmed asserted that emotions possess stickiness, circulating between objects, language, and bodies, and becoming integral to social relations. This reinforces emotional reciprocity and symbolic continuity within transnational family ties which remain connected, even in separation.

Beyond food, participants often received symbolic items imbued with emotional and spiritual meaning – gifts that carried blessings, protection, and memory. As Ivy shared:

My grandmother gave me a pendant she said had been blessed by a monk at a local temple. She said it would protect me while I was abroad. I don't really believe in those things, but I still keep it in my room.

Likewise, Elaine recalled receiving a hand-sewn sachet from her grandmother:

She said it had a peace charm inside and osmanthus flowers from her garden. She knows I will easily get anxious and panic, so she said the scent would calm me down. I still keep it on my bag as a decor.

The pendant, the food, and the sachet are not just items but affective artefacts that embody both personal and cultural meaning. They carry spiritual protection, sensory memory, and intergenerational love, merging material, symbolic, and emotional value. Ahmed (2014:10) describes this process as the sociality of emotions:

Emotions are not simply something “I” or “we” have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to things and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the “I” and the “we” are shaped by contact with others.

Kinship, therefore, is not a given but is continually constructed through repeated, circulated, and perceived affective practices. The circulation of goods (food, medicine, souvenirs) and language (video calls, voice notes) both carry emotional memory and

sustain a sense of mutual presence (Sahlins, 2011). These exchanges give emotions a tangible social form and boundary. Seemingly mundane digital acts – such as showing home-cooked dishes via video calls, sending voice blessings, WeChat red packets, or shipping local delicacies – contribute to the accumulation of affective capital within transnational kinship networks. These acts not only create interpersonal bonds but also reaffirm the family as a bounded, symbolically meaningful social unit. As Ahmed suggested, it is the circulation of emotion that shapes our understanding of family, belonging, and intimacy, rather than the other way around. This resonates with Gilroy's (1993) notion of diasporic intimacy: a condition where materiality sustains and renews emotional ties despite physical distance.

Appadurai (1986) argued that material objects are not neutral carriers of meaning. Through circulation and use, they acquire social and symbolic significance. In the examples above, items such as snacks, charms, and sachets become vessels of affection, memory, and identity. With food in particular, what circulates is not merely a product but a rich evocation of “home”, love, and continuity, enabling kinship ties to be reproduced even across physical separation. The taste of “home”, recreated in a UK kitchen, evokes the sensory presence of absent kin (see Chapter 4).

As Faist (2000) emphasised, transnational social capital is not solely based on affect or resource access, but on reciprocity embedded within kinship networks. Gift-giving and reciprocation are not merely transactions; they are practices of trust and belonging. Each act of exchange reinforces relational responsibility and emotional investment within the family. Participants' acts of return gifting reflect a giving back logic within this structure. By sending items such as vitamins or whisky, they take on the role of caretakers and connectors, thereby affirming their identity and agency within the transnational family. This role not only fosters their own sense of belonging but also contributes to the ongoing reproduction of social capital across borders.

Although the extended family is often marginalised in migration research concerning return and identity-building, Vathi (2015) rightly underscores the irreplaceable role of grandparents and parents in sustaining family cohesion, particularly through emotional support and intergenerational care. The love and wishes of elders are materialised in objects, reminders, and blessings, and the second generation do not passively receive

these gifts. Rather, they actively participate in shaping emotional orders within a transnational kinship system where reciprocity and symbolic continuity govern interaction. In doing so, they contribute to an enduring emotional infrastructure of diasporic family life.

If food, medicine, and sachets are the carriers of transnational family ties, facilitating the circulation of care and reciprocity, then property serves as a material anchor, offering a more stable and enduring locus for the performance of transnational identity. From a capital and class perspective, property ownership in China is the most tangible materialisation of intergenerational transnational economic capital. It represents the cumulative economic success of migrant parents, and its uneven distribution (half of London participants vs. one Glasgow participant) is a stark marker of transnational class differentiation between the two cities, framing divergent structural possibilities for their children's independent return and embodied transnational practice. Crucially, property functions as a capital conversion node (Bourdieu, 1986), enabling the transformation of economic capital into emotional capital (a sense of rootedness), cultural capital (lived engagement with Chinese daily life and social norms), and social capital (neighbourhood and local kin ties in China), as exemplified by participants who build community relationships through their family home. Both forms of materiality, though distinct, sustain and reshape the practices and maintenance of transnational family relationships among second-generation Chinese youth.

When discussing return visit practices with participants, it became clear that property in the ancestral homeland functions as more than a symbol of economic capital; it operates as a material infrastructure of transnational life, providing second-generation Chinese youth with both a tangible anchor and a spatial framework for maintaining transnational familyhood. Crucially, property allows them to claim emotional and physical presence in the ancestral homeland on their own terms, rather than as passive participants in parental arrangements.

Through property, their independent return visits become a performance of active participation in transnational family ties. No longer dependent on parental mediation, they leverage “having a home” as a form of autonomy to initiate interactions with relatives. Everyday encounters within the property's local community, such as Daniel

being asked “How long are you staying this time?”, further enact a familial mode of presence, transforming kinship from a bloodline label into a socially recognised practice and dissolving the marginality of “tourist” status. Moreover, parental property investment and its ongoing use symbolise intergenerational efforts to sustain transnational familyhood.

Among the London-based participants, almost half (8 out of 19) mentioned that their family’s property ownership in China plays a key role in facilitating return visits by providing a stable place to stay. As Emily explained, her parents’ home in her father’s hometown serves as a practical and emotional base:

Whenever I have more than four weeks of holiday, I’ll go to China. My dad does trade and often travels between China and the UK, so he usually takes me with him. We stay in our home in Beijing... it’s near my grandmother’s, in the same neighbourhood.

Vincent also commented: “It’s like having another version of home.” This illustrates how accumulated property in the country of origin enables return visits – whether short-term or extended – by providing not just accommodation but a sense of rootedness. Similarly, Lisa shared: “We have a home in Zhejiang, so when we go back, we can stay there.” Andy also added: “My parents bought me a flat in Nanjing – that’s my home in China. If I want to go back, I can go anytime. I have a place to stay.”

Daniel, who often travelled to China without his parents, noted:

Having a place in Chengdu means I don’t have to explain myself all the time. I’m not a tourist. I live there when I’m there. The neighbours know me now, sometimes they even ask how long I’m staying this time. It’s small, but it makes me feel like part of the neighbourhood.

Property operates as a material infrastructure of transnational life, allowing young people to claim emotional and physical presence in the ancestral homeland on their own terms. It also serves as a foundation for them to carry out an independent return visit. This was noted by Lisa, who said: “I don’t need to rely on my parents to take me, I can just go when I want.”

These accounts highlight how property functions not merely as a practical stopover, but as a symbolic commitment to belonging, a place parents intentionally secure for their children as an emotional and physical claim to “elsewhere”. This recognition is the product of economic capital being converted into local social capital. Family’s economic investment enable Daniel access to the local community, and his repeated presence there transforms this structural access into meaningful social ties (e.g. neighbourly greetings). This conversion is key to overcoming the marginality of diasporic return, as it turns the abstract right to belong (derived from family bloodline) into a socially recognised practice of belonging (derived from capital and embodied presence).

As Wessendorf (2007) found in her study of Italian families in Switzerland, owning property in the country of origin offers more than logistical convenience. It symbolises an intergenerational investment that links descendants to their ancestral homeland. More importantly, it represents a stable site of belonging, transforming the origin country from a distant cultural abstraction or ancestral homeland into a tangible, lived space marked by family interaction and emotional familiarity. For these second-generation Chinese youth, a family-owned home in China offers the very possibility of going back, not as visitors or outsiders, but on their own terms, as people with a place to return to.

