The State of The Migrant

Reframing the experience of migrant through fictional storytelling

Sixin Zeng
May 2022

Abstract

This thesis is going to take my migrant experience in Shenzhen as a starting point, and explore how to reframe my experience of being a migrant by fictional storytelling. As a migrant living in Shenzhen before I was born, the address of where I lived never changed. However, where I have lived for 25 years, it did not help me to recognise myself that I am from Shenzhen. With this question in mind, I started my research topic. I analyzed how Chinese economic reform turned Shenzhen into a successful model of a Special economic zone. When migrants are attracted by the potential future and opportunities in Shenzhen, how they contributed themselves to construct the city, and how the development of urbanization discarded them in the end. The unsettled living conditions migrants experienced in the city, therefore, a sense of estrangement occured.

However, living a life as a migrant makes me forget to pay attention to my feelings, and being passive to share. In exploring ways to engage with my story to communicate with others, I started from making video recordings to write a fictional story. Writing fictional story helps me to tell my real life by covering up with fiction which makes me feel safe and comfortable to share. Through the fictional story I wrote, *The State of The Migrant* reflects how I feel as a migrant and how is the experience like. In the end, I brought the story back to Shenzhen and translated the story into a short film there.

Acknowledgement

This project could not have been possible without the help of so many lovely people. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for listening to my struggle and spending your time to think along with me 💚.

💚 Xiaojun Liu, Xinqiao Huang, Chengyi Shen, Aiwen Yin, Barbara Neves Alves, Juli Laczko, Matteo Pirolo and George GT 💚

Definition

A migrant is a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border temporarily or a state before permanently staying, and for a variety of reasons. Different from immigrants who are or intend to be settled in their new country[1].

        Says from the World Migration Report 2020[2] that there is no universally agreed definition of migration and migrant, however, several definitions are widely accepted and have been developed in different settings.

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

1   Anderson, B. & Blinder, S. "Who Counts as a Migrant? Definitions and their Consequences" Migration Observatory briefing, COMPAS, University of Oxford, July 2019. 2
2   United Nations, & Nations, U. (2019). World Migration Report 2020. International Organization for Migration. 20

Being a migrant before being born

I became a migrant not by my own choice but from the moment I was born, as my family left their hometown and moved to Shenzhen in search of a better life. This way, I became an internal domestic migrant in Shenzhen. However, moving to a new city does not mean you are a part of the new city immediately and "officially"[3] foregoing your past by leave everything from your previous life behind. There are different kinds of documents showing where you are originally from, and you are not yet a resident in a new city but a particle of the floating population[4] within the city.

I was born in 1995 when the One-Child policy was strictly enforced. My parents lived in a city called Zhanjiang before they moved to Shenzhen. My father worked as a civil servant for a State Owned Enterprise (SOE) for many years.

Fig 1 - My father with his colleague

These agencies are always the first places to rigidly follow the latest government policies. My mom was hiding from the police until she could no longer hide her pregnant belly anymore. If the police would have found out my mom was carrying a second child, either she would be forced to undergo an abortion or my family would have to pay an expensive fine that they could not afford. So when my mother was carrying me for 8 months, my father had to quit his job and my family moved to Shenzhen. They packed the bare necessities, and escaped on a night bus. I became an internal migrant before I was born.

Shenzhen - A migrant city

Why did we move to Shenzhen, and not any other city After the Proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China decided to revolute the economic structure from planned

3   In here, I emphasize the migrant status by using the word "officially", because migrants are part of the floating population which is not considered as part of the official census count of the city.
4   Wu, X., & Treiman, D. J. (2004). The household registration system and social stratification in China: 1955-1996. Demography, 41(2), 363-384.

economy to market economy which is not following the typical economic structure of socialist countries[5]. The launch of the Special economic zone (SEZ) is one of the approaches to boost the economy. It was Deng Xiaoping's mission to create Shenzhen as the first SEZs in 1980. This led to a massive influx of domestic and foregien investment into Shenzhen[6], spurring an incubator for many companies to be created. A huge amount of companies began to grow from scratch. This change brought job vacancies in the city, creating a huge impact on human migration between cities[7]. My family is one of the millions that migrated to Shenzhen because we were looking for a city with endless opportunities where newcomers can contribute.

Fig 2 - Deng Xiaoping on the billboard in Shenzhen. n.d.. Photograph. http://www.cnsunlight.net/html/news/201801/7747.html

Fig 3 - Billboard slogan: You Are A Shenzhener Once You Come Here. n.d.. Photograph. www.fund-global.com

A place across the river from Hong Kong, one of the three global financial centers, Shenzhen became the experimental enclave after the economic reform[8]. It has incentives to attract businesses and allow them to strive here, some being tax breaks and cheap labor. The whole city is built with the force of migrant workers[9]. I witnessed and experienced the developing process of Shenzhen for 25 years. I witnessed a new residence being built upon an open field only in a few months. I witnessed a new road being paved within a month. I witnessed an urban village being demolished completely for a new shopping mall location in half a year. The secret base created by my friends and I was an integral part of my childhood, where we would have fun and and accepted for

5   Naughton, B. (1995). Growing Out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform, 1978-1993 pp. 3-5. Cambridge University Press.
6   Crane, G. T. (1990). The Political Economy of China's Economic Zones (Studies on Contemporary China). Routledge.
7   Naughton, B. Growing Out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform, 5
8   Easterling, K. (2016). Extrastatecraft. Adfo Books.
9   Liang, Z. (1999). Foreign investment, economic growth, and temporary migration: The case of Shenzhen special economic zone, China. Development and Society, 28(1), 117-127.

