VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF AN IMAGINED RETURN FROM A TAIWANESE EXILE: AN INSTALLATION OF PHOTOGRAPHIC DIPTYCHS WITH ARTISTS’ BOOKS

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Abstract

This thesis constitutes five sets of photographic work of self-portraits in diptych form within an installation, with two Artists’ Books and a written component. It explores and visualises my autobiographical condition as an exiled artist from Taiwan, seeking for an imagined return.

Firstly, it provides a critical investigation of contemporary photography in Taiwan, based on the theme of an imagined return from exile. The result of the review is that the concept of an imagined return from exile has been neglected. Secondly, it explores the thesis’s conceptual frameworks in photography and the installation. The parallel concept applied in the photographic features is ‘this-has-been’ as established by Roland Barthes in his book Camera Lucida. Further interpretation has shown how the photograph evokes a place of ‘that world’ to imagine a return.

Thirdly, the thesis examines the longing subjects for my imagined return, parents, homeland and childhood over the last sixteen years. It presents my personal journey into exile, from the countryside to the urban, and moving from the island of Taiwan to the United Kingdom. Central to the understanding of the argument is the family structure, the role of parents and the duties of the eldest son in Taiwanese culture, and the experiences of Taiwanese exile in economic terms.

Fourthly, the thesis presents visual strategies for the return of the exile, and scrutinises concepts of reality and imagination in re-creating the home for the act of an imagined return. In contemplating a return, the work creates those strategies of survival in aspects of reconciling the past and redeeming myself.

The installation sets the photographic work within a metaphorical journey, a path from an empty gallery through space to a sequence of rooms presenting themes of anxiety, loss and yearning in the context of an imagined return. The diptych form is used to provide opportunities for two separate locations/situations joined in the overlapping self-portraits, to give the possibility of a visual comparison between two confronting images.

The written component combines analytic texts and images to explain and explore the nature of exile. The first part is a review of exile in contemporary photography in Taiwan. The second part is a conceptual framework of the thesis. The third part details my personal history of exile and expresses family relationships, homeland and childhood in the photographic work. The final part articulates the specific role that the photographic installation plays in representing such issues.
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Author’s declaration

I declare that while registered as a candidate for the University’s research degree, I have not been a registered candidate or enrolled student for another award of the University or other academic or professional institution.

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

Signature:
Chapter 1  Introduction

Fig. 1.1.1. An old photograph of my family, taken in the early 1980s, showing my father, sister, brother and me (on the left) in my hometown of Su-Ao.

1.1 Genesis of the research project

This research is based on autobiographical research, thus tracing back my previous experience is helpful to understand this project. Here is a simple introduction of my life, academic experiences and previous artworks that relate to the research.

A. My personal experience of exile

I come from a very poor family in the small town of Su-Ao in Taiwan. My father was a war veteran from North China and in 1949 when he was 18 years old, forced by political reasons, he migrated to Taiwan.¹ My mother, a Taiwanese girl who was adopted, met and married my father. She was very poor and received no support from her family. My family thus had very few relatives on either parent’s side. The history of my family life is not only one of poverty, but also of dislocation and isolation (Fig. 1.1.1).

¹ More details about veterans and my father’s exile are in Appendix 1 and 2.
As I was growing up, my father’s exilic experience became deeply imprinted in my mind. As a young child, I often listened to my father’s stories about his homeland in the Shan-Dong Province of Northern China. He used to end his stories in tears because he missed his home a great deal and, at that time, there was no communication between him and his relatives on the Chinese mainland. This lack of communication continued until I left my hometown in 1985. I was then 18 years old. I left to go to University to study, but I was never able to go back there due to the town’s high unemployment and also due to my wish to teach at University afterwards.

It has been 20 years since my departure and since then my perception of being an exile, which I experienced and understood from my father, has grown in me with the passing of time. My father died in Su-Ao in 1998 and, in the year 2000, I came to the United Kingdom, yet again to experience further exile from my hometown in a similar way to my father’s experience.

B. Related academic background
In 1989 I graduated in Industrial Art Education at the National Taiwan Normal University, where I also in 1994 obtained an MA. The title of my MA thesis was The Study of the Influence of Still Electronic Image on the Essence of Photography. The main concern of my MA thesis was the impact that the new digital image has exerted on the nature of photography and its main focus was on the human perception of photography: how reality reveals itself through photography. After achieving the MA, I became a full-time lecturer in the Commercial Design Department of Ming-Chuan University. Three years later, I transferred to the Plastic Art Department of Da Yeh University. I continued practising and researching in photography and was determined, especially since the beginning of my MA in 1992, to develop my practice further although I had little professional training.

Fig. 1.1.2. A group exhibition Fabricated Image in Taipei Fine Arts Museum in 1997. The large photographs in this image are my artworks.
C. My previous artworks
Before beginning my doctoral research, I was aware that the themes of my works were much related to the experience of displacement from home, but I am stuck on continuing my practice and thought I needed to take a further educational course. In 1997, I participated in a group exhibition in one of the most reputable Taiwanese galleries, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (Fig. 1.1.2). Audiences in Taiwan could not comprehend why an artist belonging to a contented generation was presenting a great deal of melancholia in his art practice. My works seemed out of context and out of the ordinary in contemporary Taiwan, so much so that even my art tutors wondered how to supervise me and could not find any photographer/reference that related to my work. At that time, I did sense the heavy feeling that comes from my artworks but I could not fully understand it (Fig. 1.1.3 and 1.1.4). Fortunately, the chief curator of Taipei Fine Arts Museum gave me a positive critique on my works during the group exhibition in 1997. She told me that she saw in my practice some elements of contemporary European art. This positive result encouraged me as an artist in an early stage of development. Eventually, I came to the United Kingdom to study art that has fulfilled my wish to develop my art practice and has made me fully realise, both as an individual and as an artist, the meaning of exile. The desire to achieve more knowledge and experience in photography as an art form, and a deeper understanding of art, has been without doubt the major reason for choosing to carry out this practice-based doctoral project.

Fig. 1.1.3. An early piece of artwork in 1994, Self Portrait No.2.
1.2 Objectives

A. Contributing to academic innovation and knowledge
In this research, understanding the issue, ‘an imagined return’ from exile, through practiced-based research is paramount. It means that even if the main subject has been investigated before in areas such as art theory, history, cultural studies and other such disciplines, this research differs from preceding investigations because it is practice-based and may provide a new perspective on, and insight into, the theme of exile. This has developed into the innovative aspect of this research.

B. Understanding and carrying out the practice-based research
As an art practitioner, I have always been interested in the development of an art practice within a research context. The methodology of ‘research through practice’ is a way to research and contribute to new knowledge. I will continue my academic training following the research through practice methodology because as an artist I believe in its relevance and I hope this thesis will serve to illustrate the point.

C. Personal and professional development
After six years of doctoral study, I can probably say that I have reached a better understanding of myself both as an artist and as a person, through developing artworks, writing an autobiography, and achieving an increased knowledge of my culture. I also believe that I have developed a more positive and creative attitude towards my work and myself.

D. For future higher education in Taiwan
As a University lecturer and a professional educator I would like to disseminate my doctoral training and experience in Taiwan, where practice-based doctoral research is only in its initial stages.

1.3 The development of this research

At the beginning of my study in October 2000, I was interested in the prevailing tone or mood presented in my photographic work through the use of multiple photographs. At this stage I tried not to include too many personal issues in my work, as I understood a PhD research project needs to have a degree of ‘objectivity’. At that time, I began to look at the work of photographers who have explored the method of multiple photographs and read some related theory. For instance, the book Sequence (con) Sequence: (sub) versions of Photography in the 80s illustrates how 19 photographers such as John Baldessari used multiples in different ways.\(^2\) This text was very important for my practice as I have been fascinated by the method of combining photographs since starting to develop my artworks in 1994.

However, I found that focusing on the formal and technical aspects of photography was rather uninspiring and soon I realised that in doctoral research one can provide a balance between the objective and subjective aspects of knowledge. Therefore I shifted the focus of my research questions to a more personal sphere that can be expressed as follows:

- What meaning do my photographs hold for me?
- What kind of personal experiences do I intend to explore through the photographs and what wider relevance do they have?

As I began the first shooting of Chinatown in London I realised that the subject of this research would deal with themes associated with ‘nostalgia’, a condition I had never considered or even experienced before with such intensity. In October 2001, I started to research the theme of ‘Chinatown’, viewed as a substitute homeland for those in exile, including relevant research on the themes of food and abandoned buildings.

In November 2001, after a meeting with local Jewish artist Barbara Loftus, I found the keyword ‘exile’ for my study. Identifying the subject of ‘exile’ and acquiring

awareness of its key aspects has been a very important shift in my project. I then began to research reference books and artists’ works. After the key concept ‘exile’ was found, I went on to explore various related themes, including ‘my parents’, ‘abandoned buildings’, and ‘the journey’.

In January 2002 I identified the themes of ‘childhood’ and ‘memory’ present in many works by exiled artists. In October 2002 I explored the theme ‘family photographs’ which is relevant for me, as well as for many exiles. I looked at how family photographs are represented in our daily lives and at the ways in which exiled artists have used their own family photographs in their artworks.

In July 2002, I began to write my autobiography, and this represented a further stage of development for my research. Writing my autobiography was like facing the unseen side of me and it became the most appropriate method for achieving awareness of my past and self. This has really helped me not only to achieve self-knowledge but has also given me more confidence and inspiration to carry out my research.

Fig. 1.3.1. Diagram of the research concept.

Fig. 1.3.2. Diagram of the thesis structure.
In August 2003, I transferred from MPhil to PhD, a milestone in this project. I exhibited my research findings and materials in two studio rooms. One room contained an interim exhibition of one of the photographic works for the final installation (Fig. 1.3.4). The second room exhibited data relevant to the overall planning and design of my research in the form of four huge diagrams affixed to the studio walls (Fig. 1.3.1 to 1.3.3). These diagrams showed the research concept and keywords, the working title, the thesis structure, the project timetable and the relationship between my artworks. The working title presented for the MPhil Transfer to PhD examination was: ‘Exile and/through Memory: melancholic self-portrait(s) in diptych photographs’. After the transfer, I realised that after three years of study I
had already successfully set up my working method and thesis methodology, especially in terms of collecting the key concepts through the key words.

In 2004 the project finally reached a clear focus in terms of analysing and investigating the experience of my personal exile from the specific perspective of ‘an imagined return’. I believe this concept has sharpened my overall research questions and in August 2004 I exhibited the final installation for examination.

1.4 Research questions

The main research questions are as follows:

- How can I visualize ‘an imagined return’ from exile in the photographic diptych and installation?
- What are the subjects of an imagined return and how are they influenced by my personal and cultural experiences of exile?
- What is my personal history of exile within the Taiwanese historical context?
- How can the condition of exile and its imagined return be more widely understood and how might it be described in terms of images and words?

1.5 Research methodology

There are a number of serious issues in the debates surrounding the essence and methodology of practice-based PhDs in the United Kingdom. Since 2000, the conferences on Research into Practice have focused upon these, and Michael Biggs’s editorials are a good starting point from which to discuss them.\(^3\) What follows is a summary of points raised in contemporary debates.

- **The fundamental argument amongst academics.** Some academics still doubt
the legitimacy of the practice-based doctorate. James Elkins has questioned the future of, and discussed three models for, practice-based research, but there are still no best solutions. He focuses on the classical/conventional standard for PhDs to question the philosophical/ontological nature of practice-based research. On the other hand, Timothy Emlyn Jones viewed this particular research more positively. He said, “...what our subject community most needs in developing its research culture is greater self-knowledge and self-confidence in its distinctiveness from other subjects; in its own enquiry based paradigm.” No matter how difficult the new research, we need to stand by our own strengths rather than limit ourselves by working within the boundaries set by academic convention.

- UKCGE (UK Council for Graduate Education) and AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council). UKCGE, a key organisation in the development of graduate education in the UK has had some influence on the methodologies and definitions of art and design-based doctorates. However, although the Council published a key paper in *Practice Based Doctorates in the Creative and Performing Arts and Design* in 1997 and a further paper in *Research Training in the Creative and Performing Arts and Design* in 2001, it has not been seriously involved in ongoing debates that have taken place in the last six years of what has become a developing and increasingly recognized field. The AHRC, a national state-funded organization, has also played a role in promoting discussion in the field since its foundation in 1998 (as the then Arts and Humanities Research Board) and has held a number of conferences about the parameters of practice-based research. Its Postgraduate Qualifications Panel for the visual arts also publishes annual reports about the AHRC’s annual doctoral studentship competition, but these are generally concerned with practical issues rather than methodological and disciplinary-centred advice to future applicants and their host institutions. In the autumn of 2005 the AHRC also commissioned a Report in Practice-Based Research in the field, the findings of which are now, in 2007, overdue for publication.

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The issue of documenting practice. The PARIP Symposium: Practice as Research in Performance 2001, at University of Bristol, which I attended, was about research in performance. Some presenters questioned the use of recording as the final outcome for a thesis, so the main issue is how we re-present practice into research. This documentation issue also affects the discipline of art and design. There have been discussions on the subject, such as the recent one-day symposium, Did Hans Namuth Kill Jackson Pollock?: The Problem of Documenting the Creative Processes.

The function of text. “A PhD required a thesis, a thesis required writing and that was that”. The written component is necessary to the PhD, but the function of text to the practice-based research is the main argument. Text can be used to describe a theoretical approach, for the purposes of documentation, or to provide a reflection on practice. Different universities regulate the use of text in different ways. For example, in one thesis I read from Goldsmiths College in University of London, the author included theory in the written component but made no direct mention of his practice. This is quite different to my approach to the written component, which is more about the critical reflection of my practice.

The fundamental methodology. The classical theory of Donald Schon’s The Reflective Practitioner is, from my point of view, more appropriate as a fundamental theoretical approach. But it is applied mainly in design-related disciplines, and seems less adequate for explaining fine art practice. Fine art is a more complex issue which involves a greater number of disciplines, including social science, and the humanities, and fields such as sociology, psychology, anthropology and culture study. Schon’s theory, however, can still explain some aspects of reflective action in fine art practice. As Timothy Emlyn Jones suggested, we need to develop our own distinctiveness, and the methodology is our starting point. If we undertake ‘practice’ as our main method and approach, we need to fully research this term ‘practice’ - to provide a research direction.

Furthermore, there are two main methodologies in this research.

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8 This is a two-day symposium. For more information, see the PARIP website, University of Bristol, 2001. <http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip/symhm.htm>
9 This is an one-day symposium on 28th April 2007 at Chelsea College of Art, University of the Arts London.
10 Chris Rust. “Picasso’s PhD.” Materials for Art-Practice-Led Researchers. <http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/~as0bg/learnco.html#apr00>
11 This is a PhD thesis completed in 2003 in the Fine Art department. The author is Yu-Chen Chuang (莊姁振). Moreover, a conference will be held to discuss this issue further. Encounters with Theory in Practice-based PhD Research in Art & Design, AHRC Postgraduate Conference, De Montfort University & Loughborough University, 26th June 2007, DMU, City Campus.
A. Research through practice

Where can I methodologically locate myself as a practice-based researcher? I have read several articles on research methodology and find that the following quotation explains the type of methodology I have applied in my research project:

…this type of research was that after the completion of one phase of the written text, when the seesaw was high in the air, the ensuing work on the art project would destabilise what had been achieved to the point that when the researcher returned to the next phase of research on the written text, the seesaw was firmly down on the ground and the text had to be completely reconceived; when the next phase of research on the written text was completed and the seesaw was high in the air, it was only to descend again when the work on the ensuing art project was underway. Thus, the written text was instrumental to the conception of the art projects but art projects themselves exacted a radical rethinking of what had been constructed in written form because the process of realising or making artwork altered what had been defined in written form.

I like the metaphor of the seesaw applied to the relation between a textual and a visual art practice. In my research the seesaw comes between practice and thinking. Research concepts can be generated not only from artworks but also from the practice of writing. There is a cycle of thinking and making, then rethinking and remaking. However this research was generated first from practice, before the text was written down, then in a successive stage the seesaw effect took place between textual and visual practice. In my view, an art practitioner develops and applies towards a doctoral project a ‘thought versus intuition’ approach. Katy MacLeod explains in the article the category of practice-based PhD she labels ‘Type C’. She states that “it (the written text) is instrumental and complementary to the artwork submission but the artwork here is the thesis; it provides the theoretical proposition”. In this research, the role of text and artwork are instrumental and complementary, and for me, this is how they should be. The artwork as the visual component of my artistic research is the heart of the thesis. The research should have a core, and this is summarised as follows.

Following my six-year study I understand the full meaning of the methodology I used in this discipline that is, research through practice. It is the key methodology

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13 Ibid.
that gains ideas from sketching, making, drawing diagrams, installation, visual planning and analysis. While researchers in a scientific field go to the laboratory to experiment, I practice and reflect within a visual practice. This latter concept refers to Donald Schon’s theory ‘Reflection in Action’, a philosophical approach that, in the early 1980s, provided the foundations for the methodology ‘research through practice’. Schon wrote:

The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behaviour. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation.14

This thesis does not focus on a question of methodology such as “what is a practice-based research?” However the question has affected this thesis, as it deals with a methodology which is relatively new, having developed since the 1970s. Many students, myself included, have doubts about how best to conduct the research. However, it is a great opportunity not only to contribute to new knowledge on a specific academic subject but also to its research methodology.

