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# Nostalgia Negotiated

REVISITING WHAT IS LOST IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA  
THROUGH DESIGN



煙波江上使人愁

日暮鄉關何處是

## — · ABSTRACT

Cultural specificity is essential to an ethnic group and potentially the nation it belongs to. As a civilization with thousands of years' history, China is home to an enormous network of diverse, rich culture. Contemporary Chinese society over time, has never been stable, it has frequently been influenced by different sociopolitical and historical aspects in the global culture. China's tangible or intangible cultural heritage, as a result, is gradually fading away ("Top10: Fading Away", 2011). Today much of it is being replaced by products of globalization.

My research, focusing on the significance of traditional culture of China and the local culture of the Sichuan region, is rooted in an argument put forward by Hall (1996) and referenced in Chiang's 2010 paper. It states that historical factors such as political movements or economic force heavily impact identity formation, and that people's identity enables and effects the position they take when they speak (Chiang, 2010, p.39). Drawing on these assertions, my thesis starts from my Chinese and Chinese diaspora identities, and discusses traditional Chinese and Sichuanese cultural heritage in the flow of modernization. Concerned with national and regional identities, my work evolves out of observations of the



mundane. The way in which Western perspectives and acts of Modernization have affected, misinterpreted, and changed aspects about the lifestyle of Chinese people since the People's Republic of China (PRC) is ever present. Part of this work also relates to the Chinese diaspora in North America, a group I geographically belong to.

A series of design projects serve as a means to reflect on *locality and place, identity, globalization and modernization*. Through design acts that **preserve, modify, and replace** these concerns, I demonstrate means of using visual communication design to reconsider the fading traditional culture in contemporary China, and reflect on the modernization of China.

## KEYWORDS

Chinese vernacular, Chinese culture, local dialects, modernization, cultural conservation, existing artifacts, Chinese diaspora

二 · CONTENTS

<b>abstract</b>	ii
<b>contents</b>	iii
<b>acknowledgements</b>	iv
<b>glossary</b>	v
<b>list of figures</b>	vi
<b>1     Where I Come From: Prologue</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2     Methodology</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>3     “Symbolical Homeland”: Locations and Identities</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>4     An Imaginary China: Discussing North American Chinatowns</b>	<b>32</b>
4.1    A Tour Guide Manual	36
4.2    Discursive Design	41
<b>5     An Abandoned Language: Revisiting the Lost Written Language of Sichuanese</b>	<b>43</b>
5.1    Seeking Sichuanese Characters	48
<b>6     Nostalgia: China’s Modernization and Its Influence on Design</b>	<b>56</b>

<b>7</b>	<b>Frog in the Well: People’s Perspectives</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>The Mundane: The Shift of “Three Bombs” in Chengdu</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>76</b>
	9.1 An Observation about Categories	77
	9.2 A Note on Languages	81
	9.3 Future Directions	86
<b>10</b>	<b>References</b>	<b>87</b>



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## 四 · GLOSSARY

### [Nostalgia]

By definition, a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations. It sets the tone and serves as the starting point for my Graduate design research. Early on in my research, it refers to the traditional culture and cultural heritage, from old times, of my homeland country China. Later, as the thread of my research develops, it stands for “the past” and past mundane experience as a more general concept, while remaining present and significant in all of my work.

### [Modernization]

A broad concept. According to Armer and Katsillis's definition for modernization, it refers to the process of becoming modern, involving the transformation of a traditional or less economically developed society to a modern, industrialized society (Armer and Katsillis, 2002). Sun and Ryder have furthermore related Modernization to Westernization, noting that the application of this concept was first experienced in the West, and was built on the assumption that a similar trajectory would be followed by other parts of the world as they “developed” (Sun & Ryder, 2016). In this paper, it is also associated with globalization, as Gulmez has pointed out that globalization is the spreading of modernization across different societies (2017).

### [China's Modernization]

According to Rozman in *The Modernization of China*, Modernization started in communist states through a Soviet-style forced industrialization. Later, in China, it was considerably affected by the 1966–1976 Cultural Revolution, which resulted in a divergent course from the term “modernization”, under the influences from China’s revolutionary leader Mao Tse-tung (Mao Zedong, 毛澤東) (Rozman, 1982, p. 2). In this paper, it is associated with unification, in terms of the use of language (the Mandarin) across mainland China.

### [Sichuanese (四川話)]

Regional dialect spoken mainly in Sichuan and Chongqing areas in Southwestern China. “Sichuanese” is not a single form of language, but rather a general designation of numerous variants spoken by Sichuanese people from different regions. In this writing, it refers to the Chengdu dialect, which is the most widely-used branch of Sichuanese, and whose diction is believed to be mutually intelligible across different Sichuanese areas.

### [The Unicode Standard]

The Unicode Standard is the universal character encoding standard used for representation of text for computer processing. The Unicode Standard defines codes for characters used in all the major languages written today.

五 · LIST OF FIGURES

<b>FIG. 01:</b>	A childhood photo of me with my grandparents in Shifang, Sichuan. 1997.	15
<b>FIG. 02:</b>	My <i>Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary</i> . Photograph by my parents in Chengdu. 2020.	16
<b>FIG. 03:</b>	A shot from "Me, on the Way of Finding Myself". 2019.	22–23
<b>FIG. 04:</b>	A shot from "Me, on the Way of Finding Myself". 2019.	26–27
<b>FIG. 05:</b>	A shot from "Me, on the Way of Finding Myself". 2019.	29
<b>FIG. 06:</b>	A shot from "Me, on the Way of Finding Myself". 2019.	29
<b>FIG. 07:</b>	A shot from "Me, on the Way of Finding Myself". 2019.	29
<b>FIG. 08:</b>	"A Tour Guide Manual". 2019.	37
<b>FIG. 09:</b>	The cover and back cover of "A Tour Guide Manual". 2019.	39
<b>FIG. 10:</b>	"A Tour Guide Manual". 2019.	40–41
<b>FIG. 11:</b>	An example showing how a Sichuanese character is built upon Chinese characters. Screenshot from "Sichuanese characters" on the Wikipedia. 2019.	46
<b>FIG. 12:</b>	An example showing how a Sichuanese character can be identified through "right-clicking". Screenshot from "Sichuanese characters" on the Wikipedia. 2019.	49
<b>FIG. 13:</b>	"Seeking Sichuanese Characters". 2019.	51
<b>FIG. 14:</b>	"Seeking Sichuanese Characters". 2019.	53
<b>FIG. 15:</b>	An example page from "Seeking Sichuanese Characters". 2019.	54–55
<b>FIG. 16:</b>	A found photo from the Internet for people riding bicycles in China. Photograph by unknown. 1997.	58



<b>FIG. 17:</b>	The “Forever-C” project by Woolley and Xue. n.d.	59
<b>FIG. 18:</b>	Collaborative collage work by Group 1. 2019.	62
<b>FIG. 19:</b>	Collaborative collage work by Group 2. 2019.	63
<b>FIG. 20:</b>	Collaborative collage work by Group 3. 2019.	63
<b>FIG. 21:</b>	Collaborative collage work by Group 4. 2019.	64
<b>FIG. 22:</b>	Collaborative collage work by Group 5. 2019.	64
<b>FIG. 23:</b>	Collaborative collage work by Group 6. 2019.	65
<b>FIG. 24:</b>	“The Three Bombs” (work in progress). 2020.	74–75
<b>FIG. 25:</b>	Diagram (a) created to reflect on my five major projects. 2020.	78
<b>FIG. 26:</b>	Diagram (b) created to reflect on my five major projects. 2020.	80
<b>FIG. 27:</b>	Diagram (c) created to reflect on my points about the languages involved in my work. 2020.	82

# Where I Come From

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## Prologue

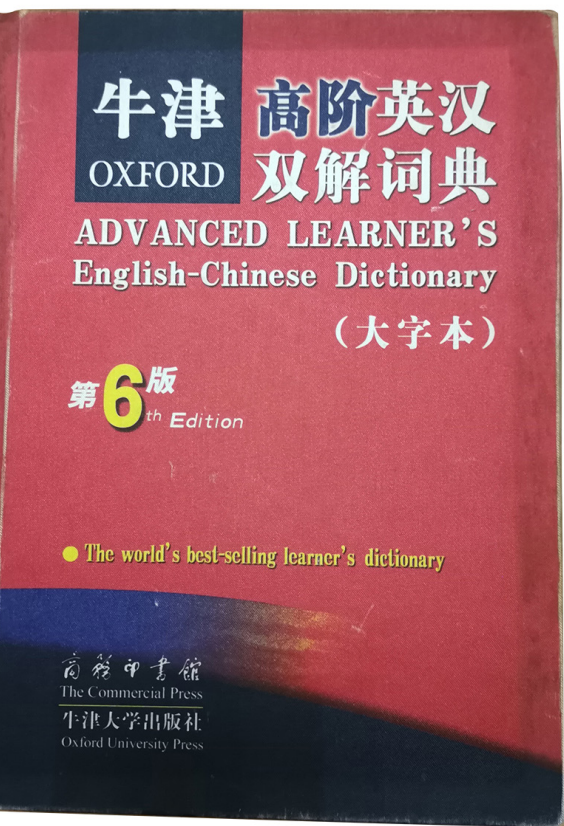
In 1997, at the age of three, I was sent to live with my grandparents in Shifang, a county-level city in Sichuan province, China, about 70 miles from Chengdu, the city I was born in, where I had lived with my parents. My grandparents use to teach History and Chinese Literature at high schools. Living in the small county of Shifang for a year, I was steeped in the traditional lifestyle of my retired grandparents. I realize now that this early time with them has influenced my personal attachment to the traditional culture of China.



**FIG. 01**  
A childhood photo of me with my  
grandparents in Shifang, Sichuan.  
1997.

At the age of four I returned from Shifang to live with my parents in Chengdu. My father immediately started to teach me English. I became aware at that time that this was connected to that my parent’s intent for me to study abroad someday. Looking back, this was not surprising. My father, an electronic engineer who works for the China branch of a Swedish company, spent much time abroad, traveling back and forth between China and Europe while working on cooperative projects.