From the perspective of diaspora theory, “home” is not solely a physical location or geographic coordinate, but a dynamic field shaped by emotions, memories, cultural practices, social relations, and also classed one (Brah, 1996). In this context, the home in China represents not only an embodiment of economic capital but also a vessel for emotional and cultural capital. It enables participants to transform return visits into practices of belonging, rather than fleeting acts of tourism or obligation. The availability of such materially supported spaces of return allows members of the diaspora to remain both geographically mobile and emotionally grounded, thereby reinforcing the foundation of a transnational identity. Moreover, “home” need not be singular or fixed, it can exist in multiple locations simultaneously.

These material practices extend beyond the mere maintenance of transnational kinship ties. They constitute a critical arena in which the second generation Chinese youth

actively negotiates class, capital, and identity within transnational social fields. Their agency shapes how different forms of capital are mobilised, while class-based inequalities (most visibly reflected in the property divide between London and Glasgow) set the conditions under which transnational identities are constructed, stabilised, or constrained. For those second-generation Chinese young people whose families own property in China, the experience of multi-sited belonging becomes possible (Vathi & King, 2011). Property ownership thus offers not only shelter, but a sense of entitlement to belong in more than one place. By contrast, where such material anchors are absent, transnational identity-making unfolds through more flexible and contingent forms of material and digital practice. Participants without access to family property in China often rely on mobile material strategies, such as gift-giving alongside digital mediation to sustain transnational ties. Despite these constraints, they exercise agency by actively mobilising their parents' limited social and cultural capital to maintain cross-border family connections. In doing so, they negotiate a transnational identity that remains meaningfully linked to their heritage while lacking embedded, firsthand knowledge of contemporary Chinese society.

Property, as a manifestation of family economic capital, also facilitates the independent return visits of second-generation Chinese youth. These visits themselves represent an active utilisation of various parental resources, including property. The next section further explores how participants deliberately mobilise the economic, social, and cultural capital inherited from their parents, transforming these resources into concrete actions for maintaining kinship ties on their own terms and at their own pace.

7.5 Capital conversion: independent and educational returns

This section traces the mechanism of capital conversion utilised by parents to build their own transnational connections and acquire advantages. During this process, a pattern emerges among second-generation Chinese youth in that they are not passive recipients of transnational arrangements. Instead, they actively negotiate, rework, and convert these capitals into tools of autonomy and transnational agency.

7.5.1 Independent return visits

For participants with early exposure to regular return visits, embeddedness in family networks – facilitated by their parents' economic stability, social ties, and cultural fluency – has become a foundation they consciously mobilise to forge independent relationships with the ancestral homeland. Notably, they strategically transform these parental investments into their own capital, asserting legitimacy and belonging in the ancestral homeland. For instance, they creatively reinterpret them, choosing which ties to strengthen, which cultural practices to maintain, and how to perform family across borders. In this sense, transnational familyhood emerges as a field of practice rather than a fixed inheritance, constructed through the younger generation's emotion work, strategic resource activation, and capacity to assert control over the rhythms and terms of return. However, for Chinese families with limited resources, participants often found it difficult to convert the resources available to them.

Crucially, this agency emerges from a contestation of parental scripts. Independent return visits are not repetitions of parental trajectories but individualised projects of belonging, shaped by the younger generation's own preferences and capacities. They actively select which familial bonds to reinforce and how to perform them, whether through solo visits, reciprocal gift-giving, or cultivating direct communication with relatives. This challenges the assumption that class-based resources automatically produce a fixed form of transnational belonging; on the contrary, these resources are reinterpreted and reappropriated.

At the same time, the ability to contest and mobilise capital is unevenly distributed, rooted in migration class stratification between Chinese families in two cities. Among London participants, substantial household economic capital underwrites the costs of frequent return visits, including access to family property. Their parents' social capital extends across both national and transnational networks, facilitating access to resources and support. Cultural capital, such as familiarity with China, educational credentials, and linguistic competence further enhances their ability to navigate multiple contexts. Symbolic capital, including professional status, reputation, and influence, strengthens their legitimacy across social fields. In addition, parents' time capital enables greater

flexibility and involvement in organising and supporting their children's transnational mobility. Conversely, Glasgow participants are mostly constrained by their parents' working conditions. Their parents most are employed in the catering or service sectors, characterised by long, inflexible hours (limited time capital), and fragmented kinship networks in China (weak social capital), compounded by a lack of dialect proficiency (constraint linguistic capital). Together, these class-based resource constraints significantly restrict their capacity to initiate and sustain independent return visits. This class-based disparity in intergenerational social capital directly shapes the second generation's motivation and capacity to engage in independent return visits. However, Faist (2000, 2010) argued, the ability to activate transnational ties depends not only on the availability of resources but also on the capacity to utilise them effectively. I argue that they are not merely passive heirs but active agents who creatively reorganise and drive transnational connections, often through uneven, classed, and gendered trajectories, with class setting the boundaries of possibility and agency determining how they negotiate transnational identity within those boundaries.

For instance, George, based in London, recalled the following:

My dad is a professor in uni, so every year we'd visit different cities to see different people, mostly my dad's relatives, cousins, uncles, they're all in different places. I'd often go see them on my own because my parents were busy. When I was younger, my parents took me back regularly, so I got to know them well. Now I just go back myself.

Social capital is equally crucial. Parents with strong ties to extended kin in China provide not only contact points but also ongoing digital connectivity (via WeChat, video calls, red envelope exchanges, etc.), which helps maintain emotional proximity and situational familiarity. These long-standing networks often facilitate young people's later return visits, enabling them to build a sense of recognition and embeddedness, as explained by Amy:

My mom talks to my grandma every day on WeChat, they even set reminders for their video calls. Whenever my summer break approaches, Mom starts "preparing" Grandma: "Your granddaughter is coming home soon!....." So since I was little, I flew back and forth every year and stayed with my grandma in China. We're really close, so now when I have time off, I go back on my own.

Similarly, Emily added:

I fly to China by myself. I have relatives and friends there, I don't need my parents to come with me....I miss them if we haven't seen each other for very long time.

Participants construct individualised emotional belonging and family narratives based on their own identities, capacities, and preferences. Baldassar (2007) contended that the maintenance of transnational family ties involves not only emotional flows but also the capacities and accessibilities required to engage in care and connection – capacities embedded in the family's social, economic, and cultural resources.

Similarly, Faist (2000, 2010), in his discussion of the structural dimensions of transnational social spaces, posited that cross-border mobility is not simply the physical movement of people, but fundamentally the maintenance of social relationships across space. Such relationships rely on two core mechanisms: the availability of resources and the capacity to activate and sustain transnational ties. In this context, the economic, social, and cultural capitals accumulated by parents – such as occupational income, social networks, and cultural competence – form the baseline of resource availability for their children. More importantly, however, the second generation do not passively inherit these resources; they activate and reorganise them through practices like return visits and interaction with relatives, developing their own transnational trajectories and affective maps. It is in this interplay between structural conditions (as outlined by Faist) and affective labour (as theorised by Baldassar) that second-generation agency becomes visible not as abstract autonomy, but as a situated, embodied negotiation of presence, legitimacy, and belonging.

However, not all second-generation Chinese youth possess the capacity to initiate such mobility. This highlights not only the uneven distribution of capital but also the changing temporal and spatial dynamics of transnational families. In households where parents work in the Chinese catering sector, characterised by inflexible hours, long working days, and limited income, economic and temporal constraints make regular return visits impractical. Weak or fragmented social ties further restrict children's access to kinship networks in China. In these cases, second-generation Chinese youth

often rely on their parents or other locally knowledgeable relatives to navigate family life in China.

Sue, for instance, described her dependence on her parents:

When we eat out, I don't know how to order food, and I don't understand what people are saying. I feel I couldn't go to China without my parents, I've never done that.