B. Autobiographical research
Placing my story at the centre of this research project is something I had never thought of doing before beginning my studies at the University of Brighton. As previously explained, in the past I have always presumed that academic research should be very objective and that a researcher’s personal experience should not take centre stage within the research. During the long journey of the research process my supervisor Dr. Chris Mullen had encouraged me to explore not only the outside world but also explore the ‘self’. This led me to understand that the subjective and objective did not necessarily conflict with each other because a researcher can interpret her or his personal history within the research process. The personal subjective aspect of research as autobiographical research can contribute to developing an original concept but needs to be located within the wider context of objective research. For me as an art practitioner the purpose is both to maintain originality and to communicate to the academic world.

...it is examined how individuals actively and independently develop into the social conditions of life surrounding them, how they develop their personality and capacity to act during these processes of change; but also how they realize existing ideological offers of adjustment and in doing so abandon possibilities of their development. So it is the *relation between the objective situational conditions of acting and the subjective explanation for acting in its effects on the individual development of personality* that is analysed.\(^{15}\)

This concept can be referred to the contemporary study in ethnography as autoethnography. Dr. Reed-Danahay defines ‘autoethnography’ as a “form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography. Autoethnography can be done by either an anthropologist who is doing ‘home’ or ‘native’ ethnography or by a non-anthropologist/ethnographer. It can also be done by an autobiographer who places the story of his or her life within a story of the social context in which it occurs”.\(^{16}\)

Fieldworkers consider their subjectivity alongside cultural, gender, and social factors. Researchers count themselves in with their research outcomes. Therefore, autobiography as a method in anthropology is "self-awareness and a critical scrutiny of the self",\(^{17}\) and includes self-reflection in the research outcomes; it is not self-adoration. Although this is a different discipline from art research, the concept of autobiographical research and the practical fieldwork involved can provide good resources for the methodology. Of value are the ways in which they are concerned with subjectivity and objectivity, and the way they incorporate their personal stories as autobiographies into the research.

In this research, I see autobiographical research as a method for exploring and understanding the inner individual self beyond the study of a cultural identity. I have used data from autobiographical writing and conversations with my mother and have used these methods in relation to a specific time period in order to explore my past. The personal story is analysed in order to access the psychological aspects of the desire ‘to return from exile’ and also provides the narrative of a personal history. In doing so re-discovering my past has had a huge impact on the perception I have of past events and has enriched my artworks. Therefore, this ‘looking into the self’ as an autobiographical research is distinguished from the other types of research which


are ‘looking out at others’. I suggest that it can generate different aspects of knowledge. For instance, writing about the train journey from the city to my hometown gave me the idea of designing my installation so that it could be experienced as a journey.\textsuperscript{18} I wanted to investigate the kind of emotional response exiles may have during the journey back home. The route to and from and the temporal/spatial gap between two places are vital for an exile.

1.6 Research context

The thesis consists of a photographic installation, two Artists’ Books and one written component.

A. The photographic installation

The photographic installation \textit{Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile} exhibited in August 2004 at the University of Brighton is the heart of this PhD research (Fig. 1.6.1 to 1.6.4). It occupied two huge spaces: the North Gallery and six rooms in the painting department. The North Gallery exhibited only a suitcase that stood alone within the vast empty space. The six rooms in the painting department each contained individual photographic works using various installation methods. Uniting these two spaces was a pathway of small red dots. This installation presented the whole concept of the thesis.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig161.jpg}
\caption{(Left) The first space in the installation was in the North Gallery of the University of Brighton Grand Parade site.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig162.jpg}
\caption{(Right) The corridor in the painting department.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{18} My experience of travelling back to my homeland appears in my autobiography and was a great inspiration for the journey in the installation. For the full text, see Appendix 3.

\textsuperscript{19} Please see the second Artists’ Book which is a book for the installation and Chapter 7 for more information.
Fig. 1.6.3. The installation view of the work Thirty-Thousand-Miles.

Fig. 1.6.4. The installation view of the work Childhood in the final room.

B. Two Artists’ Books
The first Artists’ Book is a photographic album. It consists of miniatures of five sets of photographic diptychs, and is contained in an old photographic album which I found. The second Artists’ Book is a book for the installation and contains the visual and conceptual representations of the photographic installation Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile. These two books are not only a form of documentation but are intended to be artworks in themselves (Artists’ Books in reality). They present the ontology of this thesis and its visual component. In considering and valuing the originality of the installation, I suggest that the two Artists’ Books are the proper method to represent it in this final form.

C. Structure of the written component
The written component includes charts and images. All its aspects interrelate and are of equal importance to the thesis.

Chapter 1 is the introduction to the whole structure and concept of the thesis.
Chapter 2 examines contemporary photography based on the theme of exile in my homeland, Taiwan. Its purpose is to explain the importance and originality of the thesis concept ‘an imagined return’ through a critical review of relevant photographic Taiwanese works.

Chapter 3 is based on the practical works in the thesis, which are the visual representations of photography and its installation, to generate the thesis’s components as conceptual frameworks. The key theory is based on an in-depth exploration of Roland Barthes’s photographic feature ‘this-has-been’ in his book Camera Lucida. This chapter also establishes the concept of ‘an imagined return’ from exile in photography and its installation, and discusses the subject of longing for the original home for an imagined return. Here I propose the hypothesis that exiles have different desires and subjects in terms of ‘return’ due to different personal traits based on culture diversity and backgrounds. Most exiles desire to return ‘home’, but what are the motivations and subjects of their desire? This question sums up the main subject of the written component.

The following three chapters are titled according to the different subjects of ‘an imagined return’ that reflect on my personal exile: parents, homeland and childhood (the chronological order of the installation). The three chapters are the main body of this thesis. Its main concept ‘an imagined return’ originates from my five sets of artworks, and each chapter includes the relevant ones. The written structure provides an indication of the concepts of my artworks, generated by my experience of personal exile.

Chapter 4 ‘An Imagined Return to One’s Parents’ concentrates on the missing subject ‘parents’. This chapter focuses on the concept of the dutiful son in Confucianism in Taiwanese culture, and also on migrants/exiles who have moved from countryside to city due to the social changes accompanying the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy in contemporary Taiwan. These two factors are contradictory for me as a Taiwanese exile. The final two sections explore the photographic works Father and Mother and me as a Christmas tree.

Chapter 5 ‘An Imagined Return to the Homeland’ focuses on two specific subjects: Chinatown and the abandoned buildings. It contains an analysis of Chinatown viewed as a substitute Chinese ‘homeland’ for exiles20. It also presents the condition

20 Because of the history between Taiwan and China, most of us come from the same Chinese ancestors; thus we Taiwanese sometimes define ourselves as Chinese as well as Taiwanese.
of many abandoned buildings as a symbol of exile in my hometown. The final two sections present my photographic works 1997 and Thirty-Thousand-Miles.

**Chapter 6** ‘An Imagined Return to Childhood’ explores this more universal theme of ‘childhood’ through exile. The loss of childhood here becomes a metaphor for the condition of exile that is explored in this chapter together with the ways in which exiled artists use family photographs to represent their condition. The final section presents my photographic work, *Childhood*.

**Chapter 7** sums up the outcome of the installation in all its formal aesthetic aspects. It presents the installation that enriches the photographic works’ main concept in order to represent it as an integrated form. The chapter also illustrates the process of making the installation, thus demonstrating the practical aspects, and discusses in retrospect, other thoughts generated by the installation.

**Chapter 8** gives a further and entire review of what the thesis has achieved on the research methodology, the understanding of the theme ‘an imagined return’, and my personal, cultural and artistic approach to the theme. It also explains my transitional experience of exile and redemption.
Chapter 2  Exile in Contemporary Photography in Taiwan

2.1  Introduction
In this chapter, I will examine contemporary photography based on the theme of exile in my homeland, Taiwan. Its purpose is to explain the importance and originality of this thesis through a critical review of relevant Taiwanese photographic works.

The chapter begins with a brief political and economic history of Taiwan since 1945, and a review of contemporary theory and practice, which are related to the theme of exile. Then, it discusses the dictionary definition of exile, which explores one that is more appropriate to this thesis and points out the psychological aspect of ‘an imagined return’. Based on this definition, it reviews contemporary photography in Taiwan and provides a wider investigation and commentary in response to the research assumption that there is a lack of material dealing with the issue of ‘exile’ in Taiwanese contemporary photography.

2.2  A brief political and economic history of Taiwan since 1945
This section gives a brief political and economic history of Taiwan since 1945, in relation to the theme of exile, migrants and displacement.

2.2.1  A brief political history since 1945
There have been three stages to the political development of Taiwan since 1945.

A. 1945-1949
In 1945, at the end of World War II, the aggressor, Japan, was defeated. The Kuomintang (國民黨) Chinese Government, took control of Taiwan from the Japanese. In this way, Taiwan ended fifty years of Japanese rule which began in 1895, but passed to another unfamiliar government. Thus began a time of
uncertainty; neither the Taiwanese nor the Chinese knew how to deal with one another under Chiang Kai-Shek’s (蔣介石) leadership.

During their time in control, the Japanese had established a high standard of living in Taiwan which was at that time described as a modernised society.¹ Conversely, the Kuomintang did not consider Taiwan to be a base for the nation. They thought of it only as a temporary location and resource for a counterattack on the Mainland. The Taiwanese were also ashamed of Chiang’s subordinate Chen Yi’s (陳儀) corrupt behaviour on the island. Therefore, the Chinese and Taiwanese had very different expectations. Conflicts such as the 288 Incident, in 1947, were an inevitable result. Many Taiwanese politicians, intellectuals and artists were killed. In order to control the worsening situation, Chiang imposed Martial Law in 1949 and Taiwan passed into an era marked by losses of freedom and speech, and restricted activity.² “The Garrison Command is one of the active military commands under the Military Defense. Its responsibilities include authorizing citizens to travel abroad, monitoring all entries into Taiwan, approving meetings and rallies, reviewing and sanctioning books and periodicals, and maintaining social order”.³ When I studied in Taipei in the 1980s, I could still sense restraint in society.

B. 1949-1980s

In the 1950s, Taiwan was still in a dangerous situation. There were two crises in the Taiwan Strait, in 1954 and 1958, where Jinmen island (金門), at the frontier between Taiwan and China, was heavily bombarded by artillery when the Chinese government threatened to ‘liberate’ Taiwan. The Kuomintang realized that they needed to plan over a longer term and would have to stay in Taiwan for a while. In the 1960s and 1970s, the relationship between China and America improved, because America was seeking support against the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) through cooperation with China. Therefore, in 1971, the Taiwan ROC (Republic of China) was forced to withdraw from the United Nations, following which many countries gradually broke off diplomatic relations. Japan, for instance, broke off relations in 1972. In the same year, Taiwan began its new policy of ‘Pragmatic Diplomacy’: “This was envisioned as mobilizing every kind of resource - political, economic, scientific, technological, cultural and sporting - to develop ‘substantial’

¹ Fang-Ming Chen’s (陳芳明) introduction to the book Unpredictable Changes in a Hundred Years in Taiwan (Taipei: Common Wealth Magazine, 2000) iii.
² For more information, see Chapter 3 “The Return of Mainland Rule” in the following book: Denny Roy. Taiwan: A Political History (New York: Cornell UP, 2003) 55-75.
links with states that had terminated diplomatic relations, in the hope of gaining political concessions”. 4

Due to the loss of support from other countries, Taiwan began to strengthen its own interior, and in the 1970s, the Kuomintang recruited Taiwanese intellectuals into government in a move known as ‘Localization’. This involved a transition from an authority of ‘hardship’ to one of ‘soft policy’. It was influenced by economic growth, because businessmen had power and money which enabled them to negotiate with government. 5 When Chiang Ching-Kuo (蔣經國) became president in 1978, this new political generation had moved Taiwan’s politics one more step towards democracy. Soon after that, in 1986, the first opposition party DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) was established, then, in 1987, martial law was lifted. Taiwan has now become a democratic country, and people have freedom of speech, freedom to communicate, to assemble, to demonstrate, and to establish parties. This is as a result of many protests which were held in the 1980s in favour of democratization.

C. From the 1990s to the present

In 1990, Lee Teng-Hui (李登輝) was elected as the president of Taiwan ROC (Republic of China). He had a bold vision for Taiwan’s future and strove for several political issues such as ‘Two Chinas’, or ‘One China, One Taiwan’, Taiwan’s reentry into the UN, and Taiwanese independence. Chinese PRC (People’s Republic of China) president Jiang Zemin’s (江澤民) ‘One China’ Principle’ was rejected by Lee. This enraged the government of China and, in 1995 and 1996, China held military exercises, including missile launches off the Taiwanese coast. These were the most serious incidents since the 1958 Kinmen crisis in the Taiwan Strait. 6

In February 1995, the 228 Memorial Tower was built in Taipei in recognition of those politically smeared Taiwanese intellectuals whose lives were sacrificed in 1947. This represented a milestone; that the government could accept ‘another voice’ as opposition and give it a formal name in Taiwanese political history. In 2000, DPP candidate Chen Shui-Bian (陳水扁) was elected president; this was the first time the opposition party had taken power.

In a conclusion, all of these transitions were relatively peaceful processes (with the exception of the 228 Incident in 1947) which is why the Asian Wall Street Journal

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coined the phrase, ‘Taiwan’s Quiet Revolution’. It was a miracle which made the Taiwanese people proud of themselves and stems perhaps from the concept of Confucianism which is rooted in our culture and emphasises peace and stability.

2.2.2 A nation exiled from Mainland China to Taiwan

Most political and war exiles migrated to Taiwan around 1949. About 1,500,000 exiles came with Chiang Kai-Shek from Mainland China to Taiwan. This was a human disaster, because they could not go back home for decades. Apart from the fact that the Kuomintang wanted to regain their lost country, the people also missed their homeland. They were eager to return as soon as possible. This homesickness is part of human nature, but some Taiwanese politicians used it as a political point, saying that the mainlanders did not love Taiwan. This made it more difficult for them to live on the small island to which they had been exiled. Furthermore, martial law and the ban on communication between China and Taiwan heightened their feelings of anxiety and hopelessness. They were isolated from their homeland and were totally cut off from any contact with their relatives. More than one million people were separated from their homeland, without any further relationship. Fortunately, martial law was lifted in 1987, and people are now allowed to visit their homes in mainland China. However, with the passage of time, most of the mainlanders’ parents have passed away. Some mainlanders are too old to make the trip and some have even died in Taiwan. Although they can return, the pain of homesickness means they can not easily be reconciled to their past.

2.2.3 Economic development

Despite the political situation, Taiwan has had successful economic growth. There have been four major stages in Taiwan’s economic development since 1945. The first stage was in the 1950s and was concerned with land reform policy and the development of bases for industrialisation. Agriculture, and the export of sugar and rice, was the main area of activity. However, “between 1951 and 1968, the US provided Taiwan with US1.5 billion of what was called ‘non-military aid’”. In the second stage, between 1966 and 1980, Taiwan underwent rapid industrialisation, the main area of growth being in the manufacturing industries. Export products were

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7 Jason C. Hu. Ed. Quiet Revolutions on Taiwan, Republic of China (Taipei: Kwang Hwa, 1995) vii.
mainly electronic goods, textiles and garments, iron and steel, and petrochemicals.\footnote{Cheng-Pu Duan, \textit{The Taiwan’s Economy in the Post-War Era}. (Taipei: Ren-Jian, 1994) 274-280.} In the third stage (1980s) industry turned to computer-related products such as printers, computer discs and monitors. The final stage, from the 1990s to the present day, is characterized by the industrial production of semi-conductors and silicon chips and has a high-tech orientation. In 2003, the Taiwanese government promoted the new policy, ‘Cultural & Creative Industries’, which is a six-year project. It places emphasis on design and creativity with a view to adding greater profit to existing products. This will take Taiwan’s industries forward to the next stage.

\subsection*{2.2.4 Economic migrants, exiles and intellectuals on the island}

There are other migration and displacement issues on Taiwan, the main causes of which are economic and this has influenced all levels of society. People have to move to find work and to better their lives. Internal migration on the island is the most influential factor in population movement in contemporary Taiwan. From 1960 to 1990, the population increased dramatically in the cities; conversely, the towns of the countryside became more sparsely populated. This was because the commercial and industrial cities had more to offer in the way of jobs. I have been affected by this situation.\footnote{For more information, see Section 4.3.1. From the extended family to the nuclear family.}

In the decade 1989 to 1999 immigration resulted in a significant increase in migrant workers. Before this there were very few foreigners in Taiwan, but in 2000, there were 326,000 guest workers, people who were only permitted to stay whilst working on the island.\footnote{Chia-Shan Chai. “Be a Guest in Taiwan: Migrant Workers’ Dream and Disgrace”. Taipei: \textit{Rhythms Monthly}. Feb. 2004. No. 67. <http://taipei.tzuchi.org.tw/rhythms/magazine/content/67/outworker.htm>}

Most came from very poor countries in south-east Asia, such as Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. Their desire was to earn money and improve their own lives and those of their families. They worked in the so-called 3D (dirty, difficult, dangerous) environment, their working and living condition were poor, and they were treated as the lowest class of people. This was a kind of self economic exile. However, they were in search of a better future in their homeland, not in their guest country.