I have two names. 晰, my Chinese name, means “clarity”. And Ozzie, my English name, which I picked out for myself in my high school English class. I was thirteen years old at the time. The name of the school I was attending was the *Chengdu Foreign Language School*. As the name indicates, this school provides education that (unlike the other high schools in the city) concentrates in foreign languages. In my class, each of the students was required to own an Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary. At the beginning of



**FIG. 02**  
My *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary*. Photograph by my parents in Chengdu. 2020.

our first semester at the school, we were asked to each pick out an English name for ourselves from the “Common First Names” appendix of the dictionary, and submit it to our teacher by the end of that class. From then on, throughout my high school years, I was called Ozzie in all my English classes. I continued using this English name after moving to North America.

In 2013 I left China and became one of the eight hundred twenty thousand international students in America (DeSilver, 2013). For five years I lived in the United States. In the beginning, I was constantly faced with the “culture shock”. Over time I gradually became used to North American life. Some other part of me though, would always reside in the old ways that had been nurtured the stories that my grandparents told me when I was a child, as we sat together watching Chinese Opera on their old TV. Much of my thesis, which explores the nature of contemporary Chinese identity and Chinese diaspora, builds off these two sides of me.

My trajectory, that I describe above, is not insignificant. It has influenced the way I work and the things I seek to address. Themes and visual elements in my work are almost always initiated by personal memories or experiences of life in China. I use these to identify and instigate further work and investigations; over time as I develop any one of my projects my past becomes validated or amended.

After leaving my hometown and moving to North America, I was exposed to a complex multi-cultural environment with the awareness of the dominant “western culture”. This has helped me to observe my homeland China from a distant but relevant position—as a geographical outsider (someone originally from China, living outside of China,) but ideological insider: someone constantly concerned with what happens back in China and someone keeping habits that are—practicing Chinese calligraphy, reading old Chinese poems, and listening to classical Chinese music, and thus, remaining the identity of a Chinese person.

## **Methodology**

During my Masters studies at Emily Carr University, I decided to conduct my research into topics about Chinese traditional culture, China's modernization, and the identities of people like myself. My work is conducted as practice-based research, which is defined as "an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge, partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice" (Candy & Edmonds, 2018), and the foundational approach for my work is research through design. Throughout my Master studies I have taken on a series of making activities as a means to investigation. Reflection of either myself or the people

around me has been generated through the processes and outcomes of my design practice.

Methods that I have adopted during my research include:

**Secondary research:** Readings related to the issues.

This also includes content synthesis, paraphrasing, and interpretation since the topic and reading materials can oftentimes be cross-cultural, for example in different languages.

**Primary research,** as follows:

**Field trips and documentation**—Collecting raw material for making the designed objects.

**Material practice**—Making and thinking through the design of objects/artifacts. My practices, for the most part, include photography, filmmaking, printing on various types of medium, bookmaking and acts of illustration.

**Discursive design and speculative practices**—A key aspect that runs throughout my work is the intent to evoke conversation and discussion through design. I often see this as a dialogue between me and my audience. It also occurs in design interventions amongst a particular group of people: my peers in the design studio. Some of the projects I have taken on adopt a speculative approach that steps away from marketplace and every day reality. All of this work is intentional, it is aimed at seeking ways of changing the reality, it enters the realm of conceptual design—the design of and about ideas of new ways of critiquing current practice, and exploring alternative realities and future



speculations (Dunne & Raby, 2013, p. 3, p. 11, p. 129).

Finally, my work can be understood as a practice made up of a series of actions that deal three key aspects—of what it means to **preserve / modify / replace** culture. By drawing on observations of mundane aspects of everyday life in particular Chinese cultural contexts, I have developed sets of explorations and designed outcomes that aim to contend with what it means to **preserve / modify / replace** culture. In the sections that follow, I will discuss how my projects address these aspects.





**FIG. 03**

A shot from "Me, on the Way of  
Finding Myself". 2019.



## “Symbolical Homeland”

### Locations and Identities

Standing on the boundary between western residence and Chinese identity, I often feel slightly out of place. I am often told that I belong to the Chinese diaspora. But this never seems to quite fit for me, so I question this affirmation. My “group”, the Chinese diaspora, has been discussed by Clifford (2005) and Safran (1991), and summarized by Chiang in her 2010 writing, who notes that diaspora refers to “legal or illegal practices of border crossing... after being dispersed, diasporas (those who have dispersed) remain transitionally

linked with a real or symbolical homeland" (p. 36). Chiang furthermore explains the statement made by Klein (2004), that "instead of grounding one's sense of identity in the dispersal community that exists in the present, travelers on diasporic journeys are settling down elsewhere and creating their sense of identity in a homeland that exists mainly in memory".

Early in my Masters studies I produced a short video titled "Me, on the Way of Finding Myself". This work depicts a subtle narrative that alludes to coping and coming to terms with a dual personality—set in two different cultural contexts and time. Two girls are featured in this short film: one wears modern attire—the type of outfit that would commonly be worn/seen in both contemporary North America and China; the other appears in scenes wearing a "hanfu", the traditional dressing of Han people of China. Throughout the 4:55 minute film these two Chinese characters occupy two sets of scenery—roaming in a modern city scape / wandering in a classical Chinese garden. At the end of the film, they find each other—stand together, back to back, and look out in opposite directions.

This work was shot and edited in Vancouver, Canada—my new "home". My intent was to find a means to represent the contrast between an individual of the modern Chinese diaspora and an "old Chinese soul". I was interested in exploring the qualities of these two separate but linked identities—ones that I consider





myself to simultaneously possess. As a self-reflective piece, this work helped lay the groundwork and initiate the research I would continue to pursue in the subsequent sixteen months of my Master's studies—a body of work where I have sought to demonstrate my personal position (both realistically and ideologically) in regards to the culture trajectories of Chinese people. As a contemporary Chinese individual, the traditional culture of China, including but not limited to customs, music, and languages, has always resonated. I pay



**FIG. 04**

A shot from "Me, on the Way of Finding Myself". 2019.

attention to dates when traditional festivals happen and read online articles about those festivals. I practice Chinese calligraphy as a hobby, and like to listen to classical Chinese music. It is something I feel should be conserved and passed between generations. I am also aware, however, that my stance toward the importance of tradition can be contrasted by my own daily routines—when living in China, I adopted a contemporary lifestyle in order to fit in to the “mainstream” of modern China. This was the choice

of wearing obviously westernized clothing styles, and speaking Mandarin Chinese instead of my regional dialect, Sichuanese.

My work, "Me, on the Way of Finding Myself" is a film that attempts to represent and convey how individuals from China living in the West might deal with assimilating with a contemporary Westernized "mainstream", while also inviting the viewer to consider, the evolution and adaptation of traditional Chinese culture in modern Chinese society.

The audio chosen for this short film ("Me, on the Way of Finding Myself") was pulled from the soundtrack of a 1987 film *The Last Emperor*, a British-Italian biographical film about the life of Puyi, the last emperor of China. This film was written by two non Chinese individuals Mark Peploe and Bernardo Bertolucci. Interestingly, like the non-Chinese producer, director, and screenplay writers, all but one of the eighteen pieces of music in the soundtrack for this film were composed by non-Chinese composers. I intentionally chose the music, titled "Lunch", for my short film, because it was composed by Cong Su, the only Chienese composer from the team of *The Last Emperor*.

I showed this film to my peers in the studio and it had generated thought-provoking responses. To a large degree people's interest was about the places where the film was shot, especially footage that contained





**FIG. 05-07**

Shots from “Me, on the Way of Finding Myself”. 2019.

[\*The full video can be viewed on Vimeo\*](#)

a classical Chinese look. The discussion in the studio class then went on to be about the Chinatown in Vancouver. Somewhere in the mix Garnet Hertz, one of our professors, recommended a 2018 podcast "It's Chinatown" by *99% Invisible*. This podcast became the most important source for a subsequent project I took on, "A Tour Guide Manual". Also, part of the discussion in the studio and of interest to my peers was the "hanfu". Someone noted that the girl in "hanfu" was actually wearing a pair of white sneakers, instead of the appropriate shoes for "hanfu". They were correct, we hadn't been able to find a pair of the "hanfu" shoes for the shot, so had used a substitute. Another person, remarked on a segment of the footage where the character (dressed in "hanfu" and crossing the street in a crowd) was wearing a face mask. I revealed that the reason was not for health. The mask was worn in a district with a high density of Chinese population in Vancouver (where most people speak in Chinese instead of English) to avoid being embarrassed. These points and responses made me realize that the "traditional Chinese attire" in the film (as well as in the real life) was so deliberate. The difficulty to acquire a pair of traditional Chinese type of shoes and the struggle of the actress to wear a "Chinese outfit" in front of a crowd of Chinese people, spoke to the strangeness of traditional Chinese clothing, even to those from its own culture.

All of these conversations were unexpected and inspiring to me. My attention was led to reflect on

aspects of Chinatowns that I had visited in North American cities—these Disney-fied, performed stages of the Eastern culture to Western people. In the next chapter, I will discuss this project about Chinatowns that evolved out of insights that arose in the process and through the responses to my short film.

# **An Imaginary** **非而是似 China**

## **Discussing North American Chinatowns**

[Bonnie Tsui]

All the things he saw in Chinatown, these pagoda roofs, these dragon gates, these flourishes that to us signal China and Chinese-ness, there were things that he actually hadn't seen in back in China for years and years and years, and they were not used in that architectural vernacular back there.

And so he wondered how Chinatown in this really supposedly modern America was... why did it feel older than the oldest parts of Hong Kong where he'd grown up?

[Chelsea Davis]

Because it was designed that way.