Here, gaps in cultural capital, such as familiarity with local social codes, dining practices, and travel routines confine Sue to a “managed” role during return visits. Her parents organise meals, communication, and itineraries, leaving her in the position of a dependent care-receiver. Baldassar (2007) similarly observed that care in transnational families is often reciprocal, and whether younger generations can offer support or care in return depends largely on their cultural and social capital. Sue's account underscores how limited embodied cultural capital can curtail transnational agency, despite the presence of structural connectivity.

Language proficiency also shapes the emotional quality of return visits, with insufficient fluency leading to feelings of awkwardness and disconnection. As Jacky from Glasgow admitted:

I would definitely say I'm more whitewashed though, like I'm definitely whitewashed. I just feel that way because I don't know the language well. If I knew more Mandarin, I wouldn't really say I'm whitewashed. It's harder to talk to people in China. I want to talk to them, but I feel like I can't. I'm so used to just talking to my friends here.

Similarly, Alex recalled:

I remember when I went back to China, everyone spoke to me in Fuzhou dialect, and I had to ask them to speak Mandarin because I couldn't fully understand.

As argued by Bourdieu (1986), language is a form of symbolic capital; mastering the dominant language provides a “passport” for entry into particular social fields. Within the context of transnational familyhood, this passport determines not only mobility across national borders but also the ability to engage socially within extended kin

networks. Bourdieu conceptualises cultural capital as a key marker of social boundaries. Jacky's limited Mandarin effectively deprives him of agency and legitimacy within the familial field, leading to feelings of communicative and emotional exclusion in the ancestral homeland. Baldassar (2007) also stressed that maintaining transnational family relationships requires the capacity to engage. Jacky wants to communicate but feeling unable to exemplifies the tension between emotional intention and expressive capability, where the lack of transnational "tools of care" obstructs affective exchange.

Language is not simply a vehicle for information; it also carries emotional resonance, intimacy, and care. When Alex cannot understand what his relatives say, the interaction is weakened and his ability to express or receive affection is partially blocked. The combined gaps in Mandarin and regional dialects hinder the mobilisation of relational capital within kinship networks. This reinforces Faist's (2000) point that disparities in capacity lead to structural inequalities in capital activation.

This form of capital, as Faist (2010) has argued, refers not only to actual relational ties but to the "capacity to access, activate, and utilise" (pp. 1680) those ties across borders. Whether second-generation Chinese youth can participate in transnational familyhood is often preconditioned on whether the first generation has built and sustained emotionally resonant family networks. As Joe observed:

We haven't gone back in a long time. My mum's relationship with her family is just okay, not really close, they don't really talk that much, so we don't really feel we need to go.

Joe's reflection points to a clear intergenerational transmission of emotional detachment. His mother's weak relational ties with her natal family, characterised by infrequent communication and emotional distance, meant that no meaningful channels were established through which Joe could form his own sense of kinship or belonging. In effect, there was no accumulated emotional currency for him to draw upon. As Baldassar (2007) argued, maintaining transnational family life requires not only digital or symbolic connection but the everyday capacity for care, reciprocity, and affective exchange – capacities which must be modelled and made visible across generations. Josh further illustrated the consequences of weak intergenerational ties:

I don't think I'd go back on my own. I don't really talk to anyone in the extended family. My parents don't speak to my grandparents that often, maybe once a month. We know each other, but not really, we're not close.

Vathi (2015) argued that whether the first generation actively sustains ties with the origin country significantly influences whether the second generation can convert those ties into usable transnational resources. Without frequent, embodied interaction or affective investment from the first generation, second-generation Chinese youth struggle to perceive extended family as part of their own lived network. In such cases, return visits are less likely to feel purposeful or emotionally significant, reducing the motivation to return to the wider family structure. Therefore, second-generation Chinese youth's access to transnational familyhood is not only conditioned by the relational scaffolding built or neglected by the first generation, but also subject to performance, negotiation, and strategic recomposition.

Emily's account reveals not only a lack of linguistic competence and cultural familiarity, but also a deeper dependence on her parents within the structure of daily life. Unlike peers who have built independent channels of communication with relatives through digital platforms, her family environment and routines offer little space for self-directed engagement with transnational kin. Consequently, her imagined connection to China remains mediated through her parents, hence she lacks a concrete pathway for personal action.

The bridging function of social capital facilitates emotional and resource exchanges across borders through family networks. In the current study, this was most evident in the experiences of participants like George, Andy, and Sue, whose parents' strong ties to extended family in China, and their early exposure to return visits, enabled them to sustain these transnational practices into adulthood as independent agents.

Simultaneously, Faist's (2000) notion of the diffusion function of social capital reveals the feedback mechanisms of chain activity: when parents regularly return and encourage their children to do so, their children establish a positive cycle of transnational engagement. However, as the participants increasingly build their own

educational, professional, and social lives in the UK, a negative feedback loop can emerge where time constraints, shifting cultural affiliations, and competing priorities begin to disrupt the continuity of return practices.

This contrast highlights how the formation of transnational familyhood among second-generation Chinese youth is stratified by class, labour conditions, and parental capital, yet is simultaneously invigorated by the younger generation's own efforts to navigate, enact, and reshape these conditions. Capital sets the boundaries of possibility, but agency determines how action unfolds within those boundaries. The outcome is characterised by unevenness shaped by stratified capital and by the fluidity of individual choices.

Building on these dynamics of capital negotiation and agency, the pursuit of strategic educational return emerges as another key arena where second-generation Chinese youth mobilise and rework parental resources. Education, as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), becomes both a motivation and a vehicle for return visits. The next section explores how educational return trips are not simply parental impositions but are actively strategised and repurposed by participants, who use these experiences to navigate the intersections of British and Chinese educational expectations, and to craft transnational advantages on their own terms.

7.5.2 Educational return visits

Among participants with regular patterns of return visits, it became clear that they also include engagement in extracurricular training in the arts, sports, and other fields in order to gain an edge within the UK education system. These transnational educational practices emerged as a key method of maintaining cultural and social ties with China while reflecting how families strategically draw upon their transnational economic, social, and cultural capital to invest in their children's development. It is a class-based strategy that is largely inaccessible to families in Glasgow. For Glasgow's participants, economic constraints and parental occupation demands prevent them from participating in such transnational educational practices, limiting their ability to convert cross-border engagement into educational and cultural advantage. While middle (or upper middle)

class families typically possess greater levels of social capital and are able to access high-quality educational resources, such as elite tutors or specialised institutions to give their children a distinct advantage in academic and social spheres (Bourdieu, 1986; Waters, 2005).

Among participants with regular return visits to China, it became evident that these trips serve not only emotional or familial functions but are also instrumentalised as part of a broader class-based strategy of what can be conceptualised as strategic transnational educational capital. This reflects the capacity of migrant parents, particularly those living in London from middle-class backgrounds, to deliberately mobilise economic, social, and cultural resources across two national systems to maximise their children's competitive advantage in the UK.

Rather than being incidental, such transnational educational practices, which include summer tutoring, arts training, and sports academies in China, represent a calculated form of investment in their children's future. These practices are structurally enabled by the dual positionality of migrant families who are embedded in both UK and Chinese contexts and deploy a spatial division of educational labour: the UK for formal accreditation, and China for intensive, low-cost skill acquisition (Waters, 2005; Ong, 1999). In this sense, return visits operate not just as sentimental journeys, but as key sites for the conversion of economic capital into cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

For example, Harry, from London, described how his parents supported his table tennis training in China:

When I was younger, I spent a lot of time playing table tennis. My parents would send me to live with my table tennis coach in China during the summer, and we would train together every day for six hours. I even lived in a sports academy as a child, where I stayed with other kids, played table tennis daily, and learnt Chinese. I would spend at least two months in China each summer, although the trips are shorter now. Back then, the sports academy provided free accommodation, and my coach, who was also a family friend, helped train me at little cost. Everything in China, from food to coaching, is much cheaper compared to the UK, and I miss the food, the people, and those experiences every time I return.

Similarly, Lily recalled: “Since primary school, I’d go back to China to learn dance – Chinese traditional dance.”