Another migrant movement which also began in the 1990s is the emigration of Taiwanese merchants to China, to set up new manufacturing plants, investments and businesses. This is attractive because of the cheaper capital which is available in China. Now, there are about 600,000 Taiwanese in the vast country of China.\footnote{Li-Wen Dong. “The Risk Indicator of Business and Investment in China”. Taipei: \textit{Mainland Affairs Council}, 2005. <http://www.mac.gov.tw/big5/risk/3-1.pdf>}


Even though Taiwan and China have a very similar culture, traditions and language, somehow Taiwanese people still do not feel at ease there, as they do at home. Some Taiwanese have left their families and live alone in China. This is a lonely life and news of affairs with new lovers is very common.

2.2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, in the past sixty years (1945-the present), Taiwan has experienced stable development both politically and economically. It has undergone a quiet revolution. With regard to the issue of exile and migration, there are two main trends. One was the political exile of people from mainland China to Taiwan around the 1950s. This migration ended the period of Japanese colonisation, but also introduced a new Chinese government. It also brought new immigrants to Taiwan, following the history of colonization in Holland, Portugal, the Chinese Ching Dynasty and Japan. The other trend is that of economic exile and migration which has been taking place since the 1960s. Due to fast economic growth, people have moved en masse. There has been internal movement from the countryside to the cities, an influx of migrant workers from south-east Asia, and an exodus of Taiwanese merchants leaving for China. The volume of economic migration is tremendous, that more than the political exiles. It represents a self-made choice for better economics, life and jobs. That is a post-modern phenomenon, which involves a new life style with mobility, fluidity, and uncertainty.

2.3 Contemporary theory and practice related to the theme of exile

This section gives a brief review of contemporary theory and practice which are related to the theme of exile.

2.3.1 Exile and displacement in contemporary discourse

If the easy alliance of place and identity was never a reality for all those who experienced the enforced displacement of diaspora and exile, it has recently been disrupted for very different sorts of people. The forces of new
technologies, globalization and ‘time-space compression’ have together created a sense of information flows, fragmentation and pace replacing what is now perceived to be a previous stability of homogeneity, community and place.13

The post-modern debates about exile and displacement are positioned within the discourse of modernity which emphasises stability, permanence and unity. In the contemporary world, people move and travel either physically (exiles, migrants, tourists) or virtually (through movie, television, or the Internet), and do so more frequently than in the modern era. The phenomenon of flux and fragmentation questions the firm attachment to ‘place’ or ‘home’. Therefore, “the concept of a fixed, unitary, and bounded culture must give way to a sense of the fluidity and permeability of cultural sets”.14 We are no longer in a situation of stability and a fear of destroying this condition is apparent. The two World Wars serve as a good example; people migrated and were exiled in large numbers. To be modern “is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world - and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are”.15 Now, we are in the unstable environment of the post-modern world. This has reflected what Ihab Hassan called ‘Indeterminacy’ in the post-modern theory.16 This unprecedented human experience has given us cause to rethink the meaning of ‘place and displacement’. If the concepts of place and home are no longer fixed, then the meaning of exile and displacement are challenged.

The new media, and especially the Internet and virtual cyberspace, help to undermine the reality in our world. Jean Baudrillard’s book Simulations described this process of simulation. An image is the reflection of a basic reality which it then masks and perverts; after that it masks the absence of it; and finally “it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum”. “Simulacrum is true”.17 According to this, the relationship between real place and people is loose. People now do not feel the same isolation and anxiety as before because they are surrounded by virtual images, but they do feel a sense of the ‘unreal’; a feeling of ‘floating on the surface’. People can now experience things by staying at home,

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using the Internet, and this seems to remove the distance between people and objects. F. Jameson said “The whole character of post-modernism is the disappearance of distance”. He asserted that if the television is in the living room and belongs to you, then the images on the television also belong to you. This concept can be extended to cyber-space and the cyber-discourse is, indeed, an update on Marshall McLuhan’s ‘global village’: “The digital world, within this perspective, will facilitate neighborhoods and cities free of geographic limits on streetwalkers, border-crossers, and transcontinental flaneurs”. However, this ‘virtual’ reality is an illusion; the illusion overcomes the reality. Although the distance and displacement still exist in reality, the concept of exile flows between reality and illusion; the real geographical distance and the intimacy in simulation. This is different to the modern locality, the firm place in the firm distance:

Roots are in a certain place. Home is (in) a place. Homeland.

From another perspective, the physical space related to home is always an issue in the discourse on exile. It can give a place-based identity: “We are born into relationships that are always based in a place. This form of primary and ‘placeable’ bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance”. Gaston Bachelard’s The Poetics of Space and Clare Cooper Marcus’s House as a Mirror of Self discuss the psychological aspects of the physical house in some depth and confirm the importance of the abode even in the post-modern world. Bachelard explains the intimacy between our habitat space and ourselves: “By remembering ‘houses’ and ‘rooms’, we learn to ‘abide’ within ourselves. …They are in us as much as we are in them”. Marcus claimed that our house can be a mirror which reflects the inhabitant’s self. This indicates the influence of our houses on our personality and identity: “A home fulfills many needs: a place of self-expression, a vessel of memories, a refuge from the outside world, a cocoon where we can feel nurtured and let down our guard”. Our houses, however, help to form us but also strain our imagination of ‘home’. Losing one’s home can result in identity problems: “It’s a problem of identity. Many of my American friends feel they don’t have enough of it.

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21 Ibid, 97.
23 This is much influenced by Carl Jung’s concept, that one’s home is a symbolic mirror of one’s inner self.
They often feel worthless, or they don’t know how they feel? … maybe it’s because everyone is always on the move and undergoing enormous changes, so they lose track of who they’ve been and have to keep tabs on who they’re becoming all the time.”

Fast movement from here to there cannot provide people with a sense of stability and security linked to place and home and this can cause problems of place-based identity.

2.3.2 Contemporary art and photographic practice in exile, migration and displacement

The term exile cannot be seen only in terms of the negative aspects of loss and desire. It is also, according to recent studies, as potent as aesthetic gain. Edward Said stated that exile is “both a condition of terminal loss’ and, at the same time, ‘a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture”. Many artists have discovered their creative imagination through exile. Alienation and displacement have become a new experience which has stimulated their imagination. Their desire to return to their homeland has also become a motivation for them to survive in another land, and “to transform the figure of rupture back into a ‘figure of connection’”. Their creations in art are an adventure, evidence, an expression of the self, and also redemption.

Examples of writers in exile include Victor Hugo, D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht, James Joyce, Vladimir Nabokov, Milan Kundera and Aleksandr Isaiyevich Solzhenistsyn. Other artists who travelled to America, a popular destination for migrants, include Hans Hoffmann, George Grosz, Joseph Albers, André Kertész, Walter Gropius, Laslo Moholy-Nagy, Mies van der Rohe, Piet Mondrian, Hans Richter, Saul Steinberg, Naum Gabo, Max Beckmann, and Marchel Duchamp. Examples of migrant artists in the United Kingdom are Vong Phaophanit, Mona Hatoum, Paula Rego, and Taiwanese Li Yuan-Chia (李元佳). Other Taiwanese artists in exilic situations are Tehching Hsieh (謝德慶), Shun-Chu Chen (陳順築), Ming-Liang Tsai (蔡明亮), and Ben Yu (游本寬).

Exile, migration and displacement are also common issues in contemporary photographic practice which are here catogorised into two parts. The first is

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photojournalism and photographic art. The second focuses on autobiographical art practice, especially based on the medium of photography. The latter is more relevant to the argument of this thesis.

In photojournalism, of marked significance is the image Migrant Mother (1936), by FSA’s (the Farm Security Administration) Dorothea Lange which records migrant workers’ lives during the Great Depression of the late 1920s and 30s in America. This photograph illustrates the social and environmental impact on migrants and represents photographic power in the social arena in modern times. With the intervention of the journalist’s eye, people ‘believe’ what they see through the lens of the camera. There have been some great photojournalists who have documented the displacement of migrants’ and ,exiles’ over a long period of time in order to explore their lives in depth. For instance, Josef Koudelka, himself an exile, created the works Exiles (1988) and Gypsies (1976), and not only recorded the outside world, but also reflected his own condition in the spiritual and physical state of exile. Sebastiao Salgado’s Migrations (2000) reported the global phenomenon across thirty-five countries of the contemporary flux of human beings around the world. Frederic Brenner’s book Exile at Home (1998) focused on documenting the lives of Jews around the world, over a period of two decades. People on the social fringes, such as lepers and psychotics, are also of interest to photojournalists. Ching-Hui Cho’s (周慶輝) photographic work The Leprosarium (1989-1993), and Chian-Chi Chang’s (張乾琦) work The Chain (1993-2001) document these specific groups in Taiwan. Using the method of re-photography, The Bus (2001) by Daniel Meadows, and Triptychs (1994) by Milton Rogovin created comparisons of groups of people’s lives, over twenty years from past to present. In the realm of photographic art, these two artists did not intend to record the life only, but to capture the soul of exile and displacement without a documentary boundary. Installation artist and photographer Shimon Attie’s The Writing on the Wall project (1991-1993), projected the Jewish past onto the same locations where the original images were taken in a way which was evocative of the forgotten community in Berlin. Photographer John Yang’s Mount Zion (2001) caught the spiritual side of the demolished exiled life in the Jewish cemetery in New York.

In autobiographical art the artists locate themselves as the main characters in the stories in their photographic works. When it is easier for the camera to look out at the world, they try instead to look into themselves to ‘tell’ their own stories. Personal stories somehow reflect the whole of society, which consists of all individuals. The subjects of their works may be self-representations, family, friends, home, or even the whole of the country in which they live. The individual, drawing from a vast array of people, uses their personal and direct voice to enrich the diversity of our post-modern society. For example, photography can be used as a means of therapy to
solve a personal or family crisis, as in Jo Spence’s confirmation of personal and political identity, Shun-Chu Chen’s loss of homeland, Araki Nobuyoshi’s loss of his wife. Jo Spence often acted as herself in front of the camera to heal herself, or, as she said, as photo therapy. Narrative based photographers (Denis Roche, Hervé Guibert, Duane Michaels, Nan Goldin, Christian Boltanski, and Robert Frank) are story tellers in photographic autobiographies. Nan Goldin’s works reveal the emotional intimacy among friends. Some, such as Claude Cahun, Sally Mann, Yasumasa Morimura and Gilbert and George, deal with sexual issues. Claude Cahun’s self-portrait collage represents the ambiguity of sexual identity. Morimura’s work *Daughter of Art History* also projects the ambiguity of his sexuality. No doubt, Gilbert and George represented themselves in huge portraits as an acclamation of their homosexual relationship. Moreover, with regard to the issue of self-identity, Cindy Sherman plays an important role in contemporary art. She portrayed herself as an individual in her native America, playing with a fragmented multi-identity. She tells the story of her nation through herself. Her works have created a fluid and complex personality, that is located in the relationship between herself and the culture of her country.

Focusing on the theme of exile, migration and displacement, a number of contemporary photographers tell their stories. Three major visual means of representation express the sense of displacement. These are: spatial displacement, ruined buildings, and tracing the family.

**A. Spatial displacement**

Conceptual artists in the 1970s used photography to question the relationship between people and land. Jan Dibbets and John Hilliard used conjunctive images to present displacement from the land. Through the use of jointed photographs the viewer was unable to see the land as a whole. Rather, they saw it as a reconstruction. This allowed viewers to re-think the meaning of land and their relationship with it. Some contemporary photographers have used visual strategies to imply the disconnection and connection between people and land. They include Weng Fen (翁奮) (*On the Wall*, 2002), Shun-Chu Chen, Ben Yu (*The Puppet Bridegroom*, 2002), Jui-Chung Yao (姚瑞中) (*Recover Mainland China-Action*, 1997), and Hai Bo (海波) (*Bridge & Winter*, 1999). In their works, viewers can see clearly the dislocation of people in other lands. Furthermore, the film directors, Andrey Tarkovsky (*Solaris*, 1972, *Nostalgia*, 1983), Theo Angelopoulos (*Ulysses’ Gaze*, 1995, *Eternity and a Day*, 1998), and Tsai Ming-Liang (*What Time is It There?* 2001) also present the concept as a journey into exile. In these films, the characters are

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lost in location and are anxious because they are in an unfamiliar land. Other storytellers have used multiple photographs and text to produce a photo-text. Examples include Duane Michael (The House I Once Called Home, 2003) and Wright Morris (The Inhabitants, 1946). Both mourned the loss of their home. It is not the disappearance of the home, rather the disappearance of its inhabitants that matters. Moreover, Chih-Chien Wang’s work (Object, 2003) employs daily objects such as an empty fruit basket to communicate symbolic meanings of displacement.

B. Ruined buildings
Images of buildings can have multiple meanings, as historical documentation, cultural heritage, or personal identity. However, some photographers have represented their house, town or homeland in a ruined condition to express the fact that the inhabitants have left, the condition of displacement of people. Ruined buildings became the main characters in their photographic works. Examples of such photographers are William Christenberry, Max Belcher, Beverly Buchanan, Michael Putnam (Silent Screens, 2000), Jeff Holder (Ghost Signs of Aarkansas, 1997) and Jui-Chung Yao (Roam the Ruins of Taiwan, 2004). Three artists, Christenberry, Belcher and Buchanan, returned to their ancestral past to capture the spirit of their origins. Christenberry’s works focus on houses without their inhabitants to give a sense of emptiness and loneliness. The ruined buildings also imply deterioration in the house or hometown. Both Putnam and Holder’s works select specific but common subjects from around America - movie theaters and advertisement signs - to look at changes over time, the fast-changing world and the lost past.

C. Tracing the family
Researching personal or family history can be a metaphor for the condition of exile, because it may involve looking at migrant people from past to present and especially applies to those families which have a history of exile and migration. Yinong Shao (邵逸農) & Chen Mu (慕辰) (Family Register, 2000), and Hai Bo’s works (Bridge & Winter, 1999) can be seen as representative of a fast modernised China; people migrate frequently in order to survive economically. The act of tracing back their origin is to confirm themselves, who they are and where they come from in this vulnerable world. Brighton-based photographer Julia Winkler explores her great uncle Hugo’s story not only as an anthropological search, but also as a re-assertion to herself of her identity and Jewish blood. Traces (2001) explored Hugo’s story of the Holocaust. A short film Leaving Atlantis (2003) continually explored Hugo’s

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escape to the United Kingdom from Austria and reflects the experience of cultural displacement. The Jewish artist Christian Boltanski used found objects and photographs of other people, and looked back at the history of the Holocaust and death. He appropriated photographs to create a fictional style of art, fusing himself and the community in order to project his artworks into a collective memory.

2.4 Exploring the meanings of exile

2.4.1 The meanings of exile

Exile is the main subject of this thesis. Dictionary definitions provide a basic knowledge of its meaning.

Exile: n. 1. the state of being sent away from one’s native country or home, esp. for political reasons or as a punishment; forced absence. 2. a long stay away from one’s country or home. 3. a person who lives away from her or his own country from choice or because forced to do so. v. to send somebody into exile.32

This definition suggests a sense that exile is a physical and geographical displacement from home/country. The reasons for being in exile are various: enforced or through choice, because of political punishment, economical migration, or even simply a preference for the life style of a foreign society/country. From the definition, exile is about the distance of space more than the distance of time, although its use has been expanded in modern literature. It can refer to spiritual removal without physical displacement, as in social exile,33 but this thesis places the emphasis on physical displacement in the sense of being away from home. In other words, ‘exile’ equates to ‘away from home’. All of the exile issues dealt with in this thesis are generated as a result of this basic equation. Exiles have left home and live in another place and the experience of displacement has become the universal experience for all exiles. This is an essential condition in this thesis.

32 This is taken from the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 1995) and is representative of definitions in other dictionaries.
The following further explanations stem from the ‘not home’ definition:

- Home exists geographically. It should occupy a physical space. The meaning of home can also be a town/country from which one is exiled, as in ‘hometown’ or ‘homeland’. Especially for exiles who leave their own country, the home country becomes an obvious object instead of home itself. “I am at home only in Bohemia”. The scope of home has, thus, been expanded.\(^{34}\)

- It does not matter how far away the exile is from their home, even if they only cross a river. It does not matter whether they leave their country and mother tongue. Exile is more concerned with the mind and awareness of distance/displacement.

- The essential condition is that the person misses his/her home.

- When they go back to live at home, the state of exile is presumed to have finished.

- If exiles visit home their exile is not considered to be at an end because they have returned to ‘visit’ and not to ‘live’. After visiting, they still need to return to their foreign home. Some exiles visit home regularly, but others leave and never return.