In the podcast "It's Chinatown" by *99% Invisible* (2018), the speakers share stories about the history and background of the San Francisco Chinatown, the oldest and largest Chinatown in North America, and the success of tourism and its affect on the planning and building of other Chinatowns is discussed.

In 2013, I started college in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. It was there that I was introduced to new "Chinese" food. I ate: General Tso's chicken, chop suey, and fortune cookies. This food was novel, interesting, but also a bit odd. At the time I joked with other Chinese friends about it, later I let it slide—never thinking very deeply about what we had consumed. I assumed that these new Chinese dishes must have come from other parts in China that I was not familiar with, such as the Guangdong areas in southern China or Hong Kong, where a large portion of early Chinese immigrants to North America was from. The time I arrived in America I visited multiple Chinatown areas in large cities. As someone who is not versed in the profession of architecture, these places, like the food I ate looked

familiar but also slightly odd somehow. At the time I didn't think much about this passing thought.

Listening to the podcast by 99% *Invisible* helped me make a link. I realized that the architecture of Chinatowns in North America has a parallel to General Tso's chicken, chop suey, and fortune cookies. The North American Chinatown buildings which supposedly showcase "traditional Chinese architecture", were in fact designed and built by western architects who had never been to China and whose knowledge of Chinese architecture only came from centuries-old images from around Song dynasty ("It's Chinatown", 2018). The buildings there are in fact architectural misrepresentations of the structure of buildings in China. Likewise, the *Chinese* food I first encountered when I arrived in North America, which did not represent what is actually eaten in China, was also discussed in this podcast. I learned that fortune cookies, which originated in Japan ("It's Chinatown", 2018) and were brought over by Japanese immigrants in the 1920s, were transferred to the Western Chinese cuisine because there was no market/interest in Japanese food. As a consequence, Japanese families ran American Chinese restaurants, with menus that featured modified "Chinese" cuisine such as chop suey alongside dishes such as fortune cookies. I also found out that the dish chop suey was a dish that originated from Chinese labors who first came to North America in the 1850s ("It's Chinatown", 2018) (n.d.). These men

who were mostly bachelors had never cooked meals before leaving China (women were considered the ones responsible for the job). As labors, the men had to cook for themselves. The dish chop suey (“炒雜碎”), which literally means “frying the leftover” was a result of their life circumstances in North America. Interestingly, unlike *Chinese* architecture in North America, the assertion that food such as chop suey is *inauthentic* doesn't actually hold. This as chop suey (“炒雜碎”) was created and made by Chinese people, in this case people of the Chinese diaspora. In the long run, as chop suey (“炒雜碎”) became accessible to other North Americans from elsewhere in the world it also shifted and catered to non Chinese tastes.

The residual of past Chinese (and Japanese) immigrants actions as they made shelter, food and adjusted to a new foreign place—of holding on to or letting go of aspects of the home they left behind—in order to be accepted in their new social/geographical setting is evident throughout North America. Alterations found in the music, food, architecture of the Chinese diaspora demonstrate: attempts of Chinese people to assimilate. Misrepresentations of these, on the part of westerners (musicians, cooks, architects and builders) demonstrates an attempt to capture, and a misguided interest to interact with the eastern world. Moreover, a paper by Santos, Belhassen, and Caton has pointed out the marketability of a neighborhood that is considered as “Other”, such as Chinatown, and work that exoticizes



this neighborhood while simultaneously reconstructing this “Otherness” in a way that appears friendly to tourists (Santos, Belhassen, & Caton, 2008). It is evident that the exoticism of something like Chinatown in North America makes an ideal fuel for tourism and brings up local economies. These findings, led to my designed outcome for this project.

### **3.1 A Tour Guide Manual**

In the middle of all my reading and wandering the streets of local Chinese districts of Vancouver it came to me that maybe I should make a tour guide manual of sorts, as a means to synthesize and further reflect on what I had recently learnt and begun to consider over the previous three weeks. I gathered photos of architecture and food, that I had taken in Vancouver’s Chinatown, along with images found online, and made a *tourist* guide, a booklet for an imaginary Chinatown, a hybrid Disneyfied amalgamation—a discursive design act—responding to the Chinatowns of Chicago, San Francisco, New York, and Vancouver. My Disneyland version of Chinatown was intended as concentrated version of all four Chinatowns that I had been to, and exploration of the political reasons for building and maintaining these sites far away from China. On each page, the booklet features “specialties” of an integrated Chinatown, including North American Chinese food, North American-Chinese hybrid architecture mentioned above, and clothing such as the qipao (cheongsam), which originated from the feminine dresses of the





FIG. 08

“A Tour Guide Manual”. 2019.

Manchu people<sup>1</sup>, but was considered as the iconic clothing for Chinese women by North American acknowledgement.

While this Tour Guide Manual started as an intuitive response to my primary research (observations, and walking in local Chinatowns, reflection of my own experience as a member of the Chinese diaspora) and secondary research into histories of these places, the act of making it moved me beyond taking the stance of documenter to one of commentator. There is an efficiency to irony as a means to get a point across. In the case of my tourist guide, irony seemed a more appropriate means of communicating these cultural inconsistencies of the diaspora rather than the affirmative one I usually associated with communication design. I saw this work not as a means of promotion of a place (for Chinatown), but rather as a way to critique of (what's not "authentic Chinese"): the food, clothes, and architecture. In my trying to sort through these realities, I was aware that languages (different ones spoken and written) play a significant role in how we understand place and culture. I chose to use two languages in my tourist book for my alternate hybrid Chinatown reality. The final page of the booklet says "thank you for visiting". It also includes the statement "感謝惠顧，請下次再來"—the Chinese equivalent—which translates as "thank you for spending money, come back to shop again". The two versions of the statement serving to demonstrate two

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1 The Manchu people are an ethnic minority in China, and the ruling class of China during Qing Dynasty (1636–1912).



FIG. 09

The cover and back cover of "A Tour Guide Manual". 2019





FIG. 10  
 "A Tour Guide Manual". 2019.

different cultural-economic perspectives. An ironic nod that could only be understood by an English-Chinese bilingual person. This play of language foreshadowed work I would take up several months later in "Seeking Sichuanese Characters".



### 3.2 Discursive Design

In their 2019 publication *Discursive design: critical, speculative, and alternative things*, Bruce and Stephanie Tharp analyze discursive design. They affirm the importance of discourse in discursive design, noting that embodied ideas are essential to this sort of design practice. Tharp and Tharp assert that an object is discursive when it can get people talking. “the

prime vehicle for discoursing a discourse” (p. 76). The designer’s role becomes increasingly significant, as the artifacts we design can help produce new discussions. My work, “A Tour Guide Manual” can be seen as an example of *an object that instigate conversation*—the need for “discourse is why it exists” (Tharp & Tharp, 2019, p. 77).

The concept of “A Tour Guide Manual” can also be seen as relating to another aspect of discursive design that is explained in Tharp’s writing. Tharp and Tharp contend that discursive design is about *problem-finding and -framing*. They note that this type of design may never truly address a problem or provide a resolved solution but contributes significantly to everyday life by raising consciousness of an issue. Further they state that this “may be the full extent of its service” (p. 77). My work, which functions in a similar way, seeks to locate the problem (it may not even be a “problem”, but rather, an interesting phenomenon from a sociopolitical aspect and produce conversations. All about exploration and discourse, it is imbued with a deep inquisitive interest (for me, as the designer) to see what designed provocations might open up and lead to.

鄉音已改

# An Abandoned Language

## Revisiting the Lost Written Language of Sichuanese

In April, 2019 I traveled back to my hometown Chengdu, Sichuan.

My trip drew my attention to the regional dialect that we speak in Chengdu. This dialect has changed quietly in the past two decades. It has shifted away from the language that was used when I was a child listening to my elders talking. Our language, Sichuanese, is a branch of dialects used in southwestern China. It

is mostly found in the province of Sichuan and the city of Chongqing. The way it is used by the younger generations such as myself and my contemporaries has shifted and lost some of its original characteristics. The pronunciation we use has changed and in the case of some words, been replaced by Mandarin Chinese language. My language, the language of Chengdu, is not the only one that is under threat of fading away and being forgotten. Languages around the world used by relative “minorities” face the same pressure, for instance, Icelandic. Jon Henley on The Guardian, in a piece that looks at the language struggles for the people of Iceland describes the role of the prevalence of digital products and access to global social media, has on young Icelanders—leading to general tendency amongst them to communicate in English (Henley, 2018). Henley points out the implications of these trends: “they are no longer getting the input they need to build a strong base in the grammar and vocabulary of their native tongue” (2018). Arguably this sort of issue for Iceland’s native language and cultural identity, which is in danger of drowning in an online ocean of English, is similar to my home dialect in Chengdu which struggles relative to the more global use of Mandarin Chinese.

Linguistic assimilation is more threatening and has deeper implications than just the nostalgic feeling for the fading mother tongue of a group of people. As Hale (1992) states “it is part of a much larger process of LOSS OF CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL DIVERSITY in

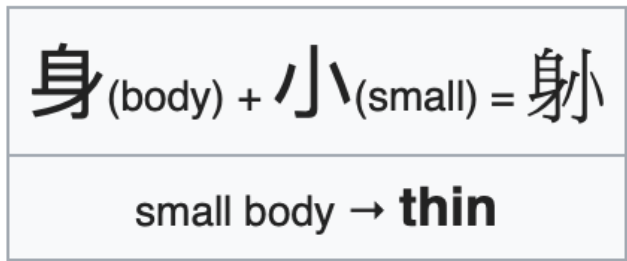


which politically dominant languages and cultures simply overwhelm indigenous local languages and cultures” (p. 1). Pamela Serota Cote, whose doctoral research at the University of San Francisco focused on Breton language and identity, was interviewed by Lane Wallace with *The Atlantic* and discussed language loss:

Because language discloses cultural and historical meaning, the loss of language is a loss of that link to the past. Without a link to the past, people in a culture lose a sense of place, purpose and path; one must know where one came from to know where one is going. The loss of language undermines a people’s sense of identity and belonging, which uproots the entire community in the end. Yes, they may become incorporated into the dominant language and culture that has subsumed them, but they have lost their heritage along the way. (Wallace, 2009)

My own observations along with further secondary research that highlighted common concerns globally about the loss of primarily oral languages that are fading under the influence of more prominent languages of commerce and trade frustrated me both as a person who has first-hand experience with this and as a designer interested in typographic form.