Alice added:

My mum used to take me back from junior high for maths tutoring during the summer holidays... You know that saying, “ten days of maths in China equals a year of learning in the UK or US”.

Vincent stated:

Since junior high, I’d go back every summer to practise drums, always practising, I still go back to practise. My drum set is at my grandparents' house, and I never get tired of it; I just love it... It helped me start a band in London and perform solo gigs.

Andy described how ten years of continuous violin training in China helped him form ties beyond his immediate family:

When I was young and went back to China, much of my time was spent practising and learning the violin. My violin teacher and I had a close relationship. When his child got married, my parents and I made a special trip to attend. We shared so many highs and lows. We studied together for nearly ten years, and throughout secondary school in the UK, I was the concertmaster at school. This is one of the greatest accomplishments in my life, and I’m proud to have met such a good teacher. Even now, we regularly check in on each other on WeChat.

When asked why they pursued training in China, common responses cited affordability, efficiency, and parental support. For instance, Harry explained:

The sports academy was cheap, with free food and accommodation, and my dad would arrange the coach each year.

Alice added:

We did exercises and problem sets all day, eight hours daily. In just one week, we’d finish the entire A-level maths syllabus... It only cost 300 pounds a week. You couldn’t do that in the UK.

Andy shared:

Learning music in China isn't expensive. One hour was about 200 RMB, just £20. In London, half an hour costs £30.

This form of transnational educational mobility reflects the conversion of parental economic and social capital across borders (Bourdieu, 1986), allowing participants to acquire intensive, high-value skills at relatively low cost while simultaneously reinforcing cultural and social ties with the ancestral homeland.

These investments were made possible through parental brokerage, demonstrating what Faist (2000) described as the transnational transmission belt of social capital, but deployed here not for adaptation, but for strategic accumulation across generations. Furthermore, Harry's parents reactivated longstanding ties with coaches and local institutions; while Andy's close relationship with his violin teacher persisted into adulthood, evolving into a transgenerational bond marked by mutual obligation and cultural intimacy. Crucially, capital conversion not only enhances their educational competitiveness in the UK but also reinforces their cultural capital (e.g., Chinese traditional dance, musical skills) and transnational social ties (e.g., relationships with coaches), fostering a hybrid transnational identity that positions them as "fluent" in both Chinese and British cultural fields. It is a form of class-based advantage that reproduces their parents' middle-class status. That is what Ong (1999) theorised as "flexible citizenship", the ability to select, activate, and convert resources across borders in response to opportunity structures. For middle-class migrant families, educational mobility becomes a vehicle of flexible citizenship, in which second-generation children are trained not merely to assimilate but to perform fluency across contexts, transforming cultural hybridity into an asset.

As Lily, Alice, Vincent, and others described, their training in arts, sports, and academics was not received passively. These young people often embraced and personalised these opportunities, using them to cultivate both competence and identity. Jason, for instance, spoke not only of summer drumming practice in China, but also of how this training allowed him to form a band in London and develop a sense of cultural self-expression that exceeded parental expectations. Andy maintained a decade-long relationship with his violin teacher, attending his teacher's child's wedding and

sustaining the connection well into adulthood – a transnational relational investment that he nurtured on his own terms. These examples demonstrate that educational mobility is not merely a top-down imposition, but a reflexive, future-oriented practice that many second-generation Chinese youth engage with to forge hybrid identities and advance personal aspirations. They are not just recipients of cross-border opportunity but strategic agents navigating dual systems with increasing autonomy.

Crucially, these practices are deeply stratified along class lines. London middle-class families have the means to access elite tutors, sport academies, and cultural institutions in China. The majority (14 out of 18) of second-generation Chinese participants in London are the only child in their family, which enables them to make use of these resources in ways that are meaningful, productive, and situated and turn into tangible developmental benefits. Conversely, Glasgow Chinese families, who are predominantly engaged in catering or service-sector work, face dual constraints of insufficient capital and limited conversion capacity, including economic, transnational social capital. Most (16 out of 18) grew up in a family with at least one sibling. Alex's reflection illustrates this divide:

I wanted to learn the violin when I was like 8, maybe, but lessons in Glasgow were very expensive. I had a younger brother to look after, and we don't have spare money on that, my parents were both very busy, so.. They tell me to focus on the school.

Despite his interest in learning the violin, his parents prioritise meeting basic necessities (housing, siblings' needs, daily living expenses) rather than “non-essential” pursuits such as music. This manifests one aspect of the widespread difficulty encountered by Chinese families in Glasgow regarding capital conversion: they are unable to transform potential (interests, aspirations) into capital (skills, opportunities), as the tools for conversion, such as money, time, cultural knowledge, and geographical pathways are unevenly distributed across class and region. This class-based inability to access transnational educational resources has profound implications for their fragmented and detached transnational identity, shaped by their inability to engage with China through class-privileged practices like educational return visits. Their inability to access or imagine alternative educational routes mirrors what Bourdieu and Passeron (1977)

called the limits of cultural reproduction, a constraint whereby low capital families reproduce success through narrow, institutionally sanctioned pathways.

This divergence constitutes a central analytical tension in the chapter. Although all participants inhabit British and Chinese social worlds, only some can move between them with ease, continuity, and agency. Strategic transnational educational capital, then, is not just about access; it is about the capacity to convert cross-border engagements into forms of self-making, advantage, and belonging. Furthermore, this capacity is classed.

Beyond this, however, it is also relational. Participants' accounts frequently revealed how their experiences in China have helped them develop ties beyond the nuclear family – with coaches, teachers, fellow trainees, and extended kin. These ties not only facilitate learning but also ground participants in a broader transnational social landscape. As Faist (2000) and Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) argued, transnationalism is sustained through dense networks of affect, obligation, and exchange. What these second-generation individuals are doing, however, is recalibrating those networks to suit their own futures – mobilising them selectively for education, creative expression, or emotional belonging.

Indeed, such transnational practices often have transformative effects. Participants develop an embodied knowledge of place, language, and culture that contributes to what Vertovec (2001) calls “multi-sited embeddedness”. They are not simply navigating between China and the UK, but inhabiting overlapping cultural fields, where being fluent in both systems offers an advantage not only in education, but in broader social participation.

Importantly, this strategic mobility also allows for emergent forms of class reproduction. Families with higher socio-economic capital facilitate these journeys, but it is the second generation who make meaning of them, often reproducing their own class positions through musical distinction, athletic recognition, or elite academic pathways. Through such processes, they secure not just qualifications, but identities and capacities that transcend the nation-state.

In sum, educational return visits should not be seen merely as parental interventions or cultural maintenance exercises. They are part of a strategically agentive, class-contingent process whereby second-generation youth develop flexible competencies and relational infrastructures that position them advantageously within transnational social fields. Some do so through privileged access and intentional cultivation; others remain on the periphery, constrained by material limits and symbolic distance. It is in this contrast that the unequal geography of strategic transnational educational capital, and its generational implications, becomes most stark.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter examined four core mechanisms: embodiment and sensory experiences (e.g. cohabitation, caregiving, and ritual participation during return visits), kinship boundary work (e.g. selective invisibility in digital spaces to balance autonomy and kin expectations), transnational family capital conversion (e.g. property and educational return visits), and digital technology mediation (e.g. WeChat-induced co-presence alongside feelings of absence and anxiety), to illuminate the transnational family maintenance practices of second-generation Chinese young people. It ultimately revealed that these individuals do not passively inherit kinship ties bestowed by blood; instead, they proactively construct transnational family ties through active repair, negotiation, contestation, and the independent development of return visit practices.

This chapter also extended the concept of ambient co-presence (Baldassar, 2008) by capturing the dysco-presence (Ou & Lin, 2023) created by second-generation Chinese users of WeChat, who simultaneously resist elder surveillance while being unable to detach entirely from familial expectations.