- Some exiles eventually go back to their home, but others will never return. Furthermore, most of them do not know how long their exile will last.

- ‘Exile’ can refer to a person, a family, a town residence or even a nation.

- The definition mentions that exile can be enforced or arise through choice. The reasons for forced (involuntary) exile are usually political, punitive, economic or human, or due to natural disaster. On the other hand, the reasons for voluntary exile (self-exile) are more personal, and may be social, economic, sexual, or even simple preference.

2.4.2 The mind of exiles

Considering the exile’s state of mind, exile is not only about physical displacement from home, but also, essentially, psychological suffering and desire. Edward W. Said said that exile is one of the saddest fates of human beings.\(^{35}\) Exile in this thesis is viewed, not only from the physical displacement point of view, but also in its psychological aspects. Suffering and desire are due to the loss and void of the place of origin, homeland, identity, mother tongue and culture. “Exile is a time when people


experience, often painfully, an almost carnal attachment to the territory (country, native soil, homeland) and group (family, relatives, community, nation) they come from". Because the exile has suddenly been cut off from his/her origins, it is like being uprooted or ruptured. Loss and discontinuity are the main symptoms of exile, which has even been described as a form of bereavement. Put simply, the condition of exile cannot be sustained without the psychological aspects of loss and suffering.

Furthermore, the exile rejects reality and lives in a world of the past because they do not want to live permanently in the new land. They see themselves on a temporary stay. Most prepare to go to home when conditions allow, but do not know when that will be. Consequently, they are not involved in society, and tend to be outsiders because they do not wish to belong. This concept of ‘temporary stay’ means that exiles live in unstable situations. For instance, I have written, “I know I can return, and also I must return. Day after day, year after year, after 18 years, I still believe I must return to my home. However, nowadays I can’t tell you the time.” This longing for return has influenced my life in an unstable way, temporarily living in a place for a very long time.

In this thesis, I choose some examples of Chinese verse to enhance the theme of exile and also to reflect on my cultural roots. For instance, Liou, Zong-Yuan’s poem Lines for My Friends and Family in the Capital after Visiting the Mountains in Liou Zhou with Venerable Master Hao Chu.

海畔尖山似剑铓，秋来处处割愁肠。若为化得身千亿，散上峰头望故乡。The peaks on the seaside, like blades, Cut my sickened heart on autumn days. If I could multiply myself, over the mountains I would, Scatter my numerous selves, all watching my homeland.

In this poem, the writer repeatedly uses the metaphor of the sharp mountain as a knife to cut the intestines, symbolising his feeling of sadness. Imagining himself as millions of selves, he wants to fly to the peaks of the mountains to look over his

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38 Ibid. Abstract.
40 In history, Taiwanese culture has been strongly influenced by China. This is the reason I choose three poems from ancient China in this section.
homeland. This indicates a strong desire from the exile’s mind to watch over his homeland, not only himself, but those millions of selves.

According to the above definition (see 2.4.1), exiles can be categorized as forced exiles and self-exiles. These equate roughly to political and economic exiles. Political/forced exiles can be recognised as exiles, refugees or asylum seekers; economic/self exiles consist of migrant workers and professionals, settlers or undocumented workers. Political exiles, as mentioned above, suffer something akin to bereavement because they have lost their homeland and their relatives. Those Taiwanese veterans who were forced to stay in Taiwan and were unable to return to their homeland in mainland China, lost everything: parents, lovers, relatives and their old homes. They also lost communication with ‘home’, totally severing their ties.

Self, or economic, exiles migrate to find a better life. They suffer less in terms of their loss of ‘home’ because the choice was made through their own free will. Psychologically, they feel guilty because they ‘chose’ to leave their homeland, and to be “better off than family and friends back home”. Economic exiles, though they might choose to stay at home, choose not to do so and thus blame themselves. That is why they often experience guilt. However, there are various degrees of self, economic and intellectual exile. For instance, in developed countries such as America and those of Europe, people choose their future homeland freely and are sufficiently mobile to move. Taiwanese high-tech intellectuals also move of their own free will to America’s Silicon Valley or NASA. On the other hand, in developing countries, people need to migrate to survive. This is a different degree of self choice.

Human movement causes homesickness. Nowadays, there are nearly thirty million migrants crowded into cities every year in the developing countries of the world. If they are unable to find ideal jobs, the rational next step is for them to migrate to other cities, taking them still further away from home. The more the physical distance increases the greater the psychological homesickness. Most economic and intellectual exiles move from the countryside to the cities, together with self-contradiction between their opportunities for their future and the struggle of personal post-modern fragmentation. Therefore, they have a mixture of feelings, ranging from joy at choosing their future, to guilt at having left home, and also a sense of loss of their homeland.

With regard to the above, self and economic exiles not only feel guilty, but also celebrate their choice of a new life. In the book Questions of Travel, Kaplan compares modern exiles and post-modern tourists. She says, “The commonsense definitions of exile and tourism suggest that they occupy opposite poles in the

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modern experience of displacement: Exile implies coercion; tourism celebrates choice. Exile connotes the estrangement of the individual from an original community; tourism claims community on a global scale”. From the viewpoint of this thesis, the notion of self-exile falls between the exile and the tourist. The self exile, thus, also celebrates their choice of a new life. This breaks down the modern definition, which is described only in terms of melancholy and loss. Self-exiles, those who move for economic reasons, for intellectual purposes or simply because they prefer the new life style, move according to the contemporary definition of exile - it results in a mixture of a sense of loss and displacement, but mobility, fluidity, even celebration, as in the post-modern condition of hybridity and fragmentation.

2.4.3 An imagined return

From the psychological point of view, exiles suffer due to the loss of their home; on the positive side, however, their mind always intends to return. This intention gives them a hope or expectation to survive in the foreign land. Even though their physical body exists in the new place, their minds travel back to their homeland through the imagination. They cannot return in reality, but they do so in their dreams, daydreams and imagination or even during suffering. Therefore, the concept of ‘an imagined return’ is essential to the exile’s survival.

Why is ‘an imagined return’ so important in an exile’s new life? As previously mentioned, exiles suffer during their daily lives. The imagined return gives them a window to escape reality and to survive in the imagination, even if this only gives temporary solace. Furthermore, the imagined return provides a psychological reason for exiles to deal with day-to-day life in their adopted land. In the thesis Intending to Return: Portuguese Migrants in France, the intention to return is significant in the migrant’s life. Caspari says “The return orientation is central among many Portuguese migrants in France, not just as a latent desire, but as a system of meaning and a structuring principle in everyday life; plans to return not only justify migration in the long term, but are a priority which is used to organize and give coherence to the migrants’ daily strategies and choices. The maintenance of an alternative value system, an identity, and options aside from those that conditions in France impose on them, give the migrants a certain autonomy despite the constraints of their situation”. He pointed out that this intention to return has allowed Portuguese exiles to form an association in France, where they enjoy their

own lifestyle in terms of ritual, language and culture. It is a substitute, but also sustenance for exiles and migrants who are consoled by Portuguese people living nearby rather than by their far away home. In this way, the intention to return helps the exiles to view their lives more positively.

In the long history of China, numerous poets, especially in the Tang Dynasty, experienced exile and created many poems on this theme. The Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 AD) included a long period of internal revolt and foreign invasion resulting in mass exile. Poets experience exile deeply and reflect on it in their poems. What follows are two Chinese poems which enhance the concept of ‘an imagined return’. The first is Kuang Gu’s (顧況) Pining for My Homeland (憶故園) in the Tang Dynasty: 45

綿繫多山人復稀，
杜鵑啼處淚沾衣。
故園此去千餘里，
春夢猶能夜夜歸。

So desolate to see so many deserted mountains,
At the sound of the cuckoo, my tears dampen the clothes.
My homeland is thousands of miles from here,
And every night only dreams can bring me there.

Bearing in mind the inconvenient transportation in ancient China, exiles leaving home for a place thousands of miles away were effectively further away than they are today. They counted the time in days and months, not by minutes and hours as we do today. Therefore, it was very difficult to return to their hometown; some never did, and died away from home. Through poetry, however, exiles were able to return to their homes every night and dreaming became a way to imagine that return. They felt free to return in dreams and poetry without the restrictions of reality and this was perhaps their greatest consolation.

The other example is from Li Bo’s (李白) famous poetry Night Thoughts (靜夜思). This poetry is very sad and gives the best artistic expression in Chinese literature of being in exile:

床前明月光，
疑是地上霜。
舉頭望明月，
低頭思故鄉。 47

I wake, and moonbeams play around my bed,
Glittering like hoar-frost to my wandering eyes;
Up towards the glorious moon I raise my head,
Then lay me down – and thoughts of home arise. 48

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47 Ibid. 244-247.
48 The poem is translated by Herbert A. Giles.
In this poetry, Li Bo uses the moon to imagine returning to his hometown. It is one of the objects associated with home and when exiles are separated from other familiar objects, they can at least see the moon. It appears everywhere. Whilst moon-gazing, an exile may recall going through the same motions at home. Alternatively, they might imagine people in their hometown simultaneously doing the same thing. Looking at the moon has formed a virtual connective line between the exile and their hometown. In this way, exiles return, even if only through their imaginations.

2.4.4 Conclusion

The discussion above describes how, in this thesis, the meaning of exile is more complex than its original definition. It is, rather, a state where a person lives away from her/his own home or country, from choice or because forced to do so. In addition, the person experiences a state of mind that leads her/him to suffer from a sense of loss only made tolerable by a desire to return. Therefore, the concept of ‘an imagined return’ becomes a necessity for the exile to survive in a foreign land. Exile is both the physical displacement and the psychological experience of loss, suffering and desire.

2.5 Exile with or without an imagined return: a critical investigation of contemporary photography in Taiwan

This section uses the core issue of ‘an imagined return’ from exile to review contemporary photography in Taiwan after the 1980s. It categorizes photographic works into three types: the unitary atmosphere of pain and depression; the state of displacement in exile; and the theme ‘an imagined return’ from exile. The analyses are below.

2.5.1 The unitary atmosphere of suffering and depression

This unit reviews those photographic works which only have a single atmosphere of suffering and depression. This visual representation reflects on the common issues of hardship in exile.
Chau-Cheng Pan’s (潘朝成) Strangers (1993) series is a documentary. It represents life in a Veterans’ Home. One photograph shows a disabled veteran seated in a wheelchair (Fig. 2.5.1). It allows the viewer to sympathise with him and to think about his sorrow and trauma at leaving China, his homeland. Pan wrote of this situation “Strangers had no choice; they were forced to leave their home and did not even have time to say goodbye to their relatives. After that, they began their cannot-return-home journey”. Another photograph shows a veteran’s body marked with the anticommunist slogan (Fig. 2.5.2). His old body shows the pity rather than the will of anticommunism. The third photograph represents veterans behind wire netting, symbolizing their segregation from society (Fig. 2.5.3). In fact, many unmarried veterans who followed government withdrawal from mainland China to Taiwan after 1949. The Veterans’ Home is a place where the government takes care of most unmarried veterans. For more information about veterans, see Appendix 1.

49 Veterans are those retired soldiers who followed government withdrawal from mainland China to Taiwan after 1949. The Veterans’ Home is a place where the government takes care of most unmarried veterans. For more information about veterans, see Appendix 1.
veterans lived in Veterans’ Homes all their lives due to the difficulties of adjusting to their new lives in Taiwan. Therefore, ironically, they did not suffer assimilation issues, because they formed a world of their own, isolated from mainstream society. After decades, a withered, dead, sorrowful feeling pervades the Veterans’ Home.

Fig. 2.5.4. (Left) Ching-Hui Cho, Angel from The Leprosarium series, 1992.
Fig. 2.5.5. (Right) Ching-Hui Cho, Cleaning for the New Year from The Leprosarium series, 1992.

Fig. 2.5.6. (Left) Ching-Hui Cho, Taking a Rest from The Leprosarium series, 1993.
Fig. 2.5.7. (Right) Ching-Hui Cho, Patient on His Deathbed from The Leprosarium series, 1992.

Ching-Hui Cho’s (周慶輝) photographic work The Leprosarium (1989-1993) series documented lepers’ life in the leprosarium. When compared to Chau-Cheng Pan’s Strangers, his works give a broader view of the issue of exile. He specialized in metaphors within his photographs. For instance, in the image subtitled Angel he captured a moment when the leper’s gesture was like that of an angel (Fig. 2.5.4).
This becomes a metaphor for lepers. Because in reality they are segregated from society, the angel symbolizes the desire to fly out of the hell-like leprosarium. They want freedom but cannot achieve it. In another similar photograph, he caught the moment when a leper appeared in a shape of a cross, symbolizing the fact that religion had become a way to extricate oneself from physical imprisonment (Fig. 2.5.5). The other two photographs, named as Taking a Rest and Patient on His Deathbed, deal with quite common issues for lepers: amputation and death (Fig. 2.5.6 & 2.5.7). Cho represented these issues poetically rather than showing the issues directly. His concept is “all people are equal and do not need to be pitied. If you pity someone, you suppose you are superior to them”, 47 and this point of view allows him to see broader issues in his profession rather than narrowing his vision into sympathy. However, his poetic images slightly contradict the intensity of his documentary work.

Fig. 2.5.8. (Left) Tsung-Hui Hou, Long-Fa-Tang-1, 1983.
Fig. 2.5.9. (Right) Tsung-Hui Hou, Long-Fa-Tang-2, 1983.

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Tsung-Hui Hou’s Long-Fa-Tang (1983) series caught a group of psychotics wandering in a state of bemusement, disorder and nihilism, and having lost their self-consciousness (Fig. 2.5.8 & 2.5.9). This series represents a bitter, lugubrious, depressed world. One of the reasons for this could be the mouldy sub-standard film used to produce the images. Their world has been sealed, and there are no windows through which to escape. The images have nothing more to communicate to viewers, however, over and above the suffocating atmosphere. Coincidentally, Chian-Chi Chang (張乾琦), a member of the Magnum photo agency, produced The Chain (1993-2001), a series which documented the same people in South Taiwan over many years (Fig. 2.5.10 & 2.5.11). These images were like staged photographs, the psychotics standing in front of a camera with or without self-consciousness and the images simultaneously representing self-consciousness and loss of self. These were common issues for psychotics and Chang successfully played with this concept through controlled photography. His images were created using professional skills, compared to Hou’s amateur representations, but they still fall into the trap of ‘peeping at others’, the psychotics becoming the objects of our gaze. In this way, these ‘beautiful’ images please the viewer but are less concerned with issues of psychosis.
Ching-Tai Ho’s Shadowed Life (1990) series photographed vagrants in the capital city Taipei (Fig. 2.5.12 & 2.5.13). As the photography critic Li-Hsin Guo (郭力昕) said, this series “brings viewers to city corners where people never go and never wanted to go. These images allowed those surviving vagrants to gaze back at the viewer, thus accusing affluent society”. In his photobook, Ho used images accompanied by texts to represent about forty vagrants. The text gives basic information about each person and the reasons why they became vagrants. All were forced to leave their homes as exiles for different reasons and now lived on the streets of Taipei. The images represent them as sorrowful and hopeless, but the viewer can only see and read a kind of exaggerated sentimental expression, which does not draw attention to the vagrants’ difficult living conditions. Images and texts do not provide the viewer with further information, analysis or thought. Therefore, Ho has arguably failed to depict the social issues of a vagrant’s life. This problem has become very common in contemporary Taiwanese documentary photography and is further discussed below.

In conclusion, all works in this category - except Ching-Hui Cho’s, which have richer meanings, portraying stereotyped visual representations of exile, the single atmosphere of suffering and depression. This narrows down the broad meanings of exile and also decreases the strong social photographic function, especially in documentary photography. As Roland Barthes claimed that, “News photographs are very often unitary (the unitary photograph is not necessarily tranquil). In these

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images, no punctum: a certain shock – the literal can traumatize – but no disturbance; the photograph can ‘shout,’ not wound. 50

The examples considered in this section are, coincidentally, all documentary, probably because documentary photography became more popular in Taiwan in the 1980s. In an article reviewing Taiwanese documentary photography, photographic critic Mei-Ling Chang (張美陵) commented that, in Taiwan “for nearly twenty years, so called ‘Documentary Photography’ has been chosen monotonously to represent the people who live on the social fringes, such as psychotics, aborigines, vagrants and incompetent persons. All of them show endless misery. These photographers might be well intentioned in ‘speaking’ for the people who cannot ‘speak out’ themselves. However, this result also revealed the unitary thinking in Taiwanese society and ignored the many possibilities of photography”. 51 In sum, in these contemporary photographic works the meanings of exile in Taiwan have been restricted to the aura of suffering and depression.

2.5.2 The state of displacement in exile

This section discusses the condition of displacement as the essence of exile as mentioned in section 2.4. Exile is generated by displacement from home. In other words, displacement has created the issue of exile over thousands of years in human history.

Fig. 2.5.14. (Left) Jui-Chung Yao, A ruined church in Ping-Dong County, 2003.
Fig. 2.5.15. (Right) Jui-Chung Yao, A ruined primary school in Ping-Dong County, 2003.