Fig 4 - Futian district in Shenzhen in 1994, 2008 and 2018s. n.d.. Photograph. http://www.xhby.net/tuiji-an/201908/t20190820·6305302.shtml

who we were. This was destroyed when a new residence was built. Gentrification of urban villages became the new norm. There were loud noises when I walked to school every morning because workers were paving a new road.when I was on the bus to the city center when I saw a new shopping mall was completed in a location that used to be an urban village. All changes are huge, rapid, real, and surreal. Sometimes, as a child, I would ask myself whether I was growing faster than Shenzhen, or if Shenzhen was growing faster than me.

Migrants in Shenzhen

The system which differentiates migrants from permanent residents within Shenzhen is called the household registration system (Hukou). A household registration record officially identifies a person as a permanent resident of an area and includes identifying information, coordinately, the hukou booklet (household register) issued per family. This usually includes the births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and moves of all family members. There are inequalities between migrants and local people because of this system[10]. Housing, health care and education are the main aspects showing the unfair situation towards migrants. I received my Shenzhen urban hukou when I was 12 years old which was the exact age for me to start the first year in a public

10   A Call for Reform of China's Household Registration System. (2010). Population and Development Review, 36(2), 405-407.

middle school (Public schools are better than private schools in China)[11]. My parents paid for the urban hukou because it became tradable after people understood the benefit that comes along with urban hukou. It was the moment that I understood how the urban hukou could improve my education, so that I could understand wider and deeper how much difference the household registration system could make and what kind of difference it makes.

Fig 5 - The public middle school I studied

Before my parents bought the urban hukou for me, I went to a private school before the age of 12, then went to a public school after. I tried to hang out with elementary school classmates after we all graduated. However, I found out that half of them went back to their hometown and stopped going to school. The reason for this is mostly because their parents realized it was hard to make a living in Shenzhen, and the tuition fee for students who do not have an urban hukou is way more expensive[12]. It was never easy to keep relations and connections as a migrant. When my family moved to Shenzhen, we first settled down in an urban village called Songyuan New village. My family still lives there today, we never moved. Living in an urban village is always the first and affordable choice for newcomers to find a temporary place to stay[13]. As a result, my neighbors living around me were constantly changing, as they are all migrants. The neighbors who live upstairs change every two, three, or five years. So even if the relationship just built up, it would fade away after they left Shenzhen. I got used to the ever-changing environment and people. Shenzhen is ever building, people who live in the village are forever being replaced, and things that happened while I was growing up never seemed stable.

11   Wu, X. (2011). The Household Registration System and Rural-Urban Educational Inequality in Contemporary China. Chinese Sociological Review, 44(2), 31-51.
12   Ibid.
13   Hao, P., Sliuzas, R., & Geertman, S. (2011). The development and redevelopment of urban villages in Shenzhen. Habitat International, 35(2), 214-224.

Estrangement

At the age of eighteen, I went to a university far away from Shenzhen in Wuxi. During freshman year, the most common question that my schoolmates would ask me was "Where are you from?". This easy and common question triggered me to recall how I felt about living in Shenzhen as a migrant. It was really strange for me to say "I am from Shenzhen". I experienced how different life was when you were just living in Shenzhen as a migrant or as opposed to being originally from Shenzhen. I was haunted by the feeling of not knowing where I belong to, where I come from, and how I should identify myself. Should I claim myself as a Shenzhener, or I am from where my parents are from. I always dwell on the question "Where are you from?" whenever I enter a new environment, because it is like an ice-breaker question of how people find inspiration to socialize with.

As I moved to the Netherlands for study, predictably this nightmare-like question "Where are you from?" showed up again. What is even worse, "How do you identify yourself?" and "How do you position yourself?" are two plus questions. This question combo hit me really hard in the first academic year. I never thought about escaping from these questions or putting them aside for a while in my brain's storage room. These questions are lingering in my head and every emotion, feeling, sentiment is taken from the deepest back of the drawer. Then I start to make comparisons and find similarities with different periods of my life. In essence, how I feel being a migrant in Shenzhen and in the Netherlands is not so contrasting. The feelings share similarities even though there are nuances.

Throughout time, I have become more accepting of my origin and where I belong, making this memory less painful. I only need to ask the person who is asking the question, to be patient, because I want to share my intriguing story with them, instead of a simple answer using a city or country name. During my twenty five years experience of being a migrant, the turning point was when I moved to the Netherlands. The decision I made to study abroad already showed how I thought of my

migrant experience. This time I continue my life as a migrant by my own choice. I embrace myself for being a migrant, not by belonging to only one place, but for being in a state that does not have to settle down permanently.

Urbanization - Urban villages & Skyscrapers

When I recalled my migrant experience of living in Shenzhen, I found out it was strongly intertwined and entangled with the urbanization development of Shenzhen. I would not have been a migrant if not for this and Shenzhen will not be growing rapidly if not because of the millions of migrants. The population in Shenzhen was thirty thousand in 1980. Since the initiation of becoming a SEZ, over twelve million migrants have flocked to Shenzhen for job opportunities.They are the main force of labor that contributed to the construction of Shenzhen[14]. Urban villages are necessary for this progression, as they contain a massive flock of migrants.