Beyond the oral aspect of my language I was vaguely aware that the disappearance of the text form of Sichuanese was already happening. Mandarin Chinese




**FIG. 11**  
An example showing how a Sichuanese character is built upon Chinese characters. Screenshot from “Sichuanese characters” on the Wikipedia. 2019.

uses hanzi (漢字) characters as the written language. Variants of these hanzi characters—combining components of the characters in ways that don’t exist in Mandarin Chinese—was a common practice and means for the communication of Sichuanese dialect in written practice in the past. Modified hanzi characters were used in pre-Cultural-Revolution books, such as 大波, which was published in 1940. This practice however was “abandoned” as we moved into the digital era. In the contemporary context of today, characters specific to the Sichuanese dialect are still used in the spoken language of Sichuanese, but there is no direct means to locate these words in the written form. Significantly, the text form of these words is not included in the Unicode Standard database, which is the universal character encoding system for the representation and handling of text expressed in most of the world’s writing systems. In other words, the characters of the dialect and language spoken by the people of Chengdu is excluded in the universal database and inaccessible in typing






and publishing. The consequence of this is that when Sichuanese people communicate through digital media and type out this specific language, they often resort to using Mandarin characters whose pronunciation—but not written form—is similar to the Sichuanese character they want to express.

## 4.1 Seeking Sichuanese Characters

How to validate as my Sichuanese dialect? What might be the means that I, as a designer from Chengdu, could help to assure that my language does not disappear under the prominent influence of Mandarin Chinese?

I began to identify disappearing Sichuanese characters, selecting thirty-five of them, which are most commonly used in the oral language of contemporary Sichuanese and typical of my personal experience speaking the language—the Sichuanese dialect, to work with. Among these thirty-five characters found on the Wikipedia page for “Sichuanese characters”, twenty-nine have the Unicode representation that enables them to show up on the webpage. Six of the thirty-five however, did not. Still, interestingly enough, it is possible to access the Sichuanese information on these characters by right-clicking on an *unidentified* character that appears in the form of a question mark within a square (  ). Doing this and following the “Look up” option brings up the corresponding Sichuanese character. In this way, I was able to collect the forms of all thirty-five of the characters, both existing and *missing*. Once I had collected this information I went about building up and creating “new” characters for the existing typing system. I did this by breaking down and manipulating existing Chinese (non Sichuanese) characters.

Having completed my character intervention I went on to

	dia <sup>1</sup>	tia <sup>1</sup>	动	提	～包包
小	ding <sup>1</sup>	tin <sup>1</sup>	形	小小, 小	～小小
凍	dong <sup>1</sup>	tun <sup>1</sup>	名	暴雨	偏～雨
揀	dong <sup>2</sup>	tun <sup>2</sup>	动	诬告, 胡说	上次我媽
	dong <sup>2</sup>	tun <sup>2</sup>	动	把物体伸进水中上下引动	拖把脏了
	dong <sup>3</sup>	tun <sup>3</sup>	助	叠用作形容词后缀, 形容人或动物貌胖厚或干粥状	胖～～,
				拼, 接, 凑在一起。	～龍; ~ 他們兩個
淹			力	一种烹调方法, 在煎熟油锅中先下食材, 再加水和佐料煮熟	～鱼; ~
脰			名	器物底部	碗～～
逕			力	抵偿, 抵消	～棋
			名		～炭: 木

**FIG. 12**  
An example showing how a Sichuanese character can be identified through “right-clicking”. Screenshot from “Sichuanese characters” on the Wikipedia. 2019.

produce two books, and a pile of designed flyers that introduced the thirty-five characters. The publication features each previously missing Sichuanese character in a large format accompanied by its meaning in Mandarin Chinese and English, the pronunciation of the character, and an example sentence in Sichuanese.

Arguably, this project, which sought to revisit the disappearing written language of a regional dialect, was mostly a process of self-study, reflection and learning more than a design work intended to convey an idea to an audience. As such it was a mode of re-**searching**, a space that gave me ideas of how I might be able to address and contribute for others in the future. Ideally, I would like to reinstate the use of these characters. I would like to spread the idea within the corresponding community—to and for the Sichuanese people.

This leads to questions of medium and how to share. My initial intention was to make paperback books to showcase these characters and achieve a sense of ritual—linking them to their origins as long existing characters usually found in a hand-bound book. I was aiming for something that would fit into a museum setting and serve the function of archiving, exhibiting, and educating viewers about the existence of this writing system. I was more interested informing the viewers about the practical applied way to use these characters in the contemporary context. I decided to find a way to show the rebuild of the characters—

dòu 扌	m iě 搥	áng 啍	b ā i 踹	nāng 舂
p ā 𤇀	g ǎ 朐	p á 汜	b ǎ 屮	b ǎ n 趺
c ǎ n 𢱿	c ào 槽	s ǒ ng 掬	g ū 𠂇	ngòu 𢱿
b ē n 拚	b í 漉	c ā 跫	cuān 趲	dàng 𠂇
d ǎ n 𤇀	c ō u 搨	d i ā 𢱿	g ào 𢱿	g ā u 𤇀
guàng 𢱿	guǎi 𢱿	h ā 𢱿	j ū 𢱿	k ā 𢱿
kǎng 康	māng 𢱿	p ē n 𢱿	qiàn 𢱿	z ò u 𢱿

FIG. 13  
"Seeking Sichuanese Characters". 2019.

displaying them together with example sentences of how to use them in the language were emphasized through this work.

How can I restore a system of written language? What does preserve mean to me? Is preserving just documenting? When talking about culture, I don't think that preserving means just documenting. For cultural convention and traditions, the way to preserve them is to make people know them, remember them, and practice them in their life, to carry them down their generations. This way, my potential future direction is to shift from documenting, to be more focused on the spreading of ideas. Considering the fact that I work on issues regarding Chinese culture and Chinese identity as someone of the diaspora, it will be more effective to produce work that can be disseminated through the digital world—social media platforms on the Internet, for example, which would be an ideal way to connect with my intended audience.

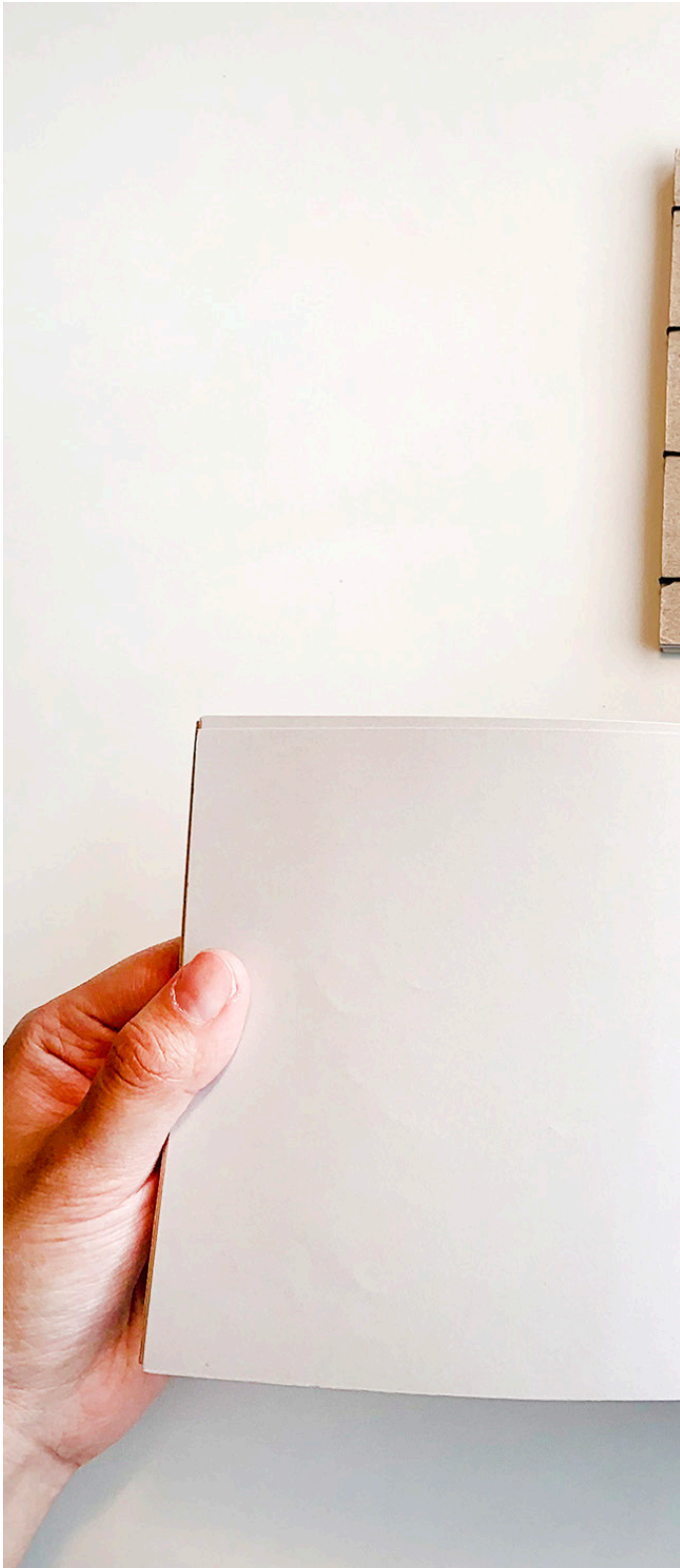
As a young Chinese communication designer, I understand my role and contribution to noticing a problem/topic and revealing to other people, and creating platforms for them to discuss. This contribution is connected to the application of design strategies to disseminate ideas. My Master's thesis is an initial foray into attempting to address a relevantly vulnerable and neglected issue in contemporary China: the loss of local languages and cultural identity, due to the promotion



and spread of Mandarin Chinese, under the influence of China’s unification in languages in this contemporary time.