Jui-Chung Yao’s (姚瑞中) photobook *Roam the Ruins of Taiwan* (2003) describes ruined buildings in Taiwan resulting from the changes from an agricultural to an industrial society (Fig. 2.5.14 & 2.5.15). These two photographs show the ruins of a church and primary school used by an aboriginal tribe. The text explains the reasons why tribal society was abandoned and images accompanying the prose imply the displacement of people and a vanished past. These photographs are now evidence of the tribe’s splendid past.


Chih-Chien Wang’s works are about himself and the experience of being uprooted. He migrated from Taiwan to Canada and, in his work *Orange Basket* from the series *Object* (2003), used an empty fruit box with a tangerine on the top as a metaphor for his experience as an immigrant (Fig. 2.5.16). He is the isolated tangerine dislocated from its box. The empty fruit box also implies the void experienced by immigrants. In another work, *Red Man* from the series *Self-portrait* (2004), he photographed his body with red skin (Fig. 2.5.17). This red skin was the symptom of urticaria and caused by a failure to adapt to a new environment. From this point of view, the photograph represented scars or injuries as evidence of displacement and expressed symbolically the wounds of exile. From these two works, Wang presented his experience of displacement as an exile through sensitive investigation and simple but meaningful metaphors.

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Ben Yu’s 隨本意 French Chair in Taiwan (1997-1999) series photographed an elegant French chair in the foreground of many Taiwanese scenes (Fig. 2.5.18 - 2.5.20). Most criticisms of the work stem from the artist’s statement that the French chair represented a tourist traveling through the various sites. The chair has been placed inharmoniously in each view, in order to address the issue of cultural juxtaposition as a postmodern phenomenon. However, in my view, these interpretations are out of focus. They make sense if one only sees the surface of the visual elements in the photographs, but if contemplated in depth, they are more

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54 Those criticisms include Ben Yu’s artist statement in 1999, Pin-Hua Wang’s Taiwan Contemporary Art Series: Photography and Video Art p.52-54, Chien-Hui Kao’s On Viewing Ben Yu’s “French Chair in Taiwan” Series and Lisa Fischman’s Surprise Encounter.
about displacement and the state of Yu’s self exile. The reasons for this are as follows. Firstly, considering the French chair as a person, its appearance is stiff and resistant, just as it is difficult for an exile to adjust to their new life. This reason is drawn from the fact that, in all of the photographs, the chair faces the camera in the same way. Secondly, these images show the lonely chair surrounded by fresh environments, with no dialogue or interaction, just as exiles go into a foreign land, a typical symptom for exiles. Thirdly, if indeed the locations were interpretations of the tourist’s viewpoint, it is better to say they represent Taiwan, the artist’s homeland, as he re-recognized it on his return from abroad. Through the French chair, Yu brings viewers, including himself, to re-visit and to confirm the essence of Taiwan in his mind. Following this line of thought, impressions of Taiwan for him as a visual practitioner stem not from economics, politics or history, but from the encounter with those scenes and their representation in the photographs. This reflects the artist’s deep emotions for his homeland as he has a new life experience of being displaced and a new vision of cultural hybridity.

Fig. 2.5.21. Ben Yu, The Puppet Bridegroom- Irwin, PA, 1999.

55 Ben Yu studied in America, married an American, and then returned to Taiwan. He has suffered due to the separation of his family.
Through Yu’s previous works French Chair in Taiwan series, it is easier to understand his other series The Puppet Bridegroom (1999-2002) (Fig. 2.5.21 - 2.5.23). Yu used almost the same visual composition but changed the main character and locations: a traditional Taiwanese cloth puppet in America. Yu declared himself ‘a half resident of the States’, but also expressed his pain and longing for his estranged family. Yu as the puppet bridegroom stated that, “in the images, the puppet always has both hands open and a stiff face, whether amongst flowers and plants, in a splendid, America style landscape, or in an exciting carnival”.

In the large life-size photographs (180×270 cm) the puppet is ‘looked down’ on by viewers and is always incompatible with the American landscape. The short, small but conspicuous Chinese red puppet highlights issues about cultural bias and the impossibility of adapting to life in America. As the critic Li-Hsin Guo commented, “this signifies estrangement and anxiety because he is inside a different culture”. Yu tells a story through images about his plight, as a puppet, an exile displaced in another land.

Shun-Chu Chen’s works always have a strong sense of nostalgia, a yearning for his family past; thus, the meaning of exile, especially the issue of displacement, is concealed. In his large installation works Assembly: Family Parade (1995), he photographed his relatives and room-mates and displayed the images in his homeland Penghu Island. In individual photographs he portrays people standing, with part of their figures obscured by the frame of the image (Fig. 2.5.24 - 2.5.26). However, he gives no clue as to the purpose of this device in the visual composition of more than a thousand photographs. A critic even said, somewhat unhelpfully “this

is a very typical portrait of Taiwan as it was in the past". These interpretations do not focus on the real meaning of the visual representation. In my opinion, the cutting in these photographs separates people visually from their background. They seem to stand out of the backdrop, attached to the surface of the photographic paper, because there is no perspective. They are thus separated from their background through this visual effect. It represents visually a displacement from background and land, as mirrored by Chen’s displacement from Penghu Island to Taiwan Island.

Fig. 2.5.24. Shun-Chu Chen, *Assembly: Family Parade* - details-1, a framed photograph, 1995.

Fig. 2.5.25. (Left) Shun-Chu Chen, *Assembly: Family Parade* - details-2, a framed photograph, 1995. Fig. 2.5.26. (Right) Shun-Chu Chen, *Assembly: Family Parade* - details-3, a framed photograph, 1995.

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*59* Pin-Hua Wang. *Taiwan Contemporary Art Series: Photography and Video Art* (Taipei: Council for Cultural Affairs, 2003) 50. I supposed she want to describe about the formal family photographs, the people were with those standing straight stiff gesture. However, this was still out of focus.
In sum, in this section I have demonstrated how Chih-Chien Wang’s works give an explicit visual interpretation of displacement. However, in the others’ works, the issues of exile and displacement are unidentified. This means the issues can be ‘seen’ in the photographic works but are not ‘written’ in the artist’s statements or critics’ reviews. The issues of exile and displacement are replaced or concealed by other concepts, such as nostalgia, strangeness and cultural juxtaposition, concepts which did not touch the core issue and merely lead to vague interpretations. Nevertheless, this research reveals the concepts of exile and displacement in the Taiwanese context.

2.5.3 An imagined return from exile

‘An imagined return’ from exile is the core issue of this research, as discussed in section 2.4. This section will review two relevant Taiwanese photographers’ work.

Fig. 2.5.27. Shun-Chu Chen, Assembly: Family Parade- Penghu House, 1995.
For his photographic installation *Assembly: Family Parade* (1995), Shun-Chu Chen (陳順篤) chose a specific site in his homeland Penghu Island (Fig. 2.5.27 - 2.5.29). This installation symbolized the return and gathering together of his family. He chose two abandoned houses and a farmland and “mapped sites that are today desolate and devoid of human life”. The sites also symbolized two important objects for exiles, home and land. Ironically, in these empty fields all the families paraded to denote a return to a flourishing past through hundreds of photographs. Chen stated that “this was like an active demonstration” to protest against the vanished past and abandoned homeland. When viewers saw the installation, “the solemn silence in the field was suffocated because of the collective silences and gazes from people in the photographs”. This demonstrates a social phenomenon in Taiwan brought about by the change from agriculture to industry. People who lived in the countryside were forced to leave their homes and go to the industrial cities. The countryside became just so many abandoned buildings and fields, which are now the best evidence of social change.

However, not all people can accept this change; at least Chen cannot. Art critic Tsong-Zung Chang (張頌仁) commented: “He has never been able to leave his home island of Penghu, spiritually tied to it like a prodigal son’s attachment to the banished house. Through remembering and mourning for the past he has given new meaning to life, turning private experiences into public memory”. Chen as an exile wanted to return to his homeland through his installation, even though it was sad.

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This installation was about displacement and an imagined return from the artist as an exile.

![Image of Jui-Chung Yao's work](image)

**Fig. 2.5.30. Jui-Chung Yao, Recover Mainland China- Action- Beijing Palace Museum, 1997.**

**Fig. 2.5.31. (Left) Jui-Chung Yao, Recover Mainland China- Action- The Great Wall, 1997.**

**Fig. 2.5.32. (Right) Jui-Chung Yao, Recover Mainland China- Action- Beijing Wishing Temple, 1997.**

In Jui-Chung Yao’s (姚瑞中) works Recover Mainland China- Action series, art critic Juei-Jen Shih’s (石瑞仁) exhibition preface attempts to explain the title (Fig. 2.5.30 – 2.5.32). He claimed that “Yao tries to defy and subvert historical facts, political authority, myths and dogma, by pretending to firmly obey and taking an oath to personally carry them out. At a time when the Taiwanese Government no longer talks about counter-attacking Mainland China, Yao secretly filmed his one-man show in ‘Recovering Lost Territory’, in Beijing, Shanghai, and at that time soon-to-be-returned Hong Kong. What these images purport to portray is a fanatical follower of the slogan, a phantom-like rigid character. This character is then used to deride the myth of ‘Recovering the Nation’ that once dominated Taiwan, as ultimately
antiquated and illusory”.

However, I want to use his interview to reveal an alternative viewpoint, through his personal life. He said that when he went to China to create this series, “on my way to Shanghai to visit my father’s family whom I’ve never met, I thought ‘What the hell am I doing here?’ and departed for Taiwan without meeting my extended family... This sense of displacement or of not belonging is a tragedy that I attempt to convey in my work. There is a sense of desire coupled with duty to discover one’s place of belonging”.

The fact that he is a member of a second generation from mainland China gives his work more personal meaning. From his interview, it can be understood that Yao missed his original home, and also his father’s homeland. He was given a chance to visit China, to which he had never been. When the Taiwanese government allowed people to visit their relatives in China, this afforded him an opportunity to physically touch his father’s homeland in reality. He returned to China for his father but also for himself. This must have involved contradictory and ambiguous feelings because, although politically separated, most Taiwanese people were originally from China. Yao as part of a second generation from mainland China, struggled with his identity, sense of belonging, and knowledge of where his original home was. Finally, there is ambiguity in the images; the floating self represents the desire, but also the confusion, in returning to his ‘original home’, either real or imagined.

In conclusion, Shun-Chu Chen and Jui-Chung Yao’s works are rare in Taiwan. They represent the desire to return to the homeland; one is an economic exile who is forced from his home in the countryside to the city and another is the second generation of exiles who looks for the identity of the original home. They produced excellent works, but their statements and critics’ reviews missed the important issues of exile and an imagined return. These are reflected in the narrow views of contemporary photographers and critics in Taiwan. Through the analysis in this research, their works have found different interpretations.


65 Many comments stemmed from Juei-Jen Shi’s preface, such as Pin-Hua Wang Taiwan Contemporary Art Series: Photography and Video Art (p.80), Chi-Ling Hsu “An Initial Exploration of Taiwan Photography and ‘China’ Icon.” (p.163-165) and Manry Hsu “When History is Beside Itself: On Yao Jui-Chung Recent Works.”

2.5.4 Conclusion
This sums up the review of the theme of exile in contemporary photography in Taiwan.

A. A rare issue in exile: suppression by martial law
Very few photographers are concerned with the subject of exile because, according to photography historian Jia-Bao Wu (吳嘉寶), the political suppression of forty years’ martial law (1947-1987) has restricted possibilities for photographic representation. He mentioned this in A brief history of Taiwan photography, where he writes “whether in the school or family, people learned not to discuss the government’s faults or social disasters. In the severe control of the mass media by government, the medium of photography, which has the essential function of providing documentary evidence and witness, was certainly included. Even photography in art was ‘allowed’ in very limited subjects”. Therefore, even though Taiwan has been free from martial law for many years, the shadow of fear is still in people’s minds. It is not difficult to understand this rare, highly political, issue in contemporary photography with regard to exile.

B. The unitary in documentary photography in Taiwan
Documentary photography in Taiwan mostly presents exiles’ difficult living conditions or their dignity in terms of emotive social concern. The lack of accurate visual language, the shallow concept of humanism and narrow subjects are all issues here. Documentary photography only seems to represent sorrow, hardship, anger, or a dead atmosphere and the lack of windows to jump from. Photography critic Mei-Ling Chang’s (張美陵) very precise review of Taiwanese documentary photography claimed that, “on the purpose of so called ‘objective reality’, photographers presume they cannot interrupt the objects’ life when they are taking pictures. Photographers can only ‘visit’ the objects and kept their distance from them. Therefore, they cannot really understand them”. From my view, this has limited the potentiality of the medium of photography in Taiwan.

C. The situation of the contemporary photographer in Taiwan
Instead of criticising documentary photography, some contemporary photographers have broken the limitations of so called ‘retina reality’ to express themselves in a more open way. They explore context, use precise visual language and experiment

67 Jia-Bao Wu. “A Short History of Taiwan Photography.” Three Photographic Perspectives- Hong Kong, Mainland China, Taiwan. Ed. Wong Wo Bik and Sinsee Ho (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 1993) 26.
new media. Because most of their work is based on personal experiences, they paradoxically produce work on more in-depth issues and even expressive of greater political concern. This is the reason such an emotional personal issue as an imagined return from exile is something they could tackle, a concept which is also reflected in my practice. However, as previously suggested, some photographers have produced works related to the theme 'an imagined return' from exile, but have rarely made statements on the concept. Shun-Chu Chen and Jui-Chung Yao, for instance, have made no statements of their works on the subject. It is only now through the reviews for this research that the concept of 'an imagined return' from exile has been revealed. It is thus clear that this concept is still ignored in contemporary Taiwanese photography.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the meanings of exile and expanded it to include psychological aspects. The research identified the essential element of physical displacement from home and further addressed the psychological issue of 'an imagined return' as a vital aspect of exile. Exiles always struggle in their desire to return, either in reality or in the imagination. ‘An imagined return’ from exile thus becomes the core concept of this thesis.

Beginning with an introduction to Taiwanese political and economic history, I have developed this further to include the methods and means of contemporary theory and practice, to support the main arguments in the thesis. This provided cultural, social, theoretical and practical background knowledge to extend such issues.

The chapter also reviewed contemporary Taiwanese photography, dividing it into three categories - the unitary atmosphere of pain and depression; the state of displacement in exile; and an imagined return from exile - to give an in-depth criticism of photographic works, photographers' statements and critics' reviews. The chapter ends with a consideration of three aspects, the rare issue of exile due to suppression by martial law, the single atmosphere of suffering and depression in documentary photography, and the plight and creation of the contemporary photographer in Taiwan. In overall conclusion, then, this thesis points out that the concept of 'an imagined return' from exile in contemporary photography in Taiwan has been neglected.
In the following chapter, it will discuss the thesis’s conceptual framework of ‘an imagined return’ from exile. It will include some important concepts from photography theorist Roland Barthes and also from several inspired contemporary photographic works.
Chapter 3 An Imagined Return from Exile in Photography and its Installation

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is based on the practical works in this thesis, through the visual presentations of photography and its installation as a means of generating the thesis's conceptual frameworks. It builds up the concept of ‘an imagined return’ from exile in photography and the installation to which it relates, and also discusses themes of nostalgia and yearning for ‘an imagined return’.

Firstly, it provides an exploration of Roland Barthes’s book Camera Lucida and the photographic essence ‘this-has-been’, and provides an extensive interpretation of the photographs as a place of ‘that world’. Then, it discusses the issues of returning to ‘that world’ through contemporary photographic works, as related to the main concept of ‘an imagined return’ from exile. In this way, the thesis’s conceptual framework is integrated with the aesthetics of photography and the photographer’s creativity.

The following section discusses the photographic installation. It describes my motivation for using the installation as a means of enhancing the meaning of the photographic works and then discusses three concepts applied in the installation: the experience of exile as a journey; the transition through darkness and quietness; and the concept of ‘out of place’ in site-specific installations.

Finally, it focuses on the subjects of an imagined return which, along with the idea of an imagined return, have become another core element in this thesis. It explores the meaning and importance of ‘home’ and the various subjects involved in exile, longing to return. The thesis points out three subjects for an imagined return; parents, homeland and childhood, reflecting my personal and cultural background.

3.2 An imagined return in the photographs

3.2.1 This-has-been: the sense of reality and the past
Old photographs have always fascinated me. I always looked at abandoned, unknown photographs (such as the carte-de-visite and the cabinet) in the flea market. I wandered inside the world of the photographic images and even sometimes lost myself in abstractions. Concentrating my attention on the photographs, it was as if I wanted to see through the surface of silver gelatin; I could almost be in the place where the photograph was taken, with all the people in the image just gazing at me. I had become that photographer and involved in that world.... On the other hand, when I looked at my family photographs, the feeling was like a bank of dense fog surrounding the images. The sense of this fog was emotional and unclear. This fascinated me and constantly stimulated my photographic creativity.¹

I have always been passionate about encounters with photographs, especially old ones, and sometimes this passion overwhelms my rational thought. Through my contemplation, however, I discovered the writings and outlook of the French scholar Roland Barthes, whose book about photography, Camera Lucida, acts as a source of insight for this thesis.