Urban villages are like enclaves inside Shenzhen; wild, sloppy and substandard living areas surrounded by skyscrapers that provide accommodation for migrant workers. These villages became the backstage for people who built up the city to hide behind. Skyscrapers are performing on the mainstage. They are the result

Fig 6 - An urban village surrounding by skyscrapers. n.d.. Photograph. http://www.dzwww.com/2020/szdjb/syjy/202101/t20210105_7529183.htm

of the development and urbanization and at the forefront of the ever changing skyline. The triumphant and highlighted part of the cityscape that consists of generic skyscrapers, prove how fast the city is built and grown; leaving behind residential areas that are intentionally hidden from the viewer's eyes. With the ongoing development of urbanization, demolishing and integrating urban villages is the next step of the urbanization plan.
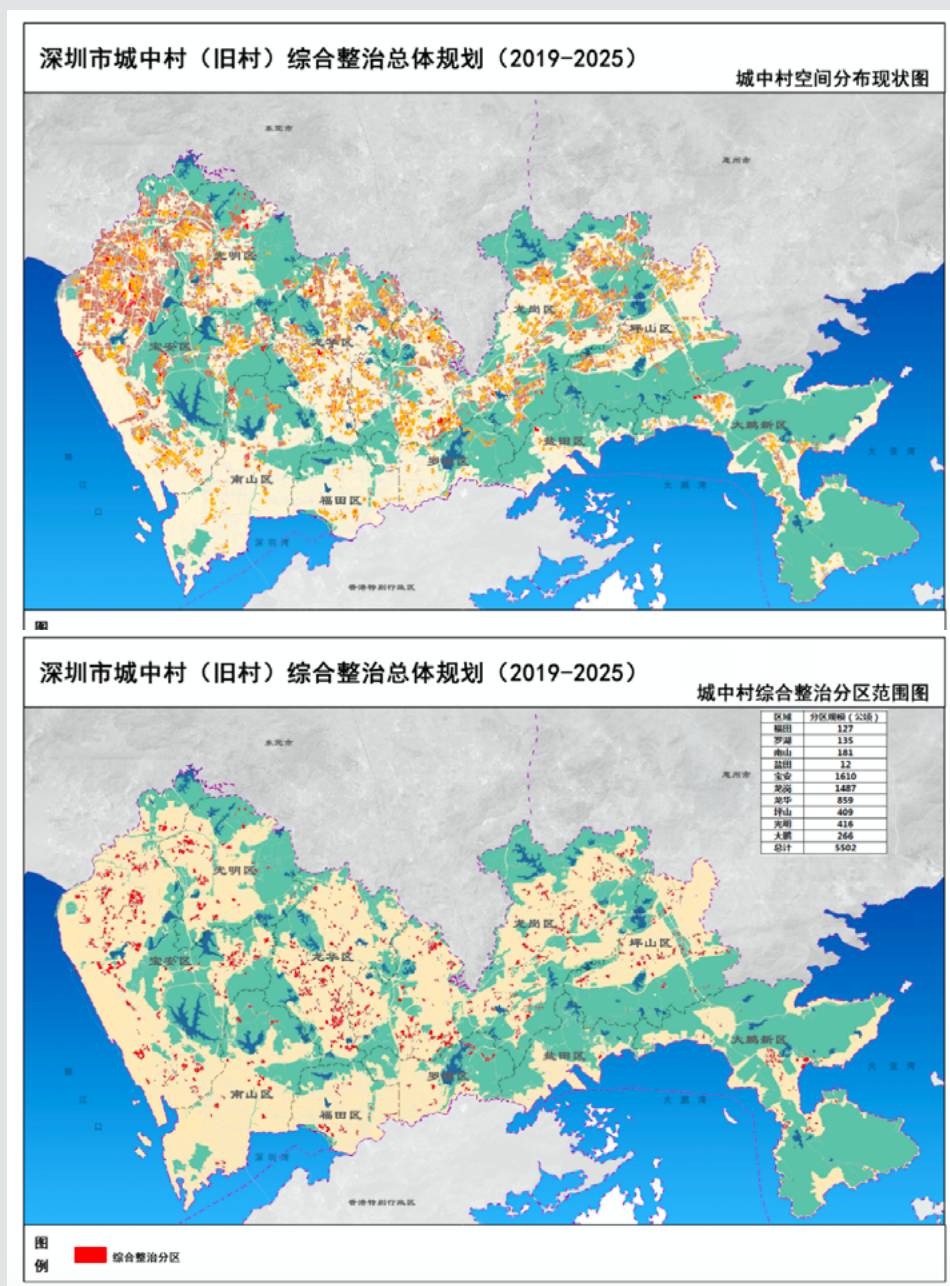
Liang, Foreign investment, economic growth, 117-127.

Fig 7 - Shenzhen Municipal Planning and Natural Resources Bureau.
(2019, March 29). Shenzhen Urban Village(Old Village) integrated
rehabilitation Masterplan(2019-2025). Diagram. http://pnr.sz.gov.cn/
xxgk/zcwj/zcjd/content/post+5839113.html

Making a living in Shenzhen is already hard for migrants, being
outcast by the next phase of urbanization development makes
the situation even worse. It is ironic that it is migrants who are
the biggest group that contribute to the process of urbaniza-
tion, yet they are the ones most negatively affected.

Where is the next stop?

If the urban village where migrants live is going to be taken down, then where should they live then? Will they leave the city instead? If they find another urban village that is not yet in the Integrated Rehabilitation Masterplan[Fig 8], then they will be facing an unpredictable change of moving sooner or later[15]. Or should they just give up the life in Shenzhen and go back to their hometown to find other cities for living?