It also highlighted how material objects and property (e.g. grandparents' homes in China, family heirlooms, or even shared assets like a summer apartment) serve as tangible “anchors” for kinship. These material forms provide a more stable sense of belonging than ephemeral digital interactions or temporary visits; for example, participants who had regular access to a family home in China described it as a “fixed point” of return.

In addition, the chapter underscored second-generation Chinese youth's agency in capital conversion and class differences through practices such as gift exchange, property use, and educational investment. London's participants develop flexible competencies and relational infrastructures that position them advantageously within transnational social fields, enabling the reproduction of parental middle-class status through the accumulation of transnational economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. By actively leveraging class privilege, they negotiate a relatively stable hybrid identity anchored in both British and Chinese cultural contexts. Glasgow's participants occupy a more peripheral position. Constrained by time, cultural, social, and material limitations and distance tied to class position, they have limited access to independent return visit and transnational educational resources and fewer opportunities to build embedded ties to China. Digital platform as their way to connect transnational family. As a result, their transnational identities are more fluid, periodic and conditional. This contrast foregrounds the uneven geography of strategic transnational educational capital, rooted in class stratification between London and Glasgow, and highlights its generational implications for transnational identity formation and class reproduction.

Yet, a critical question arises: What would such a refusal look like when the second generation actively stops performing transnational family relations? This was demonstrated by Sue, who stopped contact with her grandmother after returning to the UK, prioritising academic pressures over emotion work. Based on the findings, such refusal would likely manifest in layered withdrawals: reducing return visits that repair estrangement, scaling back emotional labour (e.g. abandoning daily video calls), curbing material exchanges (e.g. ceasing cross-border gift-giving), and limiting digital engagement (e.g. muting family WeChat groups). How might this reshape transnational families? Answering this requires further exploration of how transnational family ties adapt to the withdrawal of active "performance" by the second generation.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

Drawing on a six-month multi-sited period of ethnographic fieldwork, this thesis has shown how second generation Chinese youth negotiate and navigate their in-betweenness through food, music, language and return visits across family, Chinatown, takeaway shops/ restaurants, Chinese language schools, and other public spaces. This interdisciplinary study is situated in the field of transnationalism studies, where diaspora is used sparingly as a stance. It conceptualises everyday life as the primary site where belonging is negotiated and employs the lenses of performance and performativity to examine how belonging is enacted in practice. At the micro level, the analysis traces mechanisms of boundary work and positioning to show how lines between “us” and “them,” “here” and “there,” are continually drawn and redrawn. Attention to embodiment and the senses reveals how smell, sound, and touch render belonging a phenomenon that is materially and affectively felt. Finally, the concept of capital conversion explains why some young people are better positioned to sustain, mobilise, or transform cross-border ties than others.

The investigation began by examining the mundane practices through which these participants simultaneously connect their country of origin and society in which they live in Britain. Focusing on the intertwined domains of food, music, and language, I trace how they navigate belonging and difference through what they eat, listen to, perform and speak, often in ways that are embodied, sensory and shaped by place. The thesis uses “second generation” cautiously as a heuristic category while showing that participants’ lived identifications are more complex than the term allows. Participants identify variously as “British Chinese”, “Chinese background”, “more British than Chinese”, “half and half”, “in-between”, or avoided fixed labels altogether. Their identifications shifted across family, school, peer, community and transnational contexts, showing that belonging is relational, situated, and shaped by audience, place, language, racialisation and family history. “Second generation” remains an analytical shorthand for a shared structural location, not an identity assumed to be held by participants themselves. It also recognises that transnational identity is shaped by structural constraints, including class, public attitudes towards immigrants after Brexit and the pandemic. This concluding chapter synthesises the key findings of the thesis,

directly addresses the research questions, clarifies how each chapter links to others, and outlines the contributions made to the field by this research. Finally, it addresses the limitations of the study and considers future research directions.

8.1 Revisiting the research questions

The primary research question is: How do second generation Chinese youth negotiate belonging and transnational identity through everyday practices?

This thesis demonstrates that transnational identity emerges as a situated process of doing belonging through embodied practices, boundary work, positioning and the strategic mobilisation of capital. It argues that transnational identity should be understood as a situated and uneven accomplishment.

It moves away from static categories of ethnicity, origin, or identity labels, and towards a processual understanding of how belonging is lived and negotiated. Ordinary activities such as eating, listening to music, speaking language, maintaining digital connections, and returning to the ancestral homeland function as key sites where belonging is negotiated.

The thesis clarifies that the capacity to sustain transnational belonging is unequally distributed. The findings show that identity negotiation is structured by classed resources, family histories, and local urban conditions. The broader significance for the field is that second-generation transnationalism cannot be treated as a uniform condition. Instead, it needs to be understood as socially differentiated, spatially uneven, and conditioned by unequal access to resources and recognition.

Taken together, I argue that second-generation Chinese youth transnational identity is best understood as an ongoing negotiation between structure and agency, inheritance and improvisation, attachment and constraint. The wider contribution made by this thesis is to show that belonging is not merely a matter of cultural continuity, but a practical, embodied, and stratified process unfolding through everyday life.

- How do food practices across home, school, and family businesses become sites of boundary work and sensory/embodied negotiation of belonging?

Food practices become mechanisms of sensory boundary work through which participants manage visibility, difference, and belonging. Smell becomes a powerful cultural marker whereby which boundaries are enforced or negotiated in everyday life as it renders ethnic difference socially readable. Migration studies have long privileged visible and discursive markers of boundary-making, such as language, dress, and religion as primary sites for understanding difference and integration. Although smell is a critical yet under-examined factor, it signals cultural and social differences, and the spatial contexts in which such sensory cues are amplified, suppressed, or normalised. By investigating how people regulate their sensory exposure to negotiate and perform belonging, this research demonstrates that belonging emerges as a materially grounded process shaped by how bodies, senses, and spaces interact.

Across home, school, and family businesses, these practices reveal that belonging is structured through spatially differentiated regimes of visibility. Participants actively regulate sensory exposure in the following ways: maintaining traditional food rituals within the private space of the home, managing authenticity in the semi-public space of family businesses through front stage and back stage practices, and suppressing or modifying their consumption of Chinese food consumption in schools to avoid being marked as ethnically different. Through these everyday adjustments and negotiations, food is shown to be not simply a cultural symbol but an embodied medium through which individuals navigate inclusion and exclusion.

- How do listening, performance, and soundscape navigation operate as visibility-management and positioning practices in everyday life?

Listening, performance, and soundscape navigation operate as everyday negotiations through which second-generation Chinese youth control how audible, legible, and fixed they become to others. Therefore, musical practices become ways of managing exposure: deciding when to be heard, what to reveal, what to mute, and how to position oneself between mainstream norms and diasporic expectations of authenticity. They are strategies for avoiding misrecognition, resisting stereotyping, and creating room for

self-definition under conditions of double surveillance. Participants are judged by white normative assumptions about what sounds “normal” and diasporic expectations concerning about what counts as authentic. Sound becomes a way to move between these pressures without fully submitting to either.

To sum up, belonging is governed by audibility. Transnational belonging is equally enacted through sound, listening, audibility, and self-regulation. In other words, transnational belonging is shaped not merely through movement or discourse, but also through the ways in which migrants manage what can be heard, by whom, and in which spaces. What is at stake is whose sounds are permitted to pass as ordinary, legitimate, and socially unremarkable, and whose sounds are marked as excessive, embarrassing, unintelligible, or foreign. This reframes belonging as a sensory politics of recognition. Moreover, music and sound are practical media through which young people negotiate exposure, safety, legitimacy, and self-definition under uneven power relations. By demonstrating that transnational belonging is also regulated at the sensory level, this insight pushes the field beyond models of transnationalism that privilege mobility, networks, or homeland attachment alone, by demonstrating that transnational belonging is also regulated at the sensory level.