A. An overview of Camera Lucida

This book is small, but is concerned with the essence and viewing of photographs. Barthes indicates that the specific character of the photographic medium is independent of the realm of traditional art, and that his theory of semiotics is not applicable in this field. At the beginning of the book he tries to define the essence of photography but identifies it in the second half as the concept of ‘this-has-been’. “Camera Lucida develops or unfolds like a mystery novel told from an autobiographical point of view”.² The detail of his personal experience of seeing photographs means that this book is not only a complex theoretical volume but also an autobiography. It has parallels with this practice-based thesis which is both autobiographical and, through photography, also practical.

The book Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, originally published in French in 1980, was a point of transit for Roland Barthes. In the 1960s, Barthes began to use semiotics in the interpretation of the medium of photography in the essay “The Photographic Message” (1961), but he sensed that “the medium of photography (did) not properly conform to the philosophical and analytical

¹ This note is from my working diary, unpublished, 2002.
assumptions of semiology”. 3 The duality in semiology which separates the subject and its referent did not apply to photography. He said “a pipe, here, is always and intractably a pipe. It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funereal immobility”. 4 It is the concept of a message without a code, that “echo(es) sentiments that have haunted the medium since its inception while also signaling a profound turn of the screw in the discourse on photography”. 5 This allowed him to look again at the exploration of photography which he not only learned from, but ‘loved’; he thus returned to investigation through phenomenology.

Due to his adoption of the phenomenological approach, the central section of the book is autobiographical in style. In the first part of the book, although he looked at the photographs he liked he was only able to identify the punctum, or ‘partial feature’, and could not satisfy his private, individual pricking. He thought he had failed to find the essence of photography and commented, “I would have to descend deeper into myself to find the evidence of Photography”. 6 In the second part of the book he looks deeper into himself, in accordance with the principles of native phenomenology. In this way he applies personal experience to practice. Focusing on one photograph, the Winter Garden, he said, “Something like an essence of the Photograph floated in this particular picture. I therefore decided to ‘derive’ all Photography (its ‘nature’) from the only photograph which assuredly existed for me, and to take it somehow as a guide for my last investigation”. 7 In looking to the inner self to examine the theoretical discourse, the deeper he looked, the more he gained. The deeper he was involved in the photograph, the more his personal experience allowed him to change from a spectator into a participant. “To give examples of punctum is, in a certain fashion, to give myself up”. 8 This experience of inter-subjectivity was an advanced outcome which differs from his previous photographic theories: separating the spectator and the medium. 9 The noeme (or essence) was established eventually in the later part of the book, as ‘this-has-been’.

6 Barthes 60.
7 Barthes 73.
8 Barthes 43.
As the main concept ‘this-has-been’ in Camera Lucida, it is a theory of photography which supports realism in the post-modern discourse. Barthes stated that “the realists do not take the photograph for a ‘copy’ of reality, but for an emanation of past reality”. Susan Sontag’s related essay, On Photography, is also based on the realistic view of photography, but focuses more on its discourse in social function. She “defines the photograph as a ‘trace’ directly stenciled off reality, like a footprint or a death mask”. In her recent book Regarding the Pain of Others (2003), she still declared the realistic power in the medium of photography (focusing on the discussion of wars and photojournalism). This is a re-confirmation of Barthes’s ‘realism’ view of photography in Camera Lucida as a canon in contemporary critiques and debates.

The language Barthes used contained much duality and ambiguity, which can be understood in terms of his situation on the modern/post-modern shift (although “post-modern is not a term that entered Barthes’s lexicon”). He states that “to be modern is to know what is no longer possible”. Through searching the essence of photography, he asked more complex philosophical questions on subjects such as ‘time’. “Although Camera Lucida remains an essay on photography, it is informed by philosophical and cultural perspectives that invite a more complicated reading than is often the case”. However, no matter how complex post-modern discourses challenge Barthes’s theory, the theory of photography which relates to realism is definitely an issue in the ongoing debates.

In his book, Barthes introduced the concepts of ‘studium’ and ‘punctum’ as ‘co-presence’ in a photograph. Studium can be described as a cultural manner and has less to do with the spectators’ emotions, relating only to the general effect of the photograph. “The studium captures the relation to the referent by placing it within the comprehensible world of objects”. Barthes said “the studium is a kind of education (knowledge and civility, ‘politeness’)”, and “an average affect, almost from a certain training”. It was of no interest to Barthes in his search for the essence of photography. Punctum, however, is “a prick, sting, or sudden wound that makes a

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11 Barthes 88.
15 Ibid, xii.
17 Barthes 28.
18 Barthes 26.
particular photograph epiphanic to a particular viewer”. It is private, a personal experience, which is encountered when viewing the photograph. It generates a desire to expand on what cannot be seen in the picture. The first form of punctum is the ‘partial feature’, or ‘detail’: “A detail overwhelms the entirely of my reading; it is an intense mutation of my interest, a fulguration”. Barthes was unable to find the nature of photography in this kind of punctum. In the second part of the book, he identified the second punctum as ‘time’ and the essence of photography as ‘this-has-been’, by studying a family photograph of his mother. This turns the book into a deeply philosophical discussion of photography and time (history) which also involves the emotions of love and death.

Looking for photographs of his mother allowed him to finally identify the essence of photography. In the Winter Garden Photograph, he found a deep sense of time, ‘history’; “That is what the time when my mother was alive before me is – History”. He saw his mother in a photograph as a five-year old child, and recognised the impossibility of knowing her at that time. However, from another point of view, in tracing back to her personal origin as a child, he realised that the essence of photography stems from searching for the ‘essence’ of his mother: that is her, she was there, but she has died. ‘Time’ and death are not reversible and that moment in the photograph remains irreversible too. The sense of this-has-been, the passage of time, the transformation of subject into object, and of death and love - all these heavy melancholic tones interlink to confirm Barthes’s theory in Camera Lucida.

B. The sense of ‘this-has-been’

For the photograph’s immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past (‘this-has-been’), the photograph suggests that it is already dead. Hence it would be better to say that Photography’s inimitable feature (its noeme) is that someone has been the referent (even if it is a matter of objects) in flesh and blood, or again in person.

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20 Barthes 49.
21 Barthes 65.
22 Barthes 79.
That the objects in the photographs have been real in the past is the essence of photography. Photographs are closed to ‘the sense’ of reality and the past. Although other mediums have a similar function, the photographic sense of ‘this-has-been’, that something has existed in front of the camera, is its unique feature and other mediums cannot replace it. Barthes has said ‘painting can feign reality without having seen it. Discourse combines signs which have referents, of course, but these referents can be and are most often ‘chimeras’. Contrary to these imitations, in Photography I can never deny that the thing has been there. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past’.²² For example, if looking at the photographic works by Keith Arnatt, the original meaning would be totally lost if the photographs were replaced by paintings (Fig. 3.2.1). There is no point in undertaking this work as a painting because painting is a medium of visual representation and does not necessarily relate to reality. Contrarily, viewers are unable to extricate themselves from the sense of existence in photography. They are always aware that photographs are only paper, but they seem to look at them, or more precisely, at the images, in more depth. The objects in the photographic image seem to come ‘alive’ when viewed. Keith Arnatt played with the photographic power of ‘this-has-been’ in every single photograph and also in the realistic continuity between each of his images. The viewer presumes that the images are documentary, so the sequence is also ‘real’. What happened in the final photograph is actually unknown but viewers are forced to believe that the sequence is real, fulfilling the title Self Burial. This is the reason this conceptual sequence works, at the same time playing with the humour of photography.

²²Barthes 76.
Barthes gives a good logical explanation of the photographic sense of ‘this-has-been’ and why its relative, cinema, does not achieve the same effect. He says,

> Looking at a photograph, I inevitably include in my scrutiny the thought of that instant, however brief, in which a real thing happened to be motionless in front of the eye. I project the present photograph’s immobility upon the past shot, and it is this arrest which constitutes the pose. This explains why a Photograph’s *noeme* deteriorates when the Photograph is animated and becomes cinema: in the Photograph, something *has posed* in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever (that is my feeling); but in cinema, something *has passed* in front of this same tiny hole: the pose is swept away and denied by the continuous series of images.\(^{23}\)

Photography captures the shooting moment; the time when the objects actually existed, there in front of the camera, in the past. This encapsulates Barthes’s concept of photographic essence. Using the image of his mother in the Winter Garden Photograph to prove and highlight this phenomenon, he says, “In a first impulse, I exclaimed: ‘There she is! She’s really there! At last, there she is!’”\(^{24}\)

\(^{23}\) Barthes 78.
\(^{24}\) Barthes 99.
Photographs, at least some photographs, surprisingly represent the sense of being, like a real existence. This is supported by Barthes’s reference to the photographic punctum of partial feature: “A detail overwhelms the entirety of my reading; it is an intense mutation of my interest, a fulguration”. For the observer, the feeling of an objects’ existence comes from the instant sense of detail (or partial feature). This allows viewers to travel almost immediately into the world of the photographic image. For instance, on seeing a photograph by Lewis H. Hine, Barthes said, “What I see…is the off-center detail, the little boy’s huge Danton collar, the girl’s finger bandage”. Of the detail of the clothes, Hsu said: “These clothes are next to the skin and surround the body. The spectators see the border between the body and the clothes. It is impossible to prevent fancying the desire, or intriguing the personal memory”. The punctum of these attracted Barthes into the world of that particular photograph. This is the first function of punctum as ‘detail’; that it stimulates the ‘blind field’ and expands intimate memories and stories when the viewer encounters the photograph. Barthes even says of clothes: “… clothing is perishable, it makes a second grave for the loved being”. This indicates the imitative relationship between clothes and body, although the detail of the clothes in the photograph can also provide information on tastes, fashions and fabrics as studium.

Expanding Barthes’s suggestion, the textures of textiles are related to the sense of touch. This helps viewers to imagine ‘this-has-been’ not only by seeing but also through imagined touch. Extending this idea, the sense of touch can reflect the viewers’ bodily experience: “Photographs of landscape (urban or country) must be habitable, not visitable”. In Camera Lucida, Barthes reports seeing a photographed landscape. It was as if he could happily have lived there (Fig. 3.2.2), implying a deep sense of ‘being’ in the house in the photographic image. On viewing another photograph by A. Kertesz, Barthes commented, “I recognize, with my whole body, the struggling villages I passed through on my long-ago travels in Hungary and Rumania”. The texture of the dirt road in this photograph affords to him the certainty of being in that place. Barthes even described this experience as synonymous with the baby living in the maternal body. Therefore the sense of existence when ‘seeing’ photographs, from Barthes’s point of view, is not slight but very intense, involving the viewer’s imagination of sight, touch and even the whole body.

25 Barthes 49.
26 CL, 51.
28 Barthes 64.
29 Barthes 38.
30 Barthes 45.
C. Passing time and memory in old photographs

To compare: Barthes’s first punctum, partial feature, emphasizes being or existence in photography. The second, time, emphasizes a sense of passing, especially in old photographs. This punctum also intensifies the feeling of ‘this-has-been’ because it communicates the message that ‘this’ disappeared a long time ago. Thus the disconnection of time becomes a fascination for the viewer, because they cannot turn the clock back to return to a particular.

This new punctum, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the noeme (“that-has-been”), its pure representation.31 “This punctum, more or less blurred beneath the abundance and the disparity of contemporary photographs, is vividly legible in historical photographs: there is always a defeat of Time in them: that is dead and that is going to die.”

This punctum in the photographs for viewers who try to go back in time triggers memories of their past. It is the reason why the photographic historian Jia-Bao Wu said the old family photographs “triggered viewers’ huge imaginative power

31 Barthes 96. In this book Barthes used two slightly different phrases, ‘this-has-been’ and ‘that-has-been’. It is the same noeme for photography.
32 Barthes 96.
concerning their collective life experience”.

The technique was adopted by the Taiwanese artist Shun-Chu Chen in most of his works (Fig. 3.2.8 and 3.2.9). All of the old family photographs he used and adapted were taken by his father. With regard to the time punctum, a strong sense of loss and nostalgia due to the passage of time has always existed in old photographs.

Memory from photographs is, however, distinguished from memory itself: “Photography is neither mirror with a memory nor window but a picture of that which is about to become a memory, a capturing of what, in the present which is about to become the past, is to be remembered. This is not to confuse picture with memory itself because memory is internal, private, and kinaesthetic, like dreams.”

A photograph is significantly a strange memory object in that it is steady, still and unchanging. It is, in some ways, like a stubborn old person who forever stands guard over the same information. Through this approach, the photographic memory strengthens ‘that-has-been’ but also ‘that’ has gone.

Furthermore, the passing of time is a constant reminder of the death of ‘this’ (‘this-has-been’). The disappearance of objects implies that they have already died. Therefore, the photograph becomes a witness, proving what was there, but also as a reminder that it is now absent. For photographic images of people who have died the sense of absence is doubled, due to the disappearance of the past and also of someone’s life. Barthes highlighted this dead atmosphere in his mother’s Winter Garden Photograph, saying, “Here again is the Winter Garden Photograph. I am alone with it, in front of it. The circle is closed, there is no escape. I suffer, motionless. Cruel, sterile deficiency: I cannot transform my grief, I cannot let my gaze drift; no culture will help me utter this suffering which I experience entirely on the level of the image’s finitude.”

The suffering and closed gaze becomes an intensive sense when looking at this kind of photograph. In this thesis, I have used a similar concept in the work Father (Fig. 3.2.3). Using one of my father’s old photographs as a source, I took a number of photographs of my family in the same location (in front of my parents’ home). The action of taking those images and the visual representations in the five sets of photographs were like chanting a mantra and, as Barthes said, as if the suffering circle was closed. I could not escape the endless sorrow. Therefore, photographs with people who have died strengthen the sense of loss and absence, and of ‘this-has-been’, because they bear witness. This allows viewers to imagine that all those pictured in the historical photographs may possibly have died and is the reason Barthes pointed out the significance of “that is dead and that is going to die” in the historical photographs.

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35 Barthes 90.
Fig. 3.2.3. Ming-Chang Tien, *Father*, 2001.
In conclusion, the photograph has formed a world of its own even though it is related to the real world. ‘That world’ of the photograph is a place the viewer can inhabit. The concept ‘this-has-been’ is an enhancement and something that distinguishes the photographic medium from others. Viewers (including photographers themselves) can imagine visiting the world inside the photographic image. This is one of the core elements of this thesis: an imagined return from exile prompted by looking at photographs.

3.2.2 An imagined return to ‘that world’ in the photographs

Due to the concept of ‘this-has-been’, photographs always give viewers a sense of being, but also a sense of loss. The image of ‘that world’ in the photographs acts as a witness. However, although that world did indeed exist, unless people travel there nobody can prove whether the elements it portrays are still there, the people, the place or the objects. With the passage of time it must have changed and perhaps been displaced, making the photographs the only evidence of the past and of that moment. This is the character of the medium of photography. This thesis looks at the opportunity for exiles to use photography to imagine returning home to the place of ‘that world’. This section considers the practical work by myself and three contemporary photographers, who compose old and new photographs in imagining their return to ‘that world’.

Fig. 3.2.4. Hai-Bo, Winter, 1999, 360cm×127cm.
The Chinese artist Hai-Bo (海波) re-worked his old photographs by gathering people - his parents, friends and himself – who appeared in the old photographs, and re-photographing them, years later, in exactly the same positions or locations to re-enact the moment the old photographs were shot (Fig. 3.2.4). Through his actions, he has imagined a return to that place and time, or more precisely, the ‘photographic place’: “He has stated that it is not his intention to depict social change or the passing of time, but rather to recreate a time in the past - the exact moment that the button was pressed”.36 It is, then, as if he seeks to re-locate to that place, just as exiles wish to return to their home. The atmosphere when people took up their earlier poses in front of the camera would have been very strange, all participants, including the photographer, having returned virtually to a particular moment and place. The yearning for a return to the ‘this-has-been’ moment, is his motive for creating the work. In this way, Hai-Bo not only looked at the old photograph, but took action to experience, bodily, the sense of being there, thus enhancing the sense of ‘this-has-been’. This is like a performance for the camera, based on the moment in the old photographs.

The feeling of being there in photographs is sometimes enriched by our senses. Barthes has said that landscape photographs must be habitable. The viewers need to feel they dwell inside the photographic space. Therefore, the sensation of physical attachment is important in order to imagine into that world of photographs. Fig. 3.2.2 is a photograph of a house, in the book Camera Lucida, entitled “I want to live there”. It is a pun, referring to living either in the real place or inside the photograph. The sense of habitation is a stimulus for viewers to go into that space. They are really there (in their imaginations of course) and surrounded by the whole space of the photograph. Hai-Bo’s work, The Bridge, uses the act of holding onto the railings to look back to the past (Fig. 3.2.5). Using the bodily experience of touch, the awareness of being there is very strong for both the viewer and himself. Hai-Bo returned to this place because of his old family photograph. Through the acts of touching and posturing he was able to experience the whole space, the environment as well as the bridge, which gave him a greater realization of the absence and displacement of his past. When viewers look at the work, they imagine Hai-Bo’s experience of what he actually did in the two photographs. This allows them to experience ‘an imagined return’ to ‘this-has-been’ although the past has elapsed. These extreme senses of loss of the past and displacement of himself as exile exist both in the photograph and in his real life.