Fig 8 - A demolished urban village. n.d.. Photograph. https://new.qq.com/omn/20220415/20220415A0AN7J00.html

This most affected are migrants, just like my neighbors during my youth that I shared my days and nights with. The family from Sichuan province that lived upstairs always invited me to join them for dinner. The auntie upstairs took care of fourteen-year old me when my parents were away for work. The neighbor who lived downstairs is from Chaozhou, an area famous for flavory food, everytime they cooked some traditional cuisine my gustatory senses were tingling. The boy similar to my age from the family would bring a dish for us to share. We all have our own dialect, yet we communicated with each other in Mandarin with different accents. It was never a mandatory thing to build a harmonious relationship with your neighbors. Not only did a similar chapter in our lives bring us together, but also the urban village spurred this development. An urban village is like a sample pool containing diversity and inclusivity, where various kinds of cultures collide and symbiose. I feel grateful that I grew up in an urban village with diverse cultures. It taught me to be open-minded when approaching people from different regions, who speak different languages. I learned to be patient when they showed kindness in different ways, and to not let prejudice stop myself from understanding the world with a wider and deeper perspective. The differences between us do not keep us away from each other, but provide

15   Wu, F., Zhang, F., & Webster, C. 2012. Informality and the Development and Demolition of Urban Villages in the Chinese Peri-urban Area. Urban Studies, 50(10), 1919-1934.

and showcase the diversity of the world that we are living in. The family that used to live upstairs went back to Sichuan province when I turned seventeen, and the family that lived downstairs moved to another city a few years later. The relationships we had never lasted long, but the memories last with me forever.

I inevitably have to face the same question. If there is never a stable place for me to stay and build a stable relation with the environment, then why should a fixed place be the thing I chase? Why not look for a moving status? On one hand, I want to experience a more abundant complexity of life by constantly migrating between different environments. On the other hand, being a migrant could make me struggle with the affirmation from the new environment and local residents as well. Therefore, the connections between migrants and the outside world is fragile and vulnerable, if not in an enclave like an urban village, an alienated feeling would occur unstoppably.

Real life as fiction

What a conflicting daily cityscape means to me is that you work inside a skyscraper in the CBD (Central Business District) in the city center. Living in sloppy, substandard living conditions within an urban village far away from the city center. These two spaces are distinctively different from each other, but they add up to create the whole city. One controversial viewpoint is that the Publicity Department of Shenzhen would not like the viewers to relate urban villages to the image of Shenzhen.

Commuting from my home (An urban village) to the office (A skyscraper in the CBD area) is the time that my mind can stop for a while, the pause enhances my sense of feeling about my own existence. While taking the

Fig 9 - A man is hanging clothes in the rooftop in an urban village, behind is a skyscraper. n.d.. Photograph. https://www.sohu.com/picture/202297247

metro back home, I was watching the lights that flashed past buildings through the window. The feeling that I am an island is so strong even the metro was too crowded to concentrate on an ontological question. The weather was always hot and damp, with the humidity so high in Shenzhen all year round. Most weekends, I would wander by myself inside the city, but whatever direction I went, there was always a flow of people heading there as well. I never was alone, but I was always alone. I was trapped in the city without knowing whether I truly belonged here. A job that I used to be passionate about became a job only to keep my life running. I was part of the rat race. There are inherent issues inside the giant mechanism of work such as gender inequality, low salary and working overtime, which are the reasons why I struggled continuing work. To stay in this situation would not be what I wanted, however, "the way out" was always playing hide and seek with me.

Fictional storytelling as an approach

Whilst studying for my Master's degree, all these experiences and memories have triggered emotions from different layers. With keeping all these feelings in my mind, I designed a Latin typeface with diacritics denoting tones of Chinese pinyin[16]. I tried to put the focus on the writing system of two different languages. Designing a Latin typeface as a Chinese designer, for the first time allowed me to coherently express the in-between, limbo-like situation I experienced as a migrant. I felt I was the only one who could understand the context behind the typeface, so I wanted to find a way to express and share these differ-
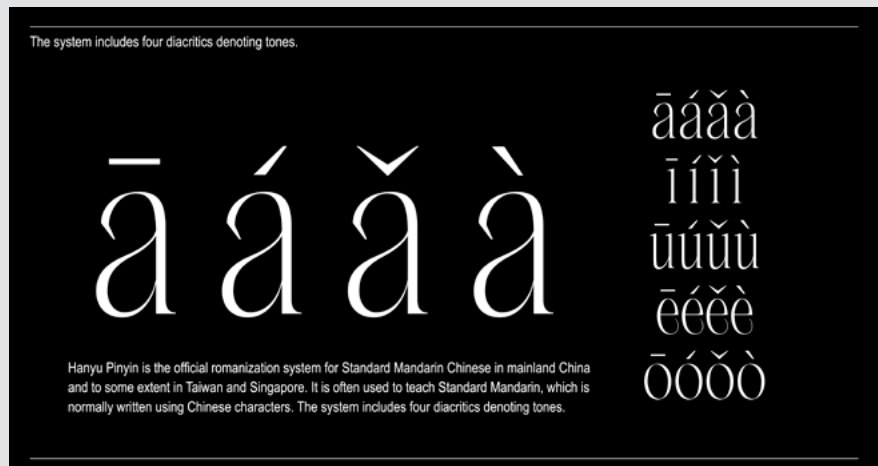

Fig 10 - WhiteCutChicken typeface, letters with diacritics tones

16   Hanyu pinyin is the official romanization system for Standard Mandarin Chinese in Mainland China, it is often used to teach Mandarin, which is normally written using Chinese characters, to learners who are already familiar with the Latin alphabet.

ent layers with others. In setting out to do this, I realized that in many ways these feelings are indescribable, or in some instances that I am unwilling to openly share. I believe this is because I look at myself more as a listener rather than a speaker. This stems back from when I was a migrant and a sense of shame that came with it when introducing myself.