Through the analysis, it became possible to examine everyday racism, white normative standards of audibility, and diasporic pressures of authenticity can be examined together, as interconnected regimes that shape how subjects are heard, misheard, or silenced. The wider significance, therefore, is that this study provides the field with a way to understand belonging as not only something claimed discursively, but also as something negotiated through the politics of sound: through what can be voiced, what must be muted, and what kinds of sonic presence are allowed to count as normal in everyday life.

- How do translanguaging/transpositioning and interactional positioning structure roles and belonging across home, community education, work, and public space?

Participants actively negotiate how they speak, switch languages, or position themselves in interaction in response to contextual expectations and social obligations. In doing so, language becomes a practical mechanism through which they respond to

the expectations of family authority, diasporic communities, workplaces, and mainstream society, while simultaneously asserting and demonstrating their own sense of identity. Identity itself is produced through the processes of translanguaging, transpositioning, and interactional positioning, rather than transnational identity simply existing and then being expressed through language.

Across home, community education, work, and public space, these linguistic practices determine who translates, who mediates between generations, who represents the family, and who is recognised as a legitimate member of a particular social group. In some contexts, multilingual competence enables participants to mobilise linguistic resources as cultural or social capital, or carries emotion and intimacy, enabling them to move flexibly between contexts, communities and claim recognition. In other contexts, the same linguistic ability assigns them caregiving, brokering, or interpretive responsibilities, transferring structural pressures from institutions or families onto individual bodies. The consequences depend on how linguistic resources intersect with family capital, class position, birth order, and urban opportunity structures.

Belonging therefore emerges through a process of situated negotiation. Participants continuously adjust their linguistic practices to respond to expectations placed upon them, but these adjustments are not purely reactive. Through translanguaging and interactional positioning, they also actively maintain, defend, and demonstrate their own identities within these structures of expectation and responsibility. For example, in public spaces, language becomes deeply embedded with spatial and sensory dimensions, spatial boundaries are materially enacted through linguistic practices, and language, in turn, functions as a "visible marker" of identity and role within such spaces. In response to racialising gazes, participants actively engage in practices that negotiate cultural tension and resist power dynamics rather than passively submitting to disciplinary forces, irrespective of whether these take the form of intergenerational authority or racial labeling.

In this sense, language functions as a means of negotiating authority, recognition, and self-definition across everyday life.

- How are transnational family ties sustained, repaired, or thinned through return visits, digital co-presence, and material exchange?

Second generation Chinese youth actively sustain, repair, or see their family ties diminish gradually through repeated practices of interaction, care, and resource exchange. Return visits function as key moments of embodied repair, where physical presence, shared routines, and face-to-face caregiving re-establish intimacy and reaffirm family belonging. Participants temporarily reintegrate into everyday family life, rebuild familiarity with relatives, and renegotiate generational relationships that cannot be fully maintained at a distance.

Digital communication, by contrast, sustains a background awareness of family life but rarely replaces the affective depth of physical interaction. Whilst forms of ambient co-presence maintain a sense of ongoing connection, participants frequently engage in selective visibility practices, curating what is shown, withheld, or muted in online communication. As a result, digital interaction often produces a form of dysco-presence, where family members remain connected yet partially distant, sustaining contact without fully reproducing the emotional resonance created through embodied encounters.

Material exchange also plays a crucial role in structuring transnational belonging. Gifts, remittances, and property ties function as infrastructures that anchor family relations across borders. These exchanges not only maintain reciprocity but also translate economic and social resources into opportunities for continued return and relational continuity.

Yet the capacity to sustain these ties is unevenly distributed. Access to economic resources, linguistic capital, and transnational networks determines how often individuals can return, how long they can stay, and how deeply they remain embedded in family life. When resources permit frequent travel, extended stays, and broader social engagement, family ties remain dense and durable. When resources are limited, interactions become more episodic, producing thinner and more fragile forms of belonging. Transnational family connection therefore emerges as a resource-dependent

practice in which the durability of belonging reflects the unequal distribution of capital, which enables or constrains continued engagement across borders.

- How do classed resources (capitals) and local opportunity structures shape the capacity to sustain these practices, and with what consequences for the density/fragility of belonging?

Classed resources and local opportunity structures shape transnational belonging by determining who can sustain identity practices as a durable, flexible, and self-directed way of life, and who can sustain them only intermittently, reactively, and at greater personal cost. Cultural, social, economic, and linguistic capital shape both the forms of capital available to second-generation youth and the extent to which they can mobilise the skills, networks, legitimacy, and time necessary to sustain their identity practices. Local opportunity structures, such as community infrastructure, family resource distribution, educational access, and social network density, further frame the extent to which these practices can be enacted safely, publicly, and strategically.

When capital is abundant and opportunity structures are dense as is the case for London-based participants, transnational practices become easier to sustain and more readily stabilised into an integrated sense of belonging. In such contexts, young people are better able to turn bilingualism into cultural competence, mobility into embeddedness, music and food into legitimate forms of self-expression, and return visits into long-term relational continuity. Belonging becomes denser because it is supported by infrastructures, recognised across settings, and reinforced through repeated practice. It is not simply felt more strongly; it is more materially anchored, more socially validated, and more deployable across home, community, and public life.

When capital is limited and opportunity structures are thinner, as is the case for Glasgow participants, the same practices become harder to maintain and less likely to consolidate into durable belonging. Under these conditions, multilingualism may become obligation rather than resource, return visits may remain short and dependent rather than self-directed, and food or music may function more as privately managed difference than as publicly usable capital. Belonging becomes fragile because it need to be continually repaired under constraint, often through duty, concealment, and

episodic reactivation rather than through confident, cumulative participation. What is sustained is not absent, but weaker in that it is less secure, less portable across contexts, and more vulnerable to interruption by institutional pressures, racialisation, or family demands.

I argue that transnational belonging is a resource-dependent capacity. It reflects the extent to which people have different forms of capital, time, infrastructure, and legitimacy to continually practice it across settings. Its fragility reflects the extent to which such practices depend on parental mediation, sporadic repair, or forms of labour that cannot easily be converted into durable recognition. In this sense, class and locality do not merely shape the expression of belonging; they shape its very durability.

These findings also raise methodological concerns about how to research transnational practices that are uneven, episodic, and selectively enacted can be researched. The next section therefore reflects on the methodological choices that made it possible to trace such differentiated forms of transnational identity across sites and social positions.

8.2 Methodological reflections

Looking back on the fieldwork of this study, challenges were a constant presence. This section shares insights gleaned from these experiences, with the aim of offering a useful reference for future multi-sited ethnographic research.

First, multi-sited ethnography boasts distinct advantages in capturing and presenting the contextuality and details of people's everyday practices. It situated me inside the patterned ordinariness of participants' lives while keeping those patterns comparable across settings. Walking with participants between home, school, work, and leisure spaces enabled me to follow how identities were done, undone, and redone in motion. Building relationships mattered, but so did boundaries. Friendship opened doors to stories that formal access would never reach, yet my presence also shaped what was told and withheld. I kept fieldnotes to track moments of complicity, discomfort, and selective visibility, and used return visits to test whether what I thought I had seen endured beyond the first telling. In practice, this design allowed me to trace trajectories

across the city, who spoke which language, who masked which smells, who performed what to whom, and under what pressures.

Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews provided participants with a space to explain themselves and share stories that cannot be observed in the field. This was invaluable for unpacking behaviours and phenomena encountered during fieldwork that are difficult to interpret through observation alone.

Yet fieldwork also brought significant challenges, such as the surge of massive datasets and the emergence of multiple parallel themes. This abundance of data became difficult to manage in the later stage of data analysis, where the emergence of several patterns and themes impelled me to refine the initial research question and narrow the focus to specific theme. Nevertheless, the inherent messiness of multi-sited ethnography provides indispensable components for building a robust, contextually rich argument about identity negotiation, driving me to engage with the complexity of transnational life rather than reducing it to abstract theories or rigid binary categories.