Fig. 3.2.5. Hai-Bo, *The Bridge*, 1999, 360cm×127cm.
Duane Michals’ photobook, *The house I once called home*, is an attempt to return to his childhood home (Fig. 3.2.6). It uses his habitual practice of sequential photographic narratives to present the magical realism of an imagined return. This photobook is full of a sense of nostalgia. Viewers can imagine his mournfulness in old age, the past, his old home and childhood. He writes,

> My heart remains a recluse in this dead house, steeped in the reverie of what used to be, I keep my vigil for another day, before I too fade away. This house is built of wood cut from my family tree. It was deprived of most amenities, and until I had grown beyond a boy, this poverty did not embarrass me. How strange that I should recall this faded stain after all these years. These rooms were our little theatre’s mise-en-scène, where we performed our daily dramas sans proscenium. I have returned to fulfill my deal with Faust, and the spirits of this dead house. I who have been most blest, now with this incantation put this place to rest.\(^{37}\)

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In one of the sequential photographs in the book he, like Hai-Bo, selected an old family photograph, re-photographing himself at home in the same location and pose (although looking sad) (Fig. 3.2.7). He arranged the three images in the narrative shown below; the new one, the new overlapping the old, and the old. Viewers looking at the narrative experience something like cinematic flashback. The transition from the present to the past in the second photograph is a magic realistic moment in which one returns to the past. The medium of photography in this work acts as a transparent carrier. Through chemical change (the second overlapping photograph), the present (the first straight photograph) is transformed to the past (the third one). This technique becomes a metaphor for returning to the past and is full of mystery and magic. Therefore, the photograph is no longer purely a material object, but provides an equivalent approach to the site of the original photograph. Michals took advantage of this as an evocation of his childhood to an imagined return to his old home as an exile. Accompanying this sequence is a handwritten verse interwoven with the images.

I believe we leave echoes of ourselves behind,
in those rooms where our lives are first defined.
Sometimes there is a moment redux,
when the flux of time becomes transparent,
It is a reverberation of recall within a shrouded familiarity.
Suddenly the clarity of second sight,
Mother says my name, “Duane, Duane”.
“Daddy’s home. It’s time to eat”.
I seat myself at the table. The soup is ladled.
I know it once again, like a bite of Madeleine.38

38 Ibid. (13).
Fig. 3.2.7. Sequential photographs from the book *The House I Once Called Home* by Duane Michals, 2003.
Shun-Chu Chen’s new series, *Journeys in Time*, combined old family photographs, taken by his father, in a new way. Old photographs can reflect our past life (this-has-been), but Chen re-arranged his family photographs to change life in the past. In his work titled *Sandimen*, he transferred his portrait to a typical tile which was an intriguing memory of that period in Taiwan, and inserted it into a huge photographic picture (121×182×6 cm) of his father and elder brother (Fig.3.2.8). In contrast with the ‘present’, this use of two ‘past’ photographs represented the displacement as exile rather than the time difference between two images. Chen inharmoniously inserted his portrait into the family photograph so that he can join his father and brother. In doing so, he imagined he could return to the moment of that place in the photograph which he had missed and also the time which had passed by. Using this combination he implied the absence and loss of the past, and also forced himself to confront them; ‘I have been there’. He says: “I have filled up the cavity of my incomplete happiness.”39 This work regains his missing of the past and his displacement as exile.

In another work titled Grand Union, he inserted his father’s memorial photograph on image-transferred tiles into a lively family feast. His father, thus, had never been absent (Fig. 3.2.9). However, the typical memorial contrasts with the lovely, warm atmosphere of the family meal and the representation thus emphasizes the absence of his father both from the photograph and in his life. His father is like a ghost, returning to happy family gatherings and times of eating together. This expresses Chen’s sorrow at losing his father. Furthermore, the photograph’s large size (103×155×6 cm) gives it a more realistic feeling; the people seem to have been alive and to have been there. The ambiguity between life and death is what Chen seeks in the work. Although his father and his past have already passed away, he wants to return in the imagination to see them alive on the photographs. This contradiction brings out the sadness of looking back.

Fig. 3.2.9. Shun-Chu Chen, Grand Union, 2003, 103×155×6 cm.
In my own photographic works **Father, 1997** and **Childhood**, I used my old photographs to bridge the gap between here and my homeland, the present and the past; as an imagined return for me as an exile.¹⁰ I re-photographed places or people, and put my self-portrait in the middle to join the two photographs as diptychs (Fig. 3.2.3, 3.2.10 and 3.2.11). In reality, I needed to go back to the original places, or gather the same people, to complete the works, an action similar to the imagined return to ‘that world’ in the photographs. The motivation for these works was to revisit the subject of the old photographs. The importance of location and family

¹⁰ All of the author’s photographic works are fully discussed in the following chapters, Chapter 4 to 6.
emphasises displacement from home, the symptom of exile. I wanted to return to that geographical location, even though only temporarily. The strong sense of being there and then leaving is always accompanied by a sense of loss: ‘I have been there’ but ‘I have gone’. Those old photographs were a re-experience for me and the results of the diptychs thus strengthen the concept of ‘an imagined return’ from exile. Moreover, I used split and joint self-portraits in my work to express both the difficulty of, and desire to, return. I made the diptych form to link two halves of myself. It symbolized a whole self completed by ‘an imagined return’, both in the images and my mind. I confirmed myself in that place by using a self-portrait to question my existence and absence in the homeland.

Furthermore, my use of re-photography is distinguished from scientific investigation. For instance, the Rephotographic Survey project has used re-photography as a means of scientific investigation, taking photographs of the same place, at different times over the past 100 years (Fig. 3.2.12 and 3.2.13).41 This is a survey of geographical and social changes through photographic records rather than stressing the return as an exile.

Fig. 3.2.12. Timothy O’Sullivan, Green River Buttes, Wyoming, 1872.

Fig. 3.2.13. Mark Klett and Gordon Bushaw, Castle Rock and Sharon Rhoades House, Green River, Wyoming, 1979.

In conclusion, this section has discussed practical works by myself and other contemporary photographers to stress the conceptual framework of ‘an imagined return’ from exile. As in the conclusion to 3.2.1, the photograph forms a world of its own, ‘that world’, due to the photographic essence of ‘this-has-been’ (especially in old photographs). Photographs have a special place inside which it seems it is possible to really live. They can be recalled, missed and returned to. Therefore, old photographs are evidence of a specific moment at that place in the past (no other

medium has this essence) used by contemporary photographers to create their exilic return to ‘that world’. They compose newly taken and old photographs in their works to fulfil the journey. Viewers, seeing the photographs simultaneously, observe that the photographers as exiles have returned to the place both in reality and in the imagination. Those exilic returns in the imagination were accomplished through their photographic works. This has satisfied the photographers’ desire. These contemporary photographers have revealed the imagined return from exile through visual representations, from one photograph to another. They have thus ‘dwelt’ within their photographic works as ‘an imagined return’ from exile.

3.3 Photographic installations and the imagined return

3.3.1 The reason for creating a photographic installation

Photographic installations are not just traditional displays consisting of arrangements of photographic works on a wall. They should consider the interaction between the photographs within the whole space and the viewers’ physical experience. When I began to plan the installation and consider the space that I would use it was inevitable that I would look at the character of the space, its history, function and memories it would hold for people. During planning, I applied the meanings of space to interact with photographic themes, so that the space I had to work with was no longer purely functional, but a subject interwoven with the photographic works: “There is a refusal to address a single object without exploring its interactions, its relationships, the inter-stasis of objects and contexts, not only in space, but also in time”. Furthermore, an installation needs to take into account the viewers’ bodily movements and psychological experiences. When people enter a space, a journey begins, introducing another element, time. The viewers’ participation takes on an active meaning for the installation:

In the daily flood of photographs, in the thousand forms of interest they seem to provoke, it may be that the noeme ‘That-has-been’ is not repressed (a noeme cannot be repressed) but experienced with indifference, as a

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feature which goes without saying. It is this indifference which the Winter Garden Photograph had just roused me from.\textsuperscript{43}

Barthes’s comments are very relevant to the importance of the photographic installation to the concept of an imagined return. He considers that too many photographs in our daily life are treated coldly, leaving the viewer unmoved. In the modern world, people merely scratch the surface of the world of images. Their contact with images is en masse and very fast; they are stimulated by them but without evoking any deep feelings. This experience only allows them to pick up the message from an image rather than the emotion. Therefore, those photographs will only have little impact. This is a significant issue of which I am now aware. Conversely, I would like viewers to really experience photographic works, allowing sufficient time free from distraction, so that they may reach their deeper emotions. This strategy is intended to let them experience an imagined return. In doing so, looking at the photographs might be a very deep experience for them (as well as for me), similar to Barthes’ intensive encounter with the Winter Garden Photograph. The viewers can become more involved with the installation, eventually passing into ‘that world’.

From another point of view, the photographic works in the installation are no longer pure photographs. They interact with the space, location, display, lighting, ambient sound, and even smell: “Installation Art is an activity that activates a space”.\textsuperscript{44} This emphasizes the opening up of space in an installation and the artists’ exploration of new meanings within it. Therefore, the works’ space expands from that of the photographic images to that of the whole installed space. As explained in the discussion in Section 3.2, the photographic images of ‘that world’ represent a virtual space. This juxtaposition between photographic virtual space and real installation space allows the photographs to become more illusional. It seems the photographic image is a virtual dislocated space within a space at the installation site. It is the photographic installation that distinguishes itself from the meaning of other media’s installations. This is peculiar to the medium and adds fascination to the theme of displacement in photographic installations.

\textsuperscript{43} Barthes 77.
\textsuperscript{44} Adam Geczy and Benjamin Genocchio. \textit{What is Installation? An Anthology of Writings on Australian Installation Art} (Sydney: Power Publications, 2001) 2.
3.3.2 The experience of exile as a journey

A journey is a period of time when people leave their home for another place. The starting point of a journey is certain, but sometimes the final destination is uncertain. People on the journey feel excited but also displaced and sometimes anxious. Further to this, the experience of exile is similar to a journey, because both are outside normal life and, through travel, involve the unknown.

In an installation, the meaning of the word ‘journey’ is concerned with the viewers’ experience of passing through the work. They normally walk around in the space because of the non-linear conditions and feel free to choose what they see and where they go. Their experiences are thus a continuing time-space experience, rather than a jump from artwork to artwork. “The viewer has to find his or her way through an exhibition and, in doing so, can reconstitute their own conception of history”. 45 The experience of the journey through the installation is handled by the viewer, allowing them to develop their own feelings and interpretation. In this way, it is a journey created both by artists and viewers.

Fig. 3.3.1. Ming-Chang Tien, the first room (North Gallery) in Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile, 2004.

In the installation created for this thesis, *Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile*, the subtitle *a journey from North Gallery to the Painting Studio* (at the University of Brighton, Grand Parade site) points out that this work has a specific route, set out as a line of continuous dots (Fig. 3.3.1 - 3.3.3). This fixed path emphasizes the importance of the meaning of journey to the exhibition. As mentioned above, the installation implies exilic experiences as I am displaced from here to there. Viewers can enter my imagination of an imagined return from exile through the journey. Moreover, this is a forced journey due to the design of the path, and if people do not follow the path, they cannot complete the journey, or the exhibition. This symbolizes the forced journey in exile.
3.3.3 The transition through darkness and quietness

A. Transition from light to dark
In the installation for this thesis, darkness and quiet are two important factors. It is vital to move from the noise and complexity of the outside world into the tranquil inside world. The artist Christian Boltanski provides a parallel example.

My exhibitions are often in darkness: it’s clear that a spectator doesn’t see the same way in light and darkness, he’s much more enfeebled, he’s already in a different atmosphere. I have great belief in the importance of the climate: there are some works that have to be made in hot weather, others in cold weather. One important factor in an exhibition is to know whether it’s going to be hot or cold.⁴⁶

Fig. 3.3.4. Christian Boltanski, Monument: the Children of Dijon, Chapelle de la Salpêtrière, Paris, 1986.

The darkness creates a way for viewers to go to another world. Although the space is actually in the same location, their bodily experience is different. This is akin to temporarily departing from their normal life on an unpredicted journey. If the darkness is accompanied by quiet, the installation is even more tranquil. People are in a peaceful mood during their exhibition journey. Christian Boltanski has always used this strategy in his works (Fig. 3.3.4 and 3.3.5). In the installation Monument: the Children of Dijon in the 42nd Venice Biennial in 1986, Boltanski “eliminated all sources of natural light, and orchestrated how the audience literally ‘saw’ the exhibition. Having left the golden light and intense summer heat of Venice, viewers entered the cooler medieval building only to be confronted with the dreamlike spectacle of an enormous Monument combined with variations of the Ombres.”

Viewers were displaced into a strange space, the opposite of the sunny, hot, crowded and joyful outside world. In the transition to the dark, cool, lonely, and sad atmosphere the viewers are suddenly lost, forgetting where and who they are. This is a huge shock, similar to a Zen master’s blow and shout. Before the viewers think

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48 In Chinese characters this is “當頭棒喝” which states that a Zen master hits his pupils without warning during study. The purpose is to give the pupils insight through a sudden bodily shock. This
about this change, they have already gone through a series of physical experiences, in particular, their confrontation with the portraits of the dead. The viewers are shocked by the contrast in feeling with the outside world and go into a world of death and mournfulness. Boltanski said the atmosphere was like “the evil and the sinister, night and death, the absence of light and life”. Conversely, the space, lighting, symmetry of the portraits, and the quietness were reminiscent of a church, thus a sense of religious redemption emanated from his installation.

Fig. 3.3.6. Ming-Chang Tien, Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile, 2004.
The path in front of the Painting Studio corridor.

action prevents them from being confused by their habitually logical thinking and gives them an alternative experience to help with their learning.

In the *Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile* installation, the transition from brightness to darkness was at the entrance of the red-light corridor (Fig. 3.3.6 and 3.3.7). As with Boltanski’s installation, this transition of illumination gives viewers an unusual experience in a tranquil environment. However, unlike the religious feeling in Boltanski’s works, this installation was a mysterious, weird world and more like going to another space. People felt displaced as exiles because of this transition. In addition to the sense of tranquility, the self-portrait in the photographic works stresses this as an autobiographical exhibition (Fig. 3.3.9). This forces the viewer not only to observe my personal story but also to project their own particular situation. I have represented myself and the viewers also reflect on their own life experiences relating to exile.

**B. The transition from dark to bright in the final room**

When I indulge the whims of nostalgia, and daydream bittersweet scenarios of what might have been, these foolish phantoms of regret vanish in the
clear light of reality, and everything is as it should be. Our little lives are thus-perfect in their pain and happiness.⁵⁰

Fig. 3.3.8. Ming-Chang Tien, *Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile*, 2004. One dark room 1997.
Fig. 3.3.9. Ming-Chang Tien, *Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile*, 2004. One dark room *Thirty-Thousand-Miles-2*.

Fig. 3.3.10. Ming-Chang Tien, *Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile*, 2004. A tunnel in front of the final room *Childhood*.

In the Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile installation, the viewer passes through five darkened rooms and eventually a very dark tunnel, with a light bulb which is periodically switched on and off, pushes away a very heavy curtain and suddenly enters a huge room with bright natural light, the final room of Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile (Fig. 3.3.8 - 3.3.11). This room contains only one larger-than-life-size photographic work, Childhood. After the long gloomy experience of the exhibition, the brightness of the destination symbolises the positive feeling of the end of the exilic journey. It is also a metaphor for the return to reality after a long imaginative journey and a return to the past of childhood. The huge photographic works are more a representation of the present state than the past because the people depicted seem alive. I have the sense that the past of childhood is not really separate from the present, the past is actually in my mind. The experience of the past in the final room is different to that in other gloomy rooms. I tried to accept the past as a part of myself rather than lose myself to mourn the past. This psychological transition is important to my survival in another land.

The installation began with a suitcase and journeyed through different subjects which symbolized imagined return. In order, these are, parents, homeland and childhood. The final subject, childhood, was a long distance of dream in time and space for me as an exile. It indicated a dream which was too far away to touch, but still positive and bright. As Duane Michals has written, “our little lives are thus-
perfect in their pain and happiness”. Although still an exile, I have gradually understood and accepted more the reality of my situation. Therefore, this installation was, for me, like a journey of redemption.

### 3.3.4 Out of place in site-specific installations

The art object or event in this context was to be singularly and multiply experienced in the here and now through the bodily presence of each viewing subject, in a sensory immediacy of spatial extension and temporal duration (what Michael Fried derisively characterized as theatricality), rather than instantaneously perceived in a visual epiphany by a disembodied eye. Site-specific work in its earliest formation, then, focused on establishing an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site, and demanded the physical presence of the viewer for the work’s completion. When discussing installation as the interaction between works and space, the artist’s attention should be drawn to the meaning of space. For artists, space is either purely functional or has historical, institutional or cultural meanings. The book *Understanding Installation* categorized installations into two types. One is filled-space installation: “filled spaces are fairly easily redone at other locations because there is coherence between the parts of each, one to the other, rather than the parts cohering with the whole space in a significant way”. The other is site-specific installation: “a site-specific installation is inextricably linked to the locale: the parts relate to one another but, more importantly, they relate to the larger space”. The installation in this thesis is of the latter type.