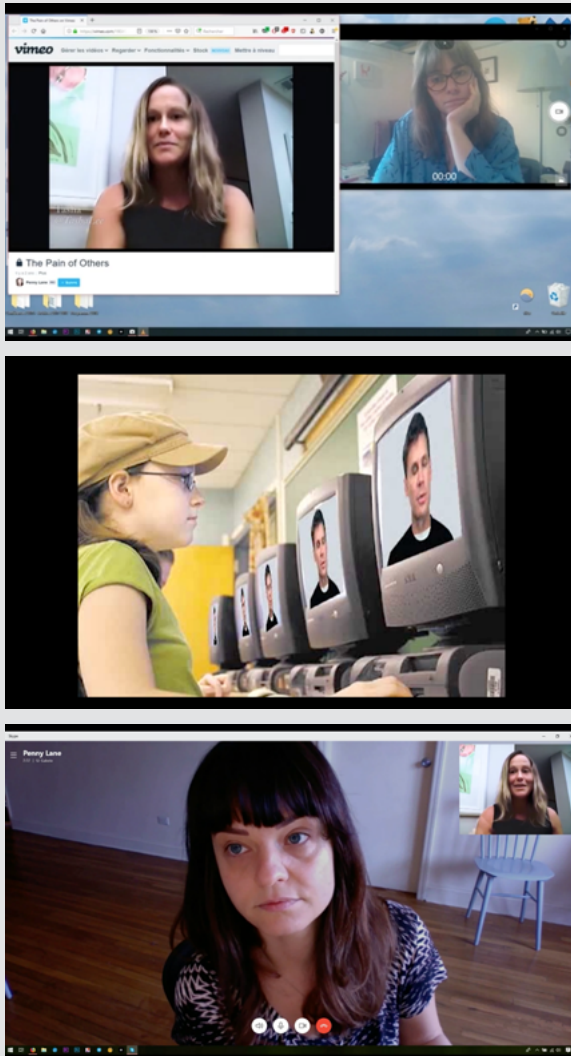A film called *Watching The Pain of Others*[17] by Chloe Galibert-Laine, is a video essay analyzing the documentary *The Pain of Others*[18] by Penny Lane. The documentary is a Youtube compilation about 3 patients who have a mysterious illness called Morgellons. They tried to seek help and made videos on Youtube, explaining their unique experiences. Galibert-Laine recorded herself when she was explaining her research of the documentary and sharing her feelings and thoughts about it. They presented themselves through video recording and it made me feel like I was talking with a friend rather than a stranger. I paid more attention as to what they were saying, observing all changes of small facial expressions and empathized with them. Inspired by that I explored new ways of engaging and communicating with others. This was done by creating videos by recording myself. The purpose of recording videos of myself speaking

Fig 11/12/13 - Screenshots from Watching the pain of others

was to share my feelings and experience, but I felt so embarrassed when I was in front of the webcam. Unlike the 3 patients and Galibert-Laine, I did not have a clear idea about what I should talk and share, what is in my mind is only fragmented and subtle feelings.

17   Galibert-Laine, C. Director. 2019. Watching The Pain of Others. Video eassy.
18   Lane, P. Director. 2018. The Pain of Others. Film. Wishful Thinking LLC.

After repeatedly doing nothing in front of my laptop so many times, I eventually forced myself to say something:`Fig 14/15/16.` My eyes were closed, so that the existence of the camera was gone, and then out of nowhere, there was an image that appeared in my head. I started by saying "I am walking down a rough road with a bag on my back..." I kept my words slowly spitting out like a murmuring sound. "...After the information war was provoked [...] and the whole world seemed to be crushed by a huge machine. There is no more concept of country, no more national borders...". After this sentence came out of my mouth, I realized that the story I was telling was fictional. Because I felt safe and relaxed, I kept myself going on describing what was happening inside the world of my head. There was no plan for recording myself telling a story. For two months, I recorded myself whenever I felt like it.

Fig 14/15/16 - Screenshots of video recordings. I was telling the story

In Thomas Bellinck's work *Domo de EUropa Historio en Ekzilo (House of European History in Exile)*[19], Bellinck created a museum exhibiting objects, recordings, cards and so on from the disintegration of the EU of the uncertain future. Through a museum with fictional objects, he criticized the present concerns about the European Union and placed historical resources in a fictional framework. After 10 recordings were accumulated, I listened to them and tried to understand the story that I improvised. There were so many pauses between sentences, it made me feel that I was lost in the story; but after a few seconds, the story kept going. These breaks were moments that I realized it was not a

Fig 17 - Willems, D. n.d.. Domo De EUropa Historio en Ekzilo

19   Bellinck, T. 2013. Domo de EUropa Historio en Ekzilo. Installation.

nonsense fictional story, but a real life story projection. What I was doing was pulling a string out from the cluster of my feelings and translated the experience of being a migrant into a fictional story.

Fig 18 - Stessel, S. n.d.. Domo De EUropa Historio en Ekzilo

Narrate reality: Story

Sherryl Vint in the book Science Fiction· Documents of Contemporary Art summarised the definition of science fiction by Darko Suvin that building up a fictional story that subverts reality but also reconstructs from it and reflecting of it. A fictional story reflecting my personal experience of being a migrant and it would be a subtle, euphemistical, infectious, and more important a comfortable way to share.