Drawing on an extensive dataset, this thesis effectively illuminated the transnational identity negotiation processes of second-generation Chinese youth in the UK and how they construct a sense of belonging. It also integrated multiple analytical perspectives, such as boundary work, translanguaging and transpositioning, the third space, capital, and sensory experience to offer new interpretive pathways for the study of transnational identity. That said, the study also contributes to relevant debates, which are addressed in the following section.

8.3 Contributions

This thesis has made a range of theoretical contributions to understanding of the lives and transnational identity of second generation Chinese youth and further contributes to the fields of migration studies, identity, cultural studies. These contributions are outlined in the following statement.

- This thesis developed an integrated framework for analysing the transnational identities of second-generation Chinese youth, addressing the limitation of isolated theoretical lenses, centring on four core domains of everyday practice along with six mechanisms and three outcomes. It revealed that such transnational identities are not abstract and static constructions, but empirically analysable concrete processes embedded in mundane everyday practices and deeply shaped by the power relations of specific spatiotemporal contexts. This framework generated in-depth insights into the ordinariness of transnational identity construction.
- This thesis contributes to showing that third space is event-based and cyclical rather than a static state. I treated third space making as a mechanism and tied it to observable indicators, such as boundary work and embodiment, as well as to situated threshold events (e.g., the kitchen door, the microwave decision, the switch from headphones to room speakers), demonstrating that the third space is constituted through practices.
- This thesis integrated translanguaging with transpositioning to emphasise its role as a multimodal, sensory, and class driven practice. This challenges the purist linguistic bias that positions identity negotiation as a coordinated orchestration of language, body, and senses.
- This thesis also refined ambient the concepts of co-presence via dysco-presence (Ou & Lin, 2023) and selective visibility, showing how second generation Chinese youth navigate this paradox. For instance, they use WeChat to perform “ambient co-presence” (e.g. festive red envelopes) while curating their digital visibility to resist intergenerational surveillance, creating a fragile balance between connection and autonomy.
- This thesis contributed an operational elaboration of second-generation capital conversion. I indexed conversion through (a) linguistic boundary work in translingual home spaces and (b) independent return visits supported by family-

owned housing and educational aims. At these thresholds (e.g. instituting home language rules, applying for visas/exams, arranging long-stay study in China), actors actively utilise, contest, negotiate, and request resources, converting economic and familial capital into institutionalised cultural capital (credentials), embodied linguistic capital (fluency/accents), and symbolic capital (legitimacy across UK-China contexts).

This study also provides a range of empirical contributions for researchers, professional organisations and wider communities.

Most importantly, it constituted a systematic empirical investigation into four core daily domains of second-generation Chinese young people in the UK: food, musical practices, language use, and return visits to the ancestral homeland. It documented the specific practices and operational logics of their transnational identity negotiation, not only providing vivid empirical insights not only for understanding the daily lives, cultural adaptation processes, and transnational identity construction pathways of this group, but also for translating the abstract theoretical mechanisms proposed earlier into observable real-world practices.

Specifically, in the domain of food, boundary work and embodiment were materialised through behaviours such as lunch concealment and language division in takeaways. In terms of musical practices, the mechanisms of embodied senses and positioning helped this group free themselves from rigid labels and balance cultural belonging with local integration. With respect to language use, the situational characteristics of translanguaging and positioning reflected their agency in dynamically negotiating identities. Regarding digital ties, WeChat, through functions such as ritual co-presence and selective visibility, served as a core tool for them to manage transnational connections, while for return visits to the ancestral homeland, the capital conversion mechanism transformed parental resources into independent practices and emotional bonds. Each domain exhibited context-specific indicators of the operation of these mechanisms.

In summary, the five core mechanisms demonstrate cross-scenario universality: boundary work (school food concealment), positioning (English replies in public, Mandarin with elders), embodiment and senses (kitchen noise and smell thresholds), digital mediation (ritual co-presence, selective visibility) and capital conversion (funds/networks and independent returns). The empirical generality of mechanisms plus context-specificity provided solid support for the integrated analytical framework proposed earlier, confirming its applicability and explanatory power. Moreover, it revealed the ordinariness and complexity of transnational identity construction among second-generation Chinese young people in the UK, such identity being continuously negotiated and shaped through trivial daily practices in the dynamic operation of mechanisms. The empirical records and analyses of this study also provide a referenceable empirical paradigm, observable indicators, and analytical perspectives for subsequent related empirical research.

In terms of methodology, this research conducted for this thesis employed a sensory multi-sited ethnography to capture the embodied, affective and lived aspects of transnational experience. Most studies of transnationalism foreground economic, political, or symbolic-cultural flows. By centring embodied, affective, and sensory dimensions, particularly taste, smell, and tactile experiences, as primary arenas where transnational identity is negotiated, performed, and lived, this thesis addresses a critical gap as much of the diaspora and migration research overlook the non-representational aspects of belonging and experiences (Thrift, 2008). It also opens up the study of belonging, displacement, and identity to embodied, non-verbal, affective, and everyday practices, enriching understanding of the “thick” textures of diasporic life.

The study also deployed a composite methodological framework in which sensory experience was treated as a mediating variable linking multiple sites and the implications of transnational identity. Here, the sensory is a trace or clue that helps track how transnational individuals negotiate identity across different settings. A sensory analysis restricted to one site may risk overlooking how cultural flows reshape sensory practices across contexts (Howes, 2005). This study addressed that gap by using sensory analysis to explore experiences across multiple sites, positioning the sensory as a bridge between local practices and transnational structures.

8.4 Limitations and future research directions

There are several limitations of this study that need to be addressed, and these can usefully serve as the basis for future research.

First, although this study has focused on second generation Chinese youth, the sample collected through various means could not fully represent the overall diversity of second-generation Chinese youth in Britain. For instance, it did not adequately capture variations in regional distribution, class, or migration histories. Class and gender serve as important lenses through which to analyse young people's identity. Although the thesis acknowledged the influence of class on identity in the context of return visits, class remains under-theorised. Further research from an intersectional perspective is therefore required.

Second, this thesis focused on four core daily domains: food, music, language, and return visits, which effectively capture key sites of identity negotiation, its methodological reliance on six months of multi-sited ethnography and in-depth interviews limits its coverage of broader life experiences. Whether the mechanisms identified can be extended to other practice fields remains underexplored. This suggests that further inquiry could involve revisiting previous studies or integrating quantitative surveys to expand the participant pool and validate the transferability of the identified mechanisms and identity outcomes.

Third, this study examined the dynamic process of second-generation Chinese youth navigating their “in-between” positioning at the individual level. It did not address macro-structural issues, for example, how national policies and nationalism shape their experiences of “in-betweenness” or the institutionalised racialised dilemmas faced at the community or group level. This leaves a gap in terms of understanding the structural constraints on identity negotiation.

Fourth, as discussed in Chapter Five, music functions as a key form of youth culture through which participants express themselves. Nevertheless, this focus overlooks the wider role and depth of youth culture and subculture as mediating forces in identity

formation. Youth subcultures are often seen as spaces where young people negotiate the tensions between parental expectations and peer influences (Brettell & Nibbs, 2009). On this point, existing research on the influence of youth culture and subculture pays insufficient attention to second-generation's identity formation. Further research could therefore involve an ethnographic focus on subculture communities in order to examine how collective practices influences second-generation Chinese youth living in Britain. It could also integrate intergenerational relationships to explore how subcultural choices mediate parent-child tensions over cultural transmission. Such an approach would fill the gap in understanding how youth culture shapes the complex, context-dependent identity formation of second-generation Chinese youth in Britain.