**FIG. 14**  
"Seeking Sichuanese Characters". 2019.



**FIG. 15**

An example page from "Seeking  
Sichuanese Characters". 2019.





# Nostalgia

斗  
轉  
星  
移

## China's Modernization and Its Influences on Design

Since the establishment of People's Republic of China in 1949, modernization has led the country onto the fast-developing track of globalization, in all aspects from revised economic practices, to casting off old, "unnecessary" traditional heritage and customs. Later, an embracing of Western culture and customs

in everyday life has occurred. Subsequently, some traditional aspects of Chinese culture have begun to disappear. Arguably, modernization in the PRC can be seen as a double-edged sword. While there has been significantly accelerated economic growth and individual property, and an improved quality of life for the majority of the population there has also been a destruction to the nation's tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Branigan, 2009)

China's modernization does not only refer to westernization. It is also linked to a specific series of historical circumstances that have occurred since the founding of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC), for example, the 1966–1976 Cultural Revolution and Chinese Economic Reform and Opening Up Policy started in 1978 (南方大视野杂志, 2013). These events/actions have been key to the formation of contemporary Chinese culture and identity. During the controversial Cultural Revolution of PRC, the “Four Olds” (old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas) were “swept away” and the “Four News” (new customs, new culture, new habits, new ideas) were established. Countless priceless cultural treasures of China, ranging from historical architecture, paintings and calligraphy work, traditional activities and festivals, to artists and scholars, were vandalized and persecuted in the process (Lu, 2004, p. 61–64). More profoundly, this decade-long movement changed the mindset of Chinese people of that generation, putting in place negative beliefs about

“the Four Olds”, and later influencing in subsequent generations, who increasingly embraced the influence of the West (Phillips, 2016).

In light of the complex relation that China has with history I began to wonder about the role of nostalgia as a potential means of negotiating which things need to be carried forward, which can be discarded. In their article published in the online journal *Design Strategies*, Woolley and Xue assert that “sociologists recognize nostalgia as a mechanism that helps people maintain their identities and cope with discontinuities caused by unconstrained globalization, transnational migration, and disruptive technological developments.” They have furthermore discussed nostalgia and design in contemporary China. Linking back to the previous assertion, they conduct a case study on “Forever-C”, a

**FIG. 16**

A found photo from the Internet of people riding bicycles in China. Photograph by unknown. 1997.







**FIG. 17**

The "Forever-C" project by Woolley and Xue. n.d.

product series created to revitalize the "Forever" bicycle, a once-legendary Chinese bicycle brand that used to be one of the four "dream products" of urban Chinese families in the late 1980s. Woolley and Xue point out that the success of "Forever-C" make people recall the "cycling culture", when bicycle was the most affordable and main transportation method used by people, and thus, generates an "idealized collective memory" that elicits an emotional bonding among the audience, to

arouse communication. The work I describe in Section 6. "Frog in the Well" below was partially informed by this case study and intended as a means to explore the role and potential of nostalgia further.





## Frog in the Well

### People’s Perspectives

“井底之蛙” is a Chinese four-character idiom that translates as “a frog sitting at the bottom of a well”, which focuses on the subject—the frog. Another related idiom “坐井觀天”, focuses on the activity itself and translates into “(someone) sitting at the bottom of a

well and watching the sky from it". Equally, both of these are a metaphor for someone with a narrow vision and—further—narrow mind.

In Fall 2019, as a means to delve into the complex factors in China's modernization, and more importantly, to avoid becoming a "frog in the well", and help understand how people from other cultures perceive China's traditional culture as well as its moves to modernize and engage globally, I conducted a collaborative work with my peers (my colleagues in the MDes program) in the studio. I invited them to collage with me. A group of fifteen of us worked collaboratively mashing together images that represented "traditional" and "modern" China. The Outcome of this first part of collaborative making were six collages, each on an eight by eight inches piece of cardboard. Reflecting on this work later, I categorized each of our collaborative collages using a set of three keywords:

#1: Economy, Western influence, Gazes



**FIG. 18**  
Collaborative collage  
work by Group 1. 2019.

#2: Merit, Root, Contrast



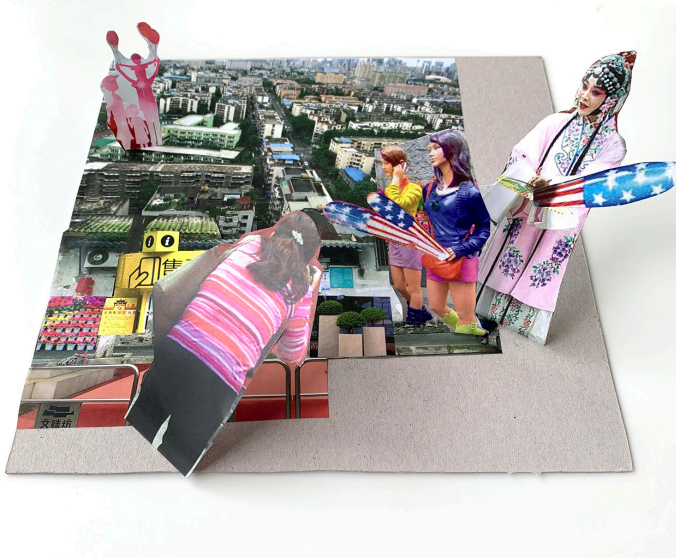
**FIG. 19**  
Collaborative collage  
work by Group 2, 2019.

#3: People, Lifestyle, Commonplace



**FIG. 20**  
Collaborative collage  
work by Group 3, 2019.

#### #4: Irony, Western influence, Tour



**FIG. 21**

Collaborative collage  
work by Group 4. 2019.

## #5: Disconnected Modernization Adrift



**FIG. 22**

Collaborative collage  
work by Group 5. 2019.



#6: Intertwine, Bodies, Ownership



**FIG. 23**  
Collaborative  
collage work by  
Group 6. 2019.

Following our collage building, each individual who worked with me to build these collaborative images in the studio was given a piece of paper with three questions:

- 1) "Name 3 *things* from your past, with time (the year, approximate or accurate) and location. What impressions did they leave to you? Give each of them a few keywords to describe."
- 2) "If you could keep *something* from the past, either for the sake of yourself, or for a group of people (your family/community, the country, the planet, etc.), what would it be?"

3) What part of your own culture is something that you wish to always keep? What part, on the other hand, is something you wish to abandon?

The responses surprised me and indicated something unexpected. My intent was to find out about my design peers' opinions and approaches toward nostalgia. Rather than a unified clear response, I found out that "being nostalgic or not", was interpreted differently. There were a range of perspectives! Three people (there were fourteen in total) explicitly wrote down that they are "not a nostalgic person", or "not sure I can think of anything", or noted that rather than looking back into their past, they would rather think about possibilities in the future. In terms of the approaches to nostalgia, while some people wished they could keep physical objects/people, others cherished the intangible memories/experiences that were in their minds. One of my peers wrote, "Although I miss things and/or people in my life, I try to focus on what memories were made while they were in my life rather than focusing on the fact that they're gone" (2019). This had made me reconsider the role of memories and think about the importance of them if and when objects and people who are cherished eventually perish.

While nostalgia remains an important thread that exists throughout my work, my realization, through this project, that not all people share nostalgic feelings toward their past and personal experience

was significant. It shifted my focus, I began to realize that the preservation of historic heritages, and ways of life connected to specific locations and means of socialization are connected to much more complex situations that involve—**the humanistic needs to preserve them, the commercial needs to modify them, and the political needs to replace them.** In other words, different mindsets of people speak to the complicated situations for cultural conservation in the society.

As discussed in my section on Methodology this realization is one that I have been subsequently linking to my own practice sorting things out. In the section below I will discuss my most recent work in progress.

## The Mundane



### The Shift of “Three Bombs” in Chengdu

My Summer 2019 trip back to the city of Chengdu led me to experience the loss of something else, in addition to the fading of our local dialect in my daily life. Pretending to be a traveler/ tourist, I went to the most popular tourist areas in the city of Chengdu. Among the places I visited were Jin Li (锦里) and Kuan Zhai Xiang Zi (宽窄巷子).



宽窄巷子). These two city blocks that are located close to each other, used to be the center of a busy commercial district—Kuan Zhai Xiang Zi was first built in 1718 during the Qing Dynasty, preceded by Jin Li, which dates back to the distant Three-Kingdoms period, over 1800 years ago (n.d.). Although the buildings and pavements of both city blocks appear to be in the classical Chinese style, they have been modified and renovated in recent times to serve as “tourist areas” (Peng, 2015, p. 30). They are, in effect, “Chinatowns” **within** China.

It was in these touristy places that I encountered little “food trucks”—street food vendors in Chengdu have long used these handcarts that are flexible and easy to move around. In Jin Li and Kuan Zhai Xiang Zi, I met the “three bombs” (三大炮), “candy drawings” (黄糖画), and “egg pancakes” (蛋烘糕)... again, and my feelings at that moment were almost akin to reuniting with long-lost childhood friends. All of these types of street food are ones that are hardly seen any more in present day of Chengdu. They disappeared within a decade of my childhood. In Shifang, the county near Chengdu that I lived in before 2000, my grandfather used to buy a “candy drawing” for me every time we met a maker in the street; there were “three bombs” and “egg pancakes” vendors outside of my elementary school in Chengdu during the years around 2007. Later, around 2010, there was only one “egg pancakes” handcart at the gate of my high school. During my stay in Chengdu in 2019, I rarely saw those familiar handcarts in my

childhood. The exception to this was in government-planned tourist areas. While food trucks were in the tourist areas, these ones felt "gift-wrapped"—compared with the ones of my childhood in Chengdu, the contemporary tourist vendors have much nicer handcarts (in wood, and in seemingly classical Chinese style). Some of the makers are dressed up in traditional Chinese clothing, and there are nearly always signs next to the carts introducing the food. Needless to say, the prices for the food served by these vendors are much higher than those of my childhood. When food truck vendors were commonplace the street snacks people bought after school or work cost much less. In 2010 I would get the "three bombs" at 1.5–3.5 yuan per serving outside of my school, but this time, in 2019 (less than a decade later) I bought a "three bombs" in Kuan Zhai Xiang Zi for 15 yuan.