In an urban village with a high population mobility, sharing stories about myself from my own side seems less important than putting focus on the time that I spend with a friend. That is why I found it is hard to share things about myself to people.I found sharing a fictional story about my experience sounded like a gentle compromise. The story subverts my real life experience, but when I reconstruct the story based on my experience, it tells my life again. Ten video recordings are fragments of the story, but they are not a story yet. I transcripted video recordings into text, so that I could reconstruct them into a story.

The story is called *The State of The Migrant*. The State not only refers to a nation or territory, but also the mental condition of people. This story is about an anonymous young girl who decides to start a moving lifestyle and tries to survive day after day in a post-apocalyptic time. She left her home because, after the disruption caused from the economic collapse, she did not remember where it was. At that time, there were no more borders and the concept of countries had vanished, so she started a moving lifestyle by trying to look for a place to

stay. Eventually, she found an area that had abundant resources, so she decided to stay for a while and explore the vicinity. In the end, the local population had depleted all the resources, so she left and moved to the next area.

Based on my own experience, I wrote the story to reflect the circumstance of being a migrant. By blending reality into fiction, the boundaries of reality have become obscured. For example, the economic growth seen throughout Shenzhen during the past four decades has changed the landscape from our ancestral routes to a new, morden paradigm[20]. Global capital is sweeping the world, so the pockets can be filled for the few capitalist rulers at the top of the food chain. It is those living hand to mouth, who are most affected, who rely on rations from the government.

There are some paragraphs from the story. Here is one excerpt telling the story background.

> After the information war provoked within countries. The whole world seems to be crushed by a huge machine, and the once peaceful life is shattered under the pressure of fear for the future. Some people choose to rebuild their homes on top of the ruins, and some people no longer believe in the sense of security brought by permanent residence because of the ruins in front of their eyes, the others choose to have a moving life.

The story happens in the world inside is decades after the present world[21]. A world that is hard to survive, people only need to fight for survival but nothing else. Therefore, staying in a certain place is no longer the way to survive in such a chaotic world. The necessity of moving showed up, and a part of people become migrants. The protagonist chose to have a moving life. Because of her state, she is the container for the experience that I have had as a migrant.

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

20   Cartier, C. 2002. Transnational Urbanism in the Reform-era Chinese City: Landscapes from Shenzhen. Urban Studies, 39(9), 1513-1532.
21   The present world means the world we are living now (2022).

Here is another excerpt offering some more insight to the background of the story.

> I am walking on the rough road with my bag, the roughness is not because of potholes. It is rough because there are building rubbles scattered all over it. The weather is cloudy and humid, and the air is full of dust. I am looking around while walking, observing the new environment I am about to arrive.

Being a migrant makes me unable to maintain a long and stable relationship with people outside my family, because people constantly come and go. For twenty-five years, I have been living in the same location and spending day and night in the same urban village. However, neighbours are changing. Half of my middle school classmates are no longer staying in the city. I pay more attention to spaces, places and environments that leave a deeper impression due to longer duration of time, because in comparison with people, spaces and places are not changing. Some buildings are not there anymore, but the land will always be there. In the story, I put lots of emphasis on describing the environment from a First-person perspective as it shows how I connect with the world.

Bringing the story
back to Shenzhen: Collaboration

Being a migrant makes me unable to maintain a long and stable relationship with people outside my family, because people constantly come and go. For twenty-five years, I have been living in the same location and spending day and night in the same urban village. However, neighbours are changing. Half of my middle school classmates are no longer staying in the city. I pay more attention to spaces, places and environments that leave a deeper impression due to longer duration of time, because in comparison with people, spaces and places are not changing. Some buildings are not there anymore, but the land will always

be there. In the story, I put lots of emphasis on describing the environment from a First-person perspective as it shows how I connect with the world.

      While I was reconstructing the story, I thought about how I was going to visualize the breakdown of each part. The whole research is motivated by my experience living in Shenzhen, without any doubt, I decisively chose Shenzhen as the shooting location. Now, I am currently living in the Netherlands. If I travel back to China,I will face almost one month of quarantine. This would cost me too much money and time. It did not take me too long to solve the problem. Three friends who are based in Shenzhen immediately came to my mind that I could collaborate remotely with to construct my story. They shot my footage, whilst I directed and edited remotely in Den Haag.
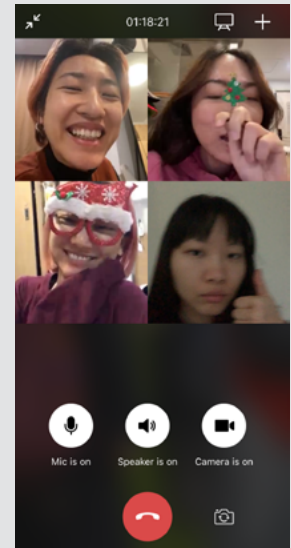

Fig 19 - Meeting with collaborators

      Xiaojun Liu is a film director and also a script writer. With her help, I translated my story into a script. She advised me how to make a storyboard based on the script in preparation for the shooting day. At the same time, she is the camerawoman for my film, because she has experience on making films and is familiar with cameras. Chengyi Shen is a specialist in film post-roduction, she is a professional with on site lighting. She is the script supervisor for the film. Xinqiao Wong is a stylist, so she decided on the custom with me. She is also the protagonist in the film.Because her hair is pink I think it would be an element to alienate the time space from the present time.