Finally, although this thesis adopts Bhabha's (1994) notion of the "third space" as a lens for interpreting the hybrid identity negotiations of second-generation Chinese youth, it pays insufficient attention to decolonial dimensions. This thesis discussed practices such as concealing the smell of hotpot at school to avoid being marked as "other" (Chapter 4) or navigating the tacit hierarchy that privileges white British cultural norms over K-pop's global reach (Chapter 5), thereby reveal the continuing force of colonial discourse that casts East Asian sensory registers as outside the British mainstream. The analysis describes these behaviours but stops short of interrogating how they reproduce a colonial logic that legitimises Western norms. As a result, its critique of power remains limited: it outlines how identity is negotiated without explaining why the negotiation proceeds within a framework that still promotes Western standards, nor does it consider how participants might unsettle that framework. Re-centring a decolonial stance and rejecting the West/non-West hierarchy would raise different questions about participants' identity logics and create room for alternative, disruptive practices.

Overall, this thesis answered the research questions by showing that second-generation Chinese youth create belonging through five mechanisms: boundary work (school-lunch concealment; FOH/BOH splits), positioning (English replies in public; Mandarin with elders; TA roles), embodiment/senses (door-crossing noise and smell thresholds; hand control in calligraphy), digital mediation (ritual co-presence; selective visibility), and capital conversion (parental funds and networks into independent returns; converting China training into UK credentials). It stands out for its strong focus on

everyday life transnationalism, how in-betweenness is negotiated, and the lives of second-generation Chinese young people living in Scotland and England. In so doing, it has developed a robust and comprehensive understanding of how second-generation Chinese or people with immigrant backgrounds navigate different ways of being and ways of belonging.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participants Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Study: Transnational identity formation of among second generation Chinese young people in the UK

Researcher: Keying Li, a Ph.D. student at School of Social and Political Science, University of Glasgow.

You are being invited to take part in a research study, "Transnational identity formation of among second generation Chinese young people in the UK." This research is a PhD dissertation project in the discipline of Sociology being carried out by the student Keying Li under the supervision of Dr Dominic Pasura and Dr Maria Grazia Imperiale of the University of Glasgow. Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take some time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

Aim of study: The aim of the study is to explore the transnational identity formation of second generation of Chinese young people with migrant backgrounds in the UK in order to assess transnational narratives and the navigation of identities throughout late adolescence and early adulthood (aged 16-25). The main research themes include lived experiences in receiving society, factors that influence their transnational identity, and the use of Mandarin and Cantonese language skills. It is expected that this research will contribute to the field of exploring the identity issues of immigrants' descendants and migration studies in general.

Procedure: You have been selected to participate in this research because you are a British Chinese young people and are between the ages of 16 to 25 years old. This study involves participant observations and interviews (18-25). In this study, it is expected that 30 young people will participate, and I will be inviting you to participate in approximately one interview session lasting about 45 minutes to an hour. If you agree to take part, I would like to arrange a face-to-face interview with you. This can be in a classroom in the school, in a café, or at your home with you and your permission. The interview will be audio-recorded. The questions I will ask are mainly about your everyday life, your connections with your parents' homeland and your opinions about your identity.

Participants' Rights: If you decide to participate in this investigation, information about your personal identity will not be disclosed. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity and then replaced by a code. Your name will not appear in my thesis or any other published materials. You can withdraw at any time during the research by letting me know that you do not want to participate. You do not need to answer all

questions if you do not want to. You have one chance to request to read a transcription copy to check your accounts were faithfully translated.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be respected subject to legal constraints and professional guidelines. All information you provide during the research will remain confidential. Any personal information will be removed and replaced with a pseudonym in report, transcripts, or passed on to third parties. Your personal data will be destroyed by the end of the project. Your research data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only I and a transcriber will have access to the information.

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as it possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

Benefits: Your participants will help me obtain a better understanding of the experiences and transnational identities of second generation Chinese young people with migrant backgrounds. It also provides you with an opportunity to express yourself as a British Chinese young person in British society. You may increase self-awareness about personal identity linked to ethnicity, migration, and transnational practice. This self-discovery may have a personal qualitative benefit for you.

This project has been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee

Contact: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, please don't hesitate to contact the researcher, Keying Li, by email xxxxxx@research.gla.ac.uk, or my supervisors: Dr Dominic Pasura, email: xxxxxxxx@glasgow.ac.uk, Dr Maria Grazia Imperiale, email: xxxxxxxxxx@glasgow.ac.uk

If you are experiencing stress or emotional distress, please don't hesitate to contact Scottish Children and Young People's Health Support group for help, by nhs.HealthScotland-GeneralEnquiries@nhs.net. To pursue any complaint about the conduct of the research: contact the College of Social Sciences Lead for Ethical Review, Dr Susan Batchelor: email socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of Project: Transnational identity formation of second generation Chinese young people in the UK

Name of Researcher: Keying Li

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my interview data from the project at any time up until it is transcribed for use in the final report, approximately two months from the interview-taking place. Recordings of interviews will be wiped upon transcription.

You may withdraw your interview data from the project at any time up until it is transcribed for use in the final report, approximately one month from the interview-taking place. Recordings of interviews will be wiped upon transcription.

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

- All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research.
- I understand that other authenticated researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I agree to take part in this research study

I do not agree to take part in this research study

Name of Participant Name of Researcher

Date

Name of Researcher Signature

Date

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

Background

- General personal information (age, birthplace, occupation, family, living area, etc.)
- How was the area you lived in? Did you ever move house? Feelings about the living area and the city.
- Family's migration experiences.

Life experiences in host society

- Past experiences of living in the UK, where you were born, what school you went to, how you felt, how you were treated by the people you knew and met, such as teachers or classmates, friends.
- What do you do in your spare time? What do you do when you with your friends?
- Could you please share with me how do you relate with your family, friends, classmates? What do you usually do and talk about together? What binds you together? How are they different from you? What is their attitude towards you?
- Has your life in the UK been affected by the Chinese background?
- Can you describe your personal experience of being a British born Chinese and how this has influenced your sense of identity?

Identity

- How would you describe yourself? Would you describe yourself as Scottish,
- Scottish Chinese, British Chinese, Chinese or any ethnicity of your choice? Why? If not sure, then how much do you think you are Scottish or British, how much do you think you are Chinese? What aspects of your life are British and what aspects Chinese?
- What factors would you describe the most significant influence on your identity?
- Where do you think you belong? Where is your home?
- In what ways-do you think the experiences of British born Chinese people differ from those of Chinese immigrants who have settled in the UK as adults?
- Have you ever experienced a conflict between your British/Scottish and Chinese identities, and how did you resolve this?
- How do you navigate the cultural differences between British/Scottish and Chinese cultures, and how has this effected your sense of identity?
- Do you have any experiences or moments that makes you love/dislike/questioning of your Chinese background?

Connection with parents' homeland

- In what ways do you feel connected to both Britain and China?
- How important is your Chinese heritage to you and how do you maintain a connection to it? How important is it to you to maintain a connection with your parents' homeland, and in what ways do you do this?
- Have you ever visited, lived or studied in China or any other country outside of the UK? If so, how did this experience effect your sense of identity and belonging? Short term or long term? If so, could you please share with me your experience? How does it feel? What did you do while you were in China?
- How have these movement experiences influenced your understanding of who you are? Are there any changes in perceptions of 'British' and 'Chinese' and 'British' and 'Chinese'?
- How do you interact with the extended family, friends in China (through what? In what

ways? Content of the connection? Are there emotional attachments?).

Language

- Can you describe your proficiency in English and Chinese? How did you learn the language and how do you maintain it?
- In what context you would use Mandarin/Cantonese/Dialect?
- How importance is English and Chinese to your life, and in what ways does it connect you to your parents' homeland, why?
- Have you ever felt pressure from your family or community to maintain your proficiency in Chinese or to identify more strongly with Chinese culture? How did you respond to this pressure?
- Do you feel that your friends consider Mandarin/Cantonese important in their everyday lives?
- How do you feel when you speaking Chinese and English?

Future

- Do you have any future plans?
- Are you planning to remain in the UK or travel to China?
- Is it likely that you will visit China in the future? Can you explain?

Final words

- Is there something you would like to add or would like to share?

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