Another aspect connected to this shift that I noticed during my 2019 visit was related to gesture. Take the "three bombs" for example. In my past, this casual street snack, was made quickly so the next customer could be served. The gesture to make them was simple, and significantly different to what I observed during my 2019 trip in the touristy areas of Chengdu. At the "three bombs" handcart in Kuan Zhai Xiang Zi, I watched the vendor throw one of the three sticky rice balls with a great force up into the air, catch it when they fell down, and then throw three of them, one by one, onto the flat surface mounted on his handcart, where twelve

small copper disks were placed. When the rice balls hit the surface, the disks clanged together and created three huge noises before the rice balls bounced into a bamboo basket full of bean flour—hence this snack is named the “three bombs”. It was a fascinating making process to watch—a performance! This theatrical aspect of the incredible, almost Kung fu-like throwing-up part was a considerably “enhanced” form compared with the one that was part of my experience purchasing “three bombs” as an after-school snack when I was a child. My past everyday experience of purchasing the street food “three bombs” was not dramatic—it was not a *souvenir* for tourists and there was no show in the gesture.

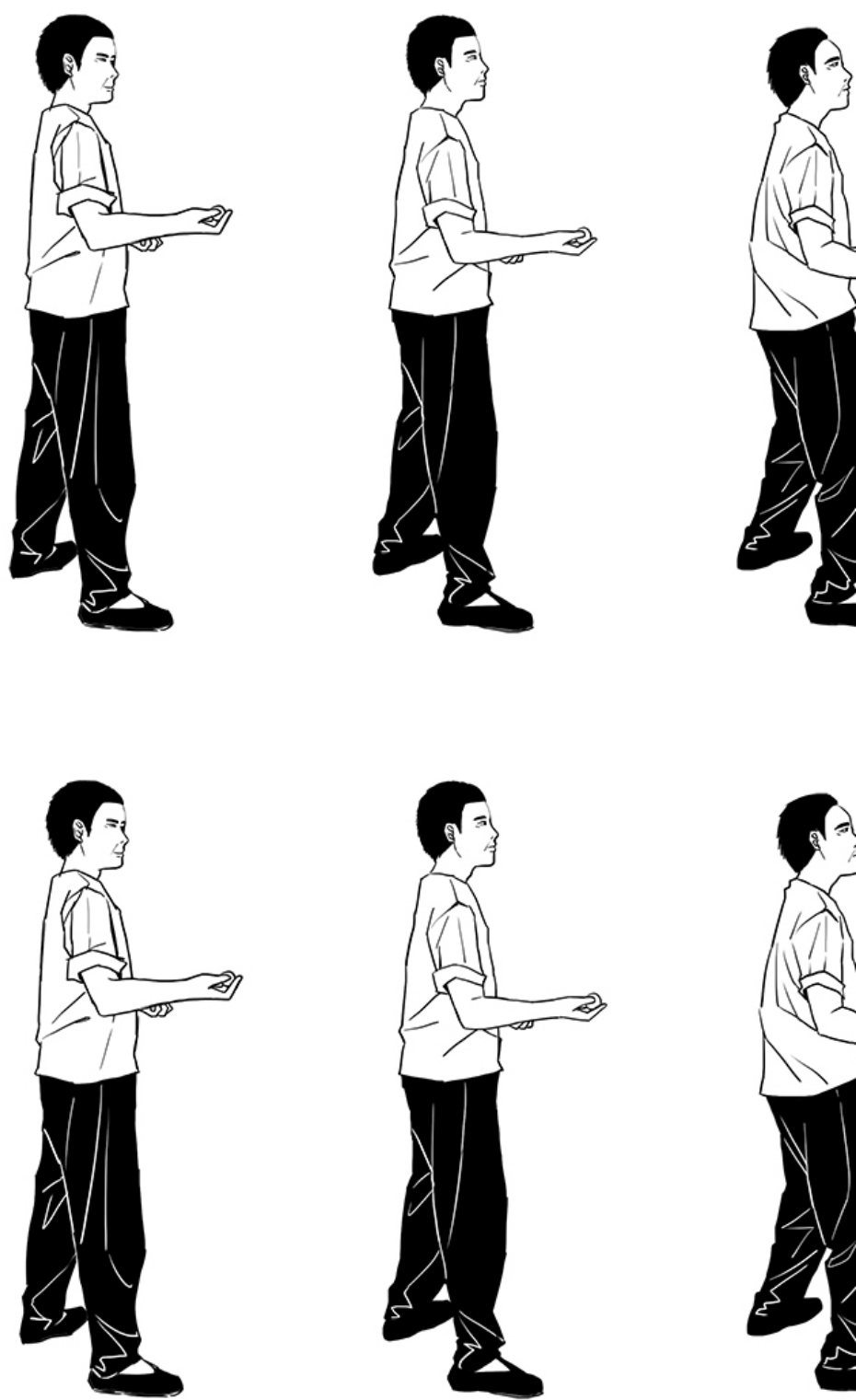
My work, “The Three Bombs” is a response to these observations. The work is made up of a series of illustrated and animated responses to my observations and ruminations about everyday culture (in Chengdu) that is sometimes lost and always in flux. I have sought to depict and enhance the gesture and movement of making “three bombs”. My memorization of the renewed cultural act of tossing one rice ball straight up, then catching it and finishing with throwing the three rice balls toward the front—“old” gestures that were completely new to me seeded the work.

As a probe into gestures “The Three Bombs” has made me realize the significance embedded in movements that people make and are accustomed to making, in everyday routines—that are profoundly connected

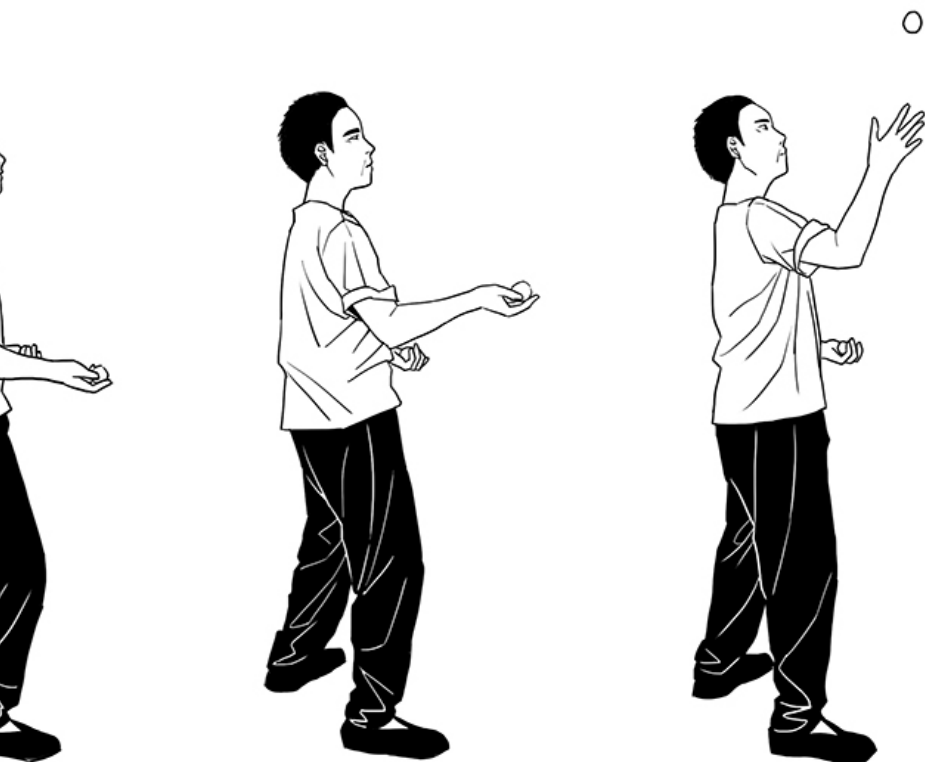
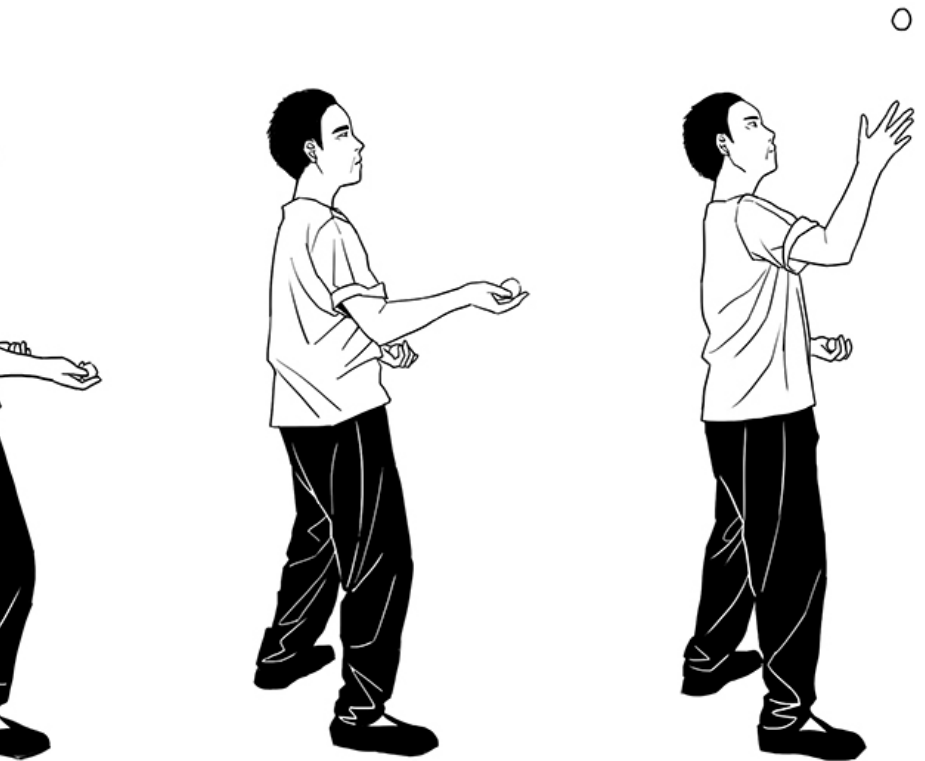
to the culture they belong to. Beyond the everyday mundane activities there are other practices where "gesture" plays a significant role, for example, the practice of *calligraphy*. In my spare time—as a hobby—I practice Chinese calligraphy. When it comes to digitizing and documenting this aspect of my life and sharing it on social platforms, I prefer to record short videos focusing on the writing process (over the end result). I am very conscious that seeing the gestures of creating calligraphy resonates with people—it seems to create a strong link for them to this making. I am not the only one who does this. On Instagram, a prevalently used social platform, there are many other calligraphy artists who also share the process of creating their writing