      We have called many times since I moved to the Netherlands two years ago. On December 19th, I had an informal video call with them and elaborated my project to them. Without any hesitation, they would love to help me. They deeply resonated with the research that I am doing, and understood how I wanted to depict the feeling of being a migrant effortlessly. We are both second generation migrants. Our families were lucky enough to make a living in Shenzhen in order to stay. We went to the same middle school and lived in the same area, friendship bound us together throughout time. Our shared experiences led us to explore possibilities for a collaboration.

Before the shooting days (December 24th & 25th) started, there were contents that we discussed and decided which included protagonist & style Set, the props & equipment, Location selections and camera movement.

Protagonist & Style Set

We quickly moved to the preparation for the first shooting day. First, I invited Xinqiao to be the protagonist of the film. The

Fig 20 - Xinqiao in costume

background was set in a wasteland world, so we wanted the style of the protagonist would fit. I wanted the costume·[Fig 20]· to reflect outdoor needs, but nothing more than that. We both knew that I had no budget for the shooting, so we picked a costume from Xinqiao's closet. According to the story background, survival is what people care about, so I asked for natural or little makeup. With regard to the hairstyle, Xinqiao already dyed her hair pink. We all agreed on keeping it like that, as it has links to a stereotypical image of characters in fictional movies. We wanted to take advantage of that and hoped it would portray to the audience that the story takes place in the future. Finally, a simple functional black bag was given to the protagonist to carry essential props.

The props & Equipment

The props I have mentioned in the story, candles, water bottle, flashlight, cigarettes, sleeping bag, toothbrush, toothpaste, photos and so on.

For shooting equipment, we used a hand-held camera to create a third person perspective that follows the protagonist. This brings the audiences closer to the protagonist within the story. To do it, we had three iPhones (from the shooting team member) to use, and Xiaojun bought a SONY DCR-TRV 25E·[Fig 21/22]· as this was something she

Fig 21/22 - SONY DCR-TRV 25E. n.d..

wanted for a long time, and was perfect for shooting my story. The handycam will create footage with a retro aesthetic which can be an interesting way to experiment with story timeline and narrative.

Location selections

After doing research on ruins in Shenzhen, we found out it is easy to find locations that fit the background setting. These locations should be messy and shabby with nobody living nearby in order to fit the wasteland setting. I intentionally hid the trace of Shenzhen. Even though my experience of being a migrant stemmed from living in Shenzhen, the city is seen as a model for capitalism to duplicate building compounds as modular constructions to build up another location with enhanced economic areas[22]. Not only people who live in Shenzhen will experience the unbelongingness, but also other people who live in Dubai could feel the same[23]. We selected four locations in total for the first shooting. These are located in the Longgang district, which is an industrial area that is full of factories[24].

Fig 23 - The bridge

The bridge·[Fig 23]· is in front of the urban village, close to where I live. I walked under the bridge to the elementary and middle

22   Easterling, K. Extrastatecraft.
23   Ibid.
24   Lai, Y., Chen, K., Zhang, J., • Liu, F. 2020. Transformation of Industrial Land in Urban Renewal in Shenzhen, China. Land, 9(10), 371.

school everyday. I hated this experience. In the morning during winter, I had to go to school when the sun had not yet risen. A few times I found out there were nacked men or homeless people sleeping on the side of the road. It was very terrifying.

Fig 24 - The abandoned house

The abandoned house·Fig 24· is really close to our living areas, located at the back of some high residential buildings and alone in a wide open field. We thought it fitted the scene where the protagonist stayed during nights in my story.

Fig 25 - The rooftop

The rooftop·Fig 25· is a shabby building in another urban village
near to my village and also the bridge, and the parking lot·Fig 26·
is 15 mins away by car.

Fig 26 - The abandoned parking lot

Camera movement

Based on four selected locations, we separated the shooting into four parts and two locations for each day. The shooting days were on the 24th and 25th December.

Before the first shooting day, I briefed Xinqiao (The protagonist) on what she needs to act and how she should act in the scenes. The movement of her walking would be the key behavior to translate the essence of moving and the unfixed state of a migrant's life. As a result, what she should need to do is walk freely in each scene and show curiosity to explore the environment.

Next, we discussed how the camera should move. I wanted to show the perspective as a person following the protagonist·Fig 27·. The hand-held camera movement gives a raw and close feeling to the footage ·Fig 28/29·. There were times when Xiaojun (The camerawoman) would hold focus the camera on a single spot to capture the environment and the protagonist·Fig 30·. Prince, S. R. explained the function of using long shot in Movies and Meanging that "Filmmakers typically use the long shot to stress the environment or setting and to show a character's position in relationship to a given environment." (Prince, 2014). I wanted the audience pay attention to the landscape of the wasteland and the relation between the protagonist and the environmen.

Fig 27 - Xiaojun (The camerawoman) used hand-held camera following the move of Xinqiao (The protagonist)

Fig 30 - Xiaojun (The camerawoman) used an IPhone filming the move of Xinqiao(The protagonist) in a fixed spot

Fig 28/29 - Close-ups of The protagonist's walking

With regards to how the composition should be in each scene, I only had one clear requirement. This was to highlight the contrast `·Fig 31/32/33/34·` between the environment (Big, wide, empty and wasted) and the protagonist (Single, alone and small), in order to translate the feeling of estrangement and tininess.

Switching between close-up and long shot, in order to change audience's perspective. One is the perspective of the protagonist, another one is the perspective of a bystander. I believed two different camera positions swap express the alienated feeling from inside and outside.

Fig 31/32 - The protagonist in the abandoned parking lot

Fig 33/34 - The protagonist in the abandoned house

·The State of The Migrant·
·Demo Link· https·://vimeo.com/669000226

Conclusion

Sharing my story is never an easy thing for me, it is hard because I feel telling a story about myself is inessential. But more important is the intimate connection that will form between people through sharing personal stories, and it is the thing I want to avoid. Now my migrant experience is one step further than before, the urge of sharing my experience showed when I moved from the China to the Netherlands. I spent so much time on finding a comfortable way to tell my story, I tried to design a Latin typeface to express my feelings, but in the end, I landed in fictional storytelling. A fictional story filled with facts from my migrant reality gives me courage to convey what happened in my life to others. At the same time, this approach led me to people who had similar experiences.

The short film *The State of The Migrant* was not planned before I started the research question, but a remote collaboration brought it to life. Without the collaboration with my childhood friends (Xiaojun, Xinqiao & Chengyi), I would not have done the short film on my own. This collaboration makes me realize even if I am not in the same country with them, the invisible bond would not fade away because of distance. This project also reminded us that we had never talked about our migrant experience, it is the norm since the first day we lived in a migrant city.

Through the process of this project, I am aware that more attention should be paid on migrants. Temporary stay is the crucial reason why the outside world gives less focus on migrants, but certainly it is unfair. Global migration is going on and will never stop. With the development of technology, how migrants share their experiences and stories on social media is the question I would like to further investigate.

Bibliography

A Call for Reform of China's Household Registration System. (2010). Population and Development Review, 36(2), 405–407.
https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2010.00337.x

A demolished urban village. (n.d.). Photograph.
https://new.qq.com/omn/20220415/20220415A0AN7J00.html

A man is hanging clothes in the rooftop in an urban village, behind is a skyscraper. (n.d.). Photograph.
https://www.sohu.com/picture/202297247

An urban village surrounding by skyscrapers. (n.d.). Photograph.
http://www.dzwww.com/2020/szdjb/syjy/202101/t20210105_7529183.htm

Deng Xiaoping on the billboard in Shenzhen. (n.d.). Photograph.
http://www.cnsunlight.net/html/news/201801/7747.html

Byrne-Smith, D. (2020). Science Fiction (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art). The MIT Press.

Cartier, C. (2002). Transnational Urbanism in the Reform-era Chinese City: Landscapes from Shenzhen. Urban Studies, 39(9), 1513–1532.
https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980220151637

Easterling, K. (2016). Extrastatecraft. Adfo Books.

Hao, P., Sliuzas, R., & Geertman, S. (2011). The development and redevelopment of urban villages in Shenzhen. Habitat International, 35(2), 214–224.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2010.09.001

International Labour Organization (ILO), & Wu, R. (2012, October). Reproductive health and gender awareness in shenzhen's migrant population. ILO.
https://www.ilo.org/beijing/what-we-do/publications/WCMS_232936/lang--en/index.htm

International Organization for Migration. (2019, November). World migration report 2020.
https://doi.org/10.18356/b1710e30-en

Lai, Y., Chen, K., Zhang, J., & Liu, F. (2020). Transformation of Industrial Land in Urban Renewal in Shenzhen, China. Land, 9(10), 371.
https://doi.org/10.3390/land9100371

Liang, Z. (1999). Foreign investment, economic growth, and temporary migration: The case of shenzhen special economic zone, china. Development and Society, 28(1), 117–127.

Naughton, B. (1996). Growing Out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform, 1978–1993. Cambridge University Press.

Nodelman, P. (1981). The Cognitive Estrangement of Darko Suvin. Children's Literature Association Quarterly, 5(4), 24–27.
https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.0.1851

Shenzhen in 1980s. (n.d.). Photograph.
https://min.news/en/history/211f9f566ea01d53851c7a558f1e5a8a.html

Shenzhen Municipal Planning and Natural Resources Bureau. (2019, March 29). Diagram.
http://pnr.sz.gov.cn/xxgk/zcwj/zcjd/content/post.5839113.html

Prince, S. R. (2014). Movies and Meaning: Pearson New International Edition (6th ed.). Pearson Education.

Schouwenberg, L., & Kaethler, M. (2021). The anto-enthographic turn in design. Valiz.

United Nations, & Nations, U. (2019). World Migration Report 2020. International Organization for Migration.

Wang, D. W. D. (2020). Urban Villages in the New China: Case of Shenzhen (1st ed. 2016 ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Wu, F., Zhang, F., & Webster, C. (2012). Informality and the Development and Demolition of Urban Villages in the Chinese Peri-urban Area. Urban Studies, 50(10), 1919–1934.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098012466600

Wu, X. (2011). The Household Registration System and Rural-Urban Educational Inequality in Contemporary China. Chinese Sociological Review, 44(2), 31–51.
https://doi.org/10.2753/csa2162-0555440202

Wu, X., · Treiman, D. J. (2004). The household registration system and social stratification in China: 1955–1996. Demography, 41(2), 363–384.
https·://doi.org/10.1353/dem.2004.0010

Wynants, N., Gielen, P., Gorki, A., Lybeer, C., Merx, S., Portela, P., Rutgeerts, J., Scholts, N., Smets, K., Eeghem, V. E., & Goethem, V. P. (2020). When Fact Is Fiction: Documentary Art in the Post-Truth Era. Valiz.