With this in mind, I decided to create an animated visual that shows no context but only the person making the gesture. I attempted to force the viewers to only pay attention to the modified gesture by intentionally excluding the surroundings. Currently, I am working on thirty images each depicting a segment of the "three bombs"-making gesture. My intent is to produce this as a looping animation, so the whole process of the gesture can be observed multiple times. I am also interested in the breakdown of the gesture. Seeking a way for the thirty still images to be displayed individually—to reveal the details moment by moment, gesture by gesture my plan is to create a physical installation of the animation, deconstructing movements of the motion—the gesture. The thirty

images that make up the animation are to be printed out on a transparent medium, either on transparency film or as large-scale vinyl cuts that can be adhered onto clear acrylic boards and then hung in a space so that a viewer can walk around and see through them. I see this as a way to explore the gesture further, both in terms of visuals and physical interactions with designed artifacts in an exhibition space. Beyond the digital animation, my intent with this future work is to invite people to see “motion” in a novel way. By “slicing” the movement, and lining the slices up my hope is that it will enable viewers to catch a glimpse of an almost lost tradition from different angles and in different ways—seeing them through, as a whole, or seeing each of them individually. For myself, as a designer/maker/researcher, this work will provide an opportunity to explore the potential in exhibiting a designed object, both as a communicative medium and also as a further tool for insight.



**FIG. 24**  
"The Three Bombs" (work in progress).  
2020.





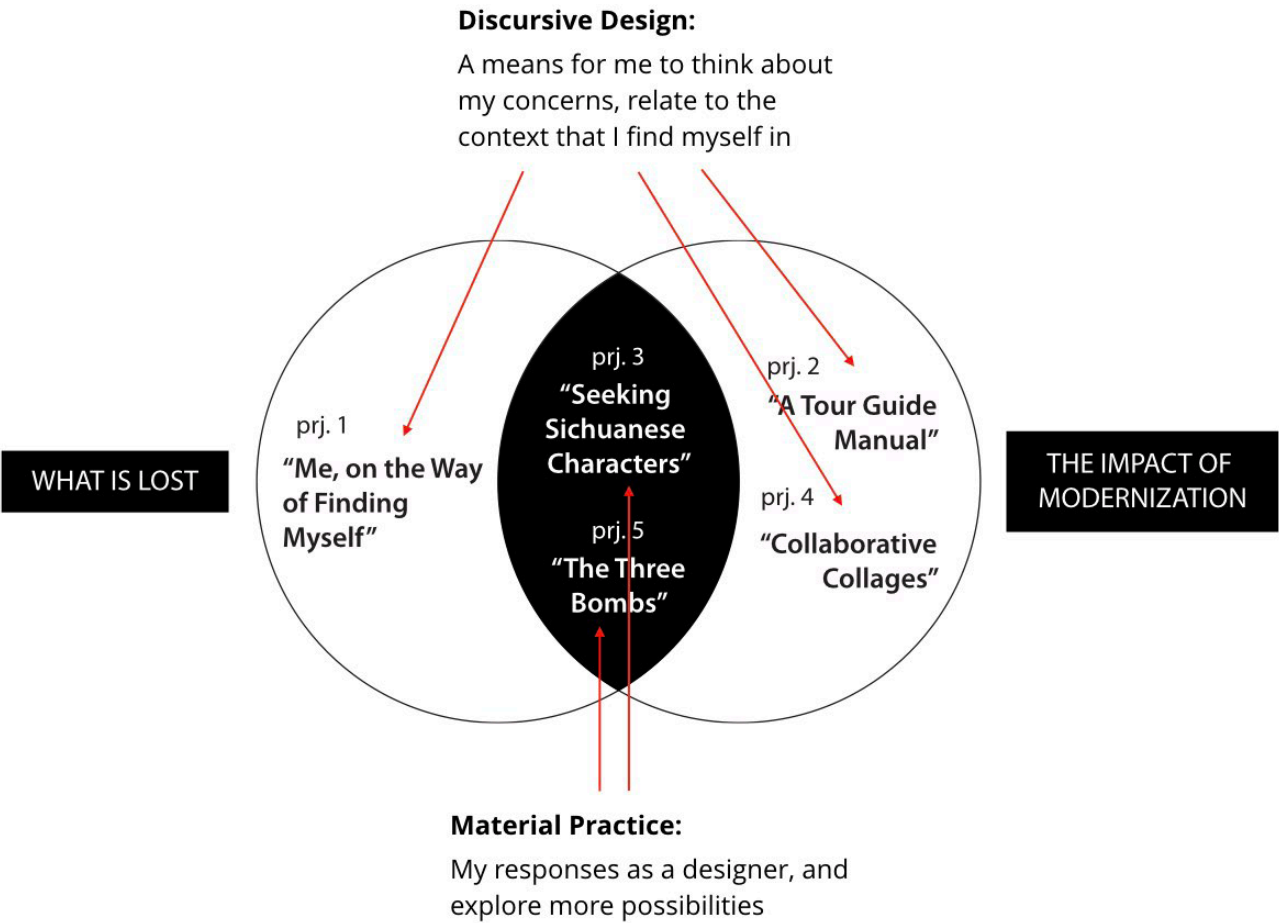
## Conclusions

Early on in my Masters studies I began looking at the traditional culture of China and cultural heritage in daily life. I was drawn into researching this by considering and responding to three aspects connected to culture: **the humanistic needs to preserve it, the commercial needs to modify it, and the political needs to replace it.** Pursuing this path, my work has enabled me to explore and consider the complicated situations that influence and effect matters of cultural preservation. My Thesis work has attempted to break down the complexity of our relation to culture and discussed it from different angles through five major projects.

## 8.1 An Observation about Categories

Over the course of the work I have done for my Graduate studies, I have begun to realize that I consistently followed the two threads of thought and inquiry in relation to China and Chinese culture: *“what is lost”* and *“the impact of modernization”*. This work uses discursive design and material practice tactics (see fig. 25) as a way of sorting things out. I have come to realize that I apply **discursive design**, as a means for me to think about my concerns, relate to the context that I find myself in. While, my more open-ended **material practice**, serves as means for me to project my responses as a designer, and explore more possibilities.

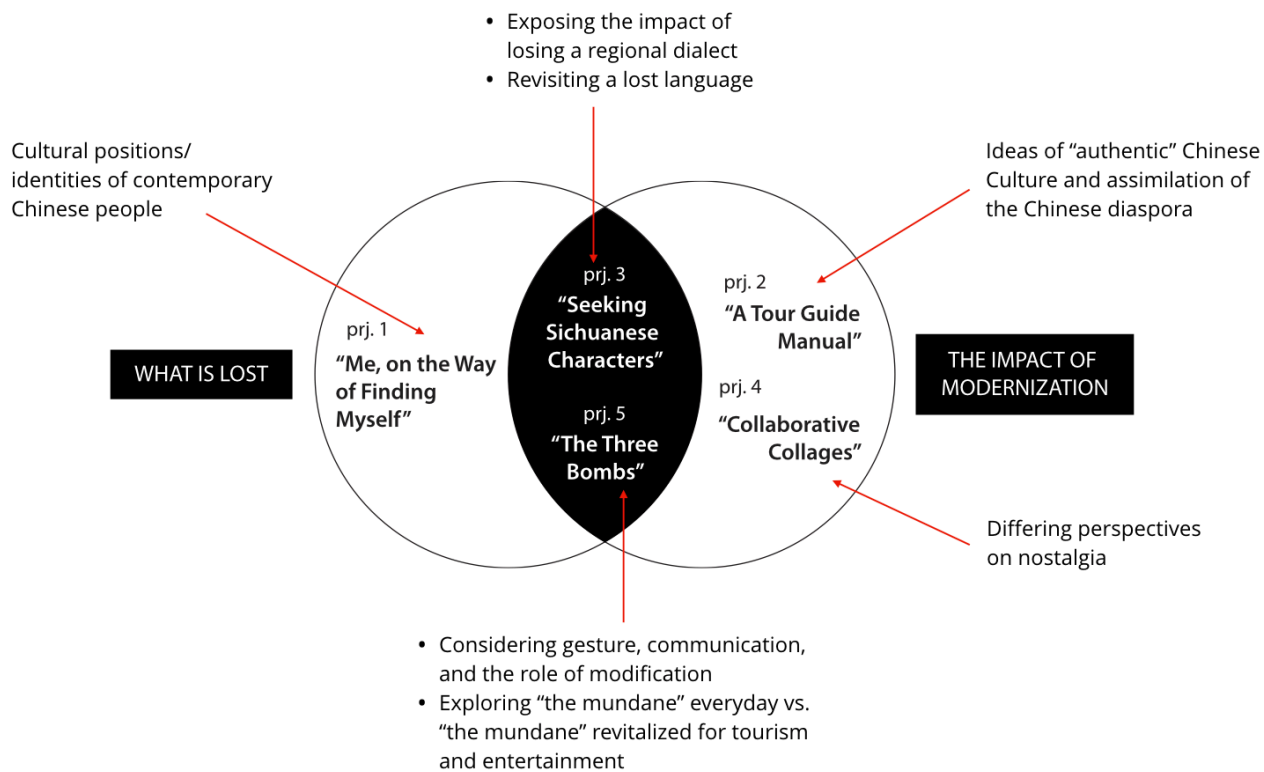
To summarize and categorize the five major projects that I have conducted throughout this research, the short film “Me, on the Way of Finding Myself” depicts the conflict and parallel between the identities of a certain culture and in the meantime as part of a diaspora, through clothing. I see this work as being categorized as dealing with ***What is lost***. In contrast, “A Tour Guide Manual” deals with cultural fusion and alteration, and “Collaborative Collages” aims at opening up conversations about modernization for a country (China) and the role of nostalgia for individuals within the designers’ community. The work “A Tour Guide Manual” and “Collaborative Collages” can be categorized as ***The impact of modernization***. Caught in between



**FIG. 25** | Diagram (a) created to reflect on my five major projects. 2020.

and fitting into both my investigation into ***What is lost*** and seeking means for ***The impact of modernization***, is my most recent work “Seeking Sichuanese Characters” and “The Three Bombs”. Both of these design responses seek to address lost “features” of my hometown Sichuan—where the Sichuanese dialect and an iconic street snacks of the region have been designed in a way to raise people’s awareness about the loss in progress, and further as a way to evoke discussion and initiative amongst “insiders”—in this case, the Sichuanese people.

In my work, projects that consider ***What is lost*** all address cultural positions and identities of contemporary Chinese people while those that reflect on ***The impact of modernization*** address ideas of the “authentic” Chinese culture and assimilation of the Chinese diaspora (project 1) and ways of revealing different perspectives on nostalgia (project 4). Work that is relevant to both of these threads of thought and inquiry (***What is lost, The impact of modernization***) expose the impact of losing a regional dialect through a desginerly act of revisiting a lost language and explore modification of “the mundane” everyday revitalized for tourism and entertainment purposes through the use of illustration and gesture.



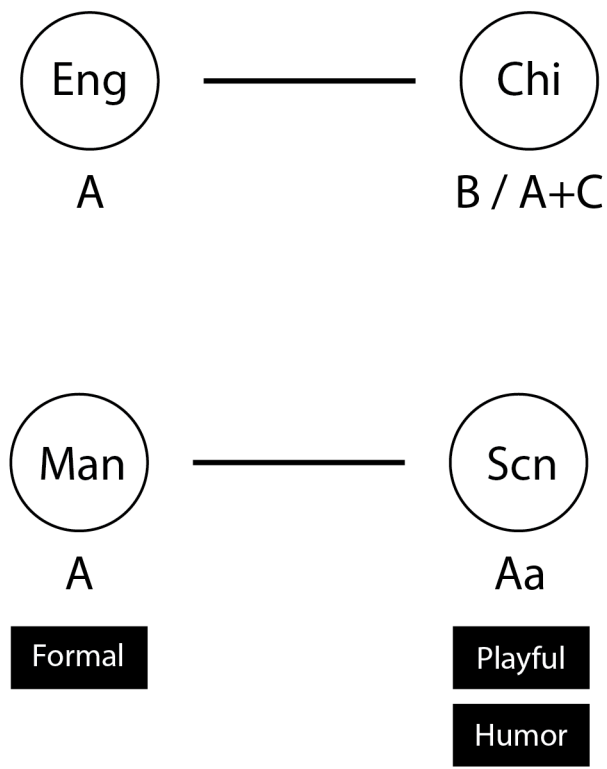
**FIG. 26** | Diagram (b) created to reflect on my  
five major projects. 2020.

## 8.2 A Note on Language, Graphic Symbols and Humor

My work has consistently sought to contend with the role of language for individuals in China and the Chinese diaspora.

A significant parallel can be found in the work I conducted on “A Tour Guide Manual” and “Seeking Sichuanese Characters” projects described in chapters “An Imaginary China” and “An Abandoned Language”. Both projects have been focusing on the contrasts between two different language systems, and seek to represent the nuance that can be subtle but important, and that would only be comprehended by a bilingual person who understands both languages. By doing so, in the two projects I aimed to communicate with an English-Chinese speaking audience in North America, and a Mandarin-Sichuanese speaking audience in China.

In the English-Chinese case, the two seemingly equivalent phrases are placed together as if they are the translation of each other in the corresponding language. To some extent, they are equivalent, as they have both expressed gratitude. Nonetheless, the English greeting would never mention money, trade and commerce, but just the act of “visiting” the place, whereas the Chinese one would explicitly express gratitude toward acts of shopping at the place and anticipation of returned customers. Incorporating this



**FIG. 27**  
Diagram (c) created to reflect on my points about the languages involved in my work. 2020.

pair of phrases is a means to reflect the commercial role of Chinatowns in North America. The contrast between Mandarin Chinese and Sichuanese, however, is even more subtle. While Sichuanese, as a regional dialect, has a unique tone and accent in its spoken language, the written languages of both are all based upon Chinese characters. Nuances between the two languages lie in different terms for nouns, different words for verbs, and a strong sense of playfulness and humor found in the dialect that only speakers of the language can perceive. In this way my work on the booklet “A Tour Guide



Manual” and the book “The Sichuanese Characters” shares a similarity: the subtleties between the two groups of languages addressed in each project can only be distinguished by speakers of both languages. As such, the projects open up a particular window for communication and conversation among certain groups of people (who know both languages and who use both modes of expression). In this way Tharp and Tharp’s observation that (discursive design) “is most often seen in exhibition, print, film, and in the research process...” and “understood as design—objects of utility, yet ones designed to carry ideas” (Tharp, 2013, p. 407) is explored and validated.

Graphic forms and language used in designed outcomes can be poignant means of indirectly communicating to and with others. The graphic language I use in my work often serves a similar function to the one described above. For example, the “chili pepper”, a graphic element that appears in my project “Seeking Sichuanese Characters” plays a significant role in the visual design of the book. My application of the chili pepper graphic is an invite to insiders—people in the know. For Sichuanese people or people who know Sichuan well it is a symbol that instantly refers and alludes to the everyday life of this region of China. The chili pepper is used as an essential ingredient in Sichuanese cuisine, which is known for its spiciness. In my project, graphics of the chili pepper are used to further build a connection to the region. It also quietly nods to a

potentially “hot” topic—the erasure of local character and meaningful elements. The chili pepper allows this designed outcome (the book) to communicate meanings on different levels, for myself as the designer of Sichuanese heritage, and also for viewers who might be Sichuanese, or know the Sichuan region, or have just heard of Sichuan. My use of codified graphic element, such as the chili pepper, functions in a similar way to the use of multi languages in my work. By including these elements I am able to evoke a resonance and awareness of important/needed conversations among members of my audience who are the “insiders” of the topic.

Designers, Yi, Nguyen, and Zeng note that creative design can be enhanced by the use of humor, because the humor comprehension process can intrigue the reader/viewer and shift the design’s capacity to create a positive sense of engagement (Yi, Nguyen, & Zeng, 2013). This perspective resonates with me. At times, my work, such as “A Tour Guide Manual”, tries to engage and entice others by including a sense of humor in it. Through the use of ironic, humorous tones applied to my work I am able to both reflect on the misinterpretation and misunderstandings. In the case of “A Tour Guide Manual”, it enabled me to actively convey the critique of taking advantage of “Chinese culture” in western Chinatowns. Humor also crops up in the work I have done with others. It can be found in the outcomes of the collaborative collaging that I undertook in Fall 2019 as I tried to address and understand different

perspectives on nostalgia. A strong sense of playfulness and humor is embodied in some of the collages that were produced, for example: a tiny little figure sticking out from the window of a building that is only discovered by the observer if they look carefully and closely, or a composite image of a Chinese Opera singer (dressed in a classical Chinese Opera costume) who is holding a balloon coated in the colors of the stars and stripes... In the case of this collage making, the humor and sarcasm achieved by this kind of visual contrast help express the makers' reflections on different issues regarding China's modernization. These humorous collage tactics are effective means that enable a piece of work to signal tension while also remaining vague in terms of visual expression, which function as a safety mechanism when it comes to work/commentary that might be political in nature.

This section has discussed language, graphic forms and humor. These designerly tactics are not insignificant. They help me and others (my viewers) navigate our way into and through topics that while just part of the mundane everyday are also—arguably—political too.

### 8.3 Future Directions

Observations of fading Chinese culture, questions about how to best share and keep aspects of traditional heritage have emerged through my research and design practice. I acknowledge that currently, my work is not yet capable of **solving** all the problems I have encountered and uncovered. As a designer I still have many more questions and propositions to make and work through. I see these as having the potential to further indicate and uncover issues connected to culture. Whether this future work becomes a means to critique current practices, attempt to address—solve issues or raise people’s consciousness by communicating and spreading information, will be highly dependent on the sites, people I encounter.

In the short term, I plan to carry on refining my work “Three Bombs”, to finish the animation and the physical installation for an Emily Carr University 2020 Graduate Show. In the long term, I would like to expand on my current research, and further explore and revisit aspects of lost/altered traditional Chinese culture, specifically in the regional culture in Sichuan. Drawn to language, I am particularly committed to continuing design work with an emphasis on written and gestural modes of communication. I believe that there is much more to be discussed and advocated for. In the future I would like to find means to discuss and contribute to revitalizing lost regional dialects in China through systems of education and local public transportation.

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