Site-specific installations are concerned with the meanings of space. Recognising those meanings within a particular space and how to activate them are the concerns of the artists. From a historical point of view, the rebellion against Modernism in the exhibition space began in the late 1960s and early 1970s: “In turn, the uncontaminated and pure idealist space of dominant modernisms was radically displaced by the materiality of the natural landscape or the impure and ordinary space of the everyday. And the space of art was no longer perceived as a blank

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54 Ibid. 28.
slate, a tabula rasa, but a real space.” Since then, exhibition space has been freed from the gallery and museum to wherever the artist chooses: churches, ruined buildings, schools, landscapes, and hospitals for instance. Artists search for a ‘meaningful’ space for their works or even work in reverse, being inspired by a space first and then producing their installation.

Fig. 3.3.12. Shun-Chu Chen, *Family Parade* – Taipei House No.1, 1995.

Shun-Chu Chen’s work, *Family Parade*, used abandoned houses and fields to represent people who had left their homeland and become exiles (Fig. 3.3.12). Through his usage, the site manifests the meaning of abandonment and exile. Chen helps speechless sites to speak through his installation. He said the portrait photographs “were installed over various homes, in fields, and old and rundown houses, to duplicate layers of group memories from traces of physical life experience”. In doing so, he activated the collective memory of the derelict house.

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Chen has successfully used the interaction between photographic works and specific sites.

In his work, *Within and Beyond the Frame*, Daniel Buren projected the concept of reframing the institutional gallery system (Fig. 3.3.13). In his installation, he hung flag-like striped sheets in a New York gallery and extended them through an open window to the street. He queries the institutional separation of art and real life in the contemporary gallery system, asking “can art get down from its pedestal and rise to street level?” He saw his works as “exceeding the physical boundaries of the gallery by having the art work literally go out the window, ostensibly to ‘frame’ the

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institutional frame”, and questioned the meaning of the word ‘gallery’ through this installation. This is a site-specific intervention. From my point of view, this work is like a state of exile. The exhibition is outside its place (the gallery) and goes to somewhere else (the street). There are parallels between Buren’s installation and the Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile exhibition, which passes through the institutional North Gallery to the informal Painting Studio.

![Image of Marcel Duchamp's Mile of String installation](image)

Fig. 3.3.14. Marcel Duchamp, Mile of String, 1942.

Interventions are an outgrowth of art that refuses to abide by conventional practices, art that makes for an unwelcome houseguest, as it were. They recall the aforementioned works by Duchamp: not only did he create confusion about the nature of a space, he played a behavioral game with the viewer’s physical movements. Duchamp created a similar problem in his Mile of String (1942) installation, for it would have been quite difficult for a viewer to manoeuvre around and through the string to see the more conventional works of art on the walls (Fig. 3.3.14).

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59 In the book *Understanding Installation Art*, site-specific installations fall into two categories, there are two kinds of site-specific installation; one is the intervention and the other is the rapprochement. Mark Rosenthal. *Understanding Installation Art: From Duchamp to Holzer* (Munich: Prestel, 2003) 28.

60 Ibid. 61.
In the exhibition, *Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile*, the usage of the gallery had an obvious intervention. In the gallery there was nothing to see but a carpet, lamp, suitcase and the path (Fig. 3.3.15). Viewers did not need to stay long and could quickly move forward following the path out of the room (Fig. 3.3.16). The gallery has...
thus lost its original function for exhibition. The status of displacement from the formal institutional system, or gallery, is a metaphor for exiles being out of their homeland. For instance, the exilic author Edward Said always felt he was out of place in the world, even in his place of residence, New York. He said “it does not seem important or even desirable to be ‘right’ and in place (right at home, for instance). Better to wander out of place, not to own a house, and not ever to feel too much at home anywhere, especially in a city like New York, where I shall be until I die”.61 His words gave the sense that the state of exile is out of place as in the exhibition. The empty gallery symbolised the loss of an exiles’ origin, my feelings of emptiness and of being uprooted. The journey out of the gallery, which follows, is an unknown adventure with elements of uncertainty, anxiety and excitement. From the certain gallery to an uncertain space is also a metaphor for my experiences out of a comfort zone.

3.4 The subject of home for exiles’ yearning and imagined return

Sections 3.2 and 3.3 of this chapter explored ‘an imagined return’ through the practical media, photography and installation. This section discusses exiles’ targets for an imagined return. Being away from home is essential to the definition of exile, but the meaning of the word ‘home’ is vague. What constitutes home and the way in which this differs between exiles are issues of concern in this thesis. This section attempts to identify some of the fundamentals associated with these questions.

3.4.1 The yearning to return home

I would suggest that the virtue of our housing is that it protects us from change: it allows us to stay put, and this is important because that is precisely what we want to do. We wish to maintain what we have, or else to build on it and develop it on our terms and in our time. We seek to be free from intrusion, especially from large impersonal forces that we cannot control or understand.62

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I wanted everything to remain the same. Because this too is typical of people who have lost everything, including their roots or their ability to grow new ones. It is precisely because you have no roots that you don’t budge, that you fear change, that you’ll build on anything rather than look for land. An exile is not just someone who has lost his home; it is someone who can’t find another, who can’t think of another.  

Home is vital to exiles. Far away from the place which is most important to them, which they can rely on, they perceive themselves as uprooted from home. In comparison with exiles, migrants often focus on belonging and identity. They either belong to both the home and host countries or fit in to the host country. However, due to the difficulty of assimilation, some try to reduce their interaction with the new country. They seek to protect their own belonging and identity. For instance, in Caspari’s Intending to Return, Portuguese migrant workers set up an association for themselves: “Folore is one of the few focal points around which Portuguese migrants in Grenoble gathered together in any numbers, and one of the few areas for the collective expression and projection of a collective identity. The vehicle for the organisation and expression of folore was most often the Portuguese associations.” In a situation with nowhere to belong to, they were forced to form their own community or diaspora to replace their original home. For them, it functions as a temporary society or home for which most migrants feel a need.

Exiles, on the other hand, would rather belong to where they come from. They have lost their origin and may not want to live in the new society permanently. The only hope for them is to return home but, in reality, they cannot fulfil this desire. Therefore, they yearn, imagine, intend to return and employ various means to achieve this, through psychological recall or physical contact by mail, internet or telephone, and whatever connects them to their homeland. An imagined return becomes a reason for survival. Due to the experience of displacement, their minds project to their far-away homes, thus displacing both their bodies and minds. In psychological terms, the locations of here (host place) and there (home) become distinct positions so that people can recognise where they are. Home is a real place for exiles, but the imagined home actually only exists in the mind. In reality, it is a virtual place that they cannot touch or catch. It is the contrast between reality and the

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64 Folore has a meaning related to the English word ‘folklore’ (traditional beliefs and customs), but encompasses especially the songs and dances of the rural areas in Portugal. A. Caspari. Intending to Return: Portuguese Migrants in France: A Case Study from Grenoble. PhD thesis (University of Sussex, 1986) 270-271.
imagination, and this results in symptoms of loss. For example, in the poem borrowing someone’s garden to plant chrysanthemums is a metaphor for the loss of homeland, because the land is not the poet’s and the flowers bring consolation. The flowers of home have become a subject which salves someone’s emotion but also intrigues a recall of the homeland.

秋風吹客客思家，
破帽從梁自在斜。
腸斷故山歸未得，
借人離落種黃花。

The autumn wind has blown on me who missed home,
The broken hat on my head tilted freely as it used to be.
I felt sorrow as my heart was cut because I could not go back to home,
All I can do is borrow people’s gardens to plant the chrysanthemums of home.

However, what is the exact nature of home for exiles? In this poem the meaning of home is more of an abstract concept. The definition of home from the Oxford English Dictionary is “a place, region or state to which one properly belongs, on which one’s affections centre, or where one finds refuge, rest, or satisfaction”. Dietmar Dath said ‘Homes are ‘origin stories’ constructed as retrospective signposts within visual space, acoustic space, and even tactile space. They are made for coming from’. Therefore, the meaning of home is an essential place for exiles’ yearning to return.

Furthermore, home can be a physical place but also something affecting the mind. Eve Hoffman talking of Jews in the Diaspora, comments “that home existed on two levels: there were the real communities that Jews inhabited in various countries; but on the symbolic and perhaps the more important plane, home consisted of the entity ‘Israel’, which increasingly became less a geographic and more a spiritual territory, with Jerusalem at its heart”. In Grief and Loss in Exile, exiles leaving their home feel “the actual loss of their usual physical and emotional environment, including geography, culture, political process, emotional support, status, roles and identity”. Therefore, home is a term with multiple meanings, both physical and psychological. This thesis focuses on the physical objects which help the imagination.

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65 The issues of migration and exile sometimes overlap. In this thesis, I have tried to point out those which most apply to exile.
68 Ibid. 68.
to return to a place, because I suggest that these are the basic elements of home which can influence an exile’s mind. They are also the objects which can be recorded in photography.

3.4.2 The various subjects for longing

Fig. 3.3.17. A postcard, the United Kingdom, 1916. The text on the postcard is “The poor sailor boy, as o’er billows he roams. Oft sighs for the cot he has left far at home. And the sweet village bells, so pleasant and gay. And the lass that he loves, who is far, far away. Home! home! sweet, sweet home! There’s no place like home! There’s no place like home!”
What if the place that we are in the midst of is different from the physical space that we currently inhabit? What if the ordinary is located elsewhere, in another place or in a remembered past, and we now carry it within us as an image of this place. We may remember only elements of it: maybe certain objects, smells, a smile or expression, particular acts or occasions, a word, all of which come out in a manner that we cannot control or understand. Yet any of these make us feel ‘at home’ in a way that we cannot find in the physical space where we are now stuck. This, I would suggest, is the problem of exile, of being displaced and yet capable of remembering place: of being dislocated yet able to discern what it is that locates us. We have a great yearning, but we cannot fulfil it with anything but memory.71

The book, *The Common Place*, addresses the issues of home and house in-depth. The author Peter King believes home is an ordinary place for everyone; it is the place of most safety and offers greatest relief. Recalling home for exiles is actually recalling their memory of the past: “Returning - or attempting to return - to where we wish to be. Ideally this is a physical move, but where we are stuck and find no means of actual return, we must rely on memory”.72 Memories of home thus decide what, from their past, exiles have lost. The missing, remembered, objects become vital because they differentiate one person’s desire to return from another’s.

The physical subjects of home can include landscape, weather, people, language, sound, smell, food, lovers, relatives, city and town (Fig. 3.3.17) and will vary with different personal and cultural experiences. For instance, in *Intending to Return*, houses are an important symbol for Portuguese migrants who earned enough in France to send money to Portugal to build a new house.73 Their family at home also became rich in their poor community. The house gave the migrants substantial satisfaction and a symbolic reputation and the new house became a new target for their imagined return. Another example is drawn from Miroslav Jancic’s experience.74 The relocation of his home was followed by that of his family. They were forced from their homeland and had nowhere stable to go. Without any possibility of returning, the meaning of home is a group of relatives rather than the bounds of geography.

This thesis emphasises autobiographical research as a method. The main body of practical works is thus based on my personal experiences and cultural identity.

72 Ibid. 74.
The purpose of this is to undertake in-depth research in my field of art practice rather than a general investigation. As stated earlier, the missing subjects for my imagined return focus on three areas, parents, homeland and childhood. The parent category indicates the significance of the parent/child relationship in traditional Chinese culture in Taiwan. Confucianism is the main influence. The category of homeland explores the reasons for, and meanings of, abandoned buildings in my hometown and also Chinatown as the substitute of homeland. The final category, childhood, opens up a larger question for exiles. To me, childhood is a complex metaphor as far as exile is concerned. It is a period of time and place to which I want to return but also a time I can never return to in reality. Paradise-like childhood has thus become a place of the distant past for redemption.

I suggest that all exiles miss different physical aspects of home and that these help trigger an imagined return. I will explore those which are significant to me and, in the following three chapters, research other similar examples to further illustrate my stance.

3.5 Conclusion

To me, the medium of photography is significant. Its ability to show that something really existed in place and time (the ‘this-has-been’ of Roland Barthes) is the quality I intended to explore in my practical works. This feature is never reproduced by other media, painting, printing or film. In this chapter, I gave an in-depth discussion of this concept, together with consideration of Barthes’s final book, Camera Lucida, and the interplay with my own work and that of some contemporary photographers. Thus the conceptual frameworks in this practice-based research are not only about theories but also concepts generated by practitioners. Further interpretation has shown how the photograph (especially old photographs) evokes a place of ‘that world’ used by those contemporary photographers, as exiles, to imagine a return. Photographers seem can dwell inside photographs in their imagination.

Furthermore, the innovative use of exhibition space for the installation of the thesis’ photographic works is important. The photographic installation Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile has explored several practical strategies. It is a site-specific installation, with a particular path, used to suggest a journey, and various means of illumination within the space. The transition between light and dark is very effective when looking at photographic works and transports viewers into another world. The design of the installation has, thus, enhanced, and is interwoven with, the
photographic works. They became a whole body of work rather than separated subjects. This installation was the core of the thesis and generated its conceptual frameworks.

Finally, the chapter looked at the issue of yearned for subjects which stimulate an imagined return. The physical objects of the homeland are an important issue to explore. I suggested that exiles had various targets in their homeland which they missed and that this could be influenced by personality and cultural identity. Based on this assumption the following three chapters will further explore the subjects I miss in terms of my personal experiences and cultural background. Those subjects were represented visually in my photographic works and can be categorized as parents, homeland and childhood.
Chapter 4  An Imagined Return to One’s Parents

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the cultural and personal significance of the family in Taiwan - especially the role of parents and the duties of the eldest son - and reflects my thoughts on two artworks, *Father*, and *Mother and Me as a Christmas Tree*. It then discusses the rapidly changing structure, from an extended to a nuclear family, due to social transition in contemporary Taiwan. This social change has forced many people, including me, to leave their parents and move to the cities as exiles. This all culminates in a desire to reunite family and parents. Sections 4.5 and 4.6, are individual studies of the two artworks and give an account of the creative concepts and working processes involved.

Moreover, this chapter gives details of my personal experiences and cultural background, as well as other examples related to the theme.

4.2 The significance of parents in Taiwanese culture

4.2.1 The duties of the eldest son

In terms of Taiwanese kinship, the most important relationship is between parents and their children. This is due to the traditional culture of the family. Parents are responsible for their children for the whole of their lives. One very good illustration of this is that in contemporary Taiwan many children live with their parents until they marry. This means that before they marry, they are still children to their parents, even at thirty years of age. Some, who do not marry, live with their parents for their whole lives. Nowadays, people marry later and the relationship is interesting because the time spent living with parents has extended.

In traditional Taiwanese culture, the eldest son is even closer to his parents, because he is responsible for them. He is educated to take care of his parents and their family from the time he is born. As the heir he inherits responsibility and power,
and when he has the ability to organise the family, he becomes its head. At this time, his father can delegate responsibility to him. This is the way in Taiwanese culture; the head of the family is determined through patriarchal order rather than ability. Thus, the eldest son receives power but also responsibility, especially for his parents. Occasionally other children are charged with these duties, but they most commonly fall to the eldest son:

In Chinese tradition, there is an emphasis on not venturing far from parents while they are alive as well as protecting the family. That is to say tradition has always been important and anyone who could not protect the family was considered the ‘black sheep’. In Chinese tradition, you never had to venture out, as long as you maintained and protected the family, there wouldn't be any problem. It has always been imperative to not be the ‘prodigal son’; that is not doing anything that would cause the family to lose face. In other words, classics like the Confucian Analects that we have been schooled in emphasise ‘emulating the past’, while occidental literature emphasises opening up to the future.¹

Therefore, this tradition is rooted in Confucianism and the concept of dutiful children in Chinese tradition. In the analects of Confucius (孔子, BC. 551 ~ BC. 479), we are very obedient; Confucius said, "if parents are still alive, the children cannot travel far from home".² This means that whilst our parents live, we cannot go far away because we need to take care of them, and also that we cannot allow them to worry about us. This makes Chinese family relationships very close and binding, and today this influence is still deeply rooted in our society.

In my personal case, I began my exile as a result of concern about my parents. My nuclear family is small because my father came from China as a political exile and my mother was a stepdaughter, living away from her original home.³ My parents felt unstable in their lives and this is one of the things which ties us together. The sense of exile comes especially from my father who often talked of his own exile during my childhood. When we three children grew up, we were forced to leave our parents to find education and work in Taipei. I am the eldest son and feel that the responsibility for taking care of my parents is on my shoulders, especially since my father was unwell. Separation from his children aged him and aggravated his

² Confucius. Annotated by Zhu Shi. Confucius Analects (Taipei: Golden Maple, 1987) 56. Apart from Taoism, Confucianism is one of the most influential philosophies in the Chinese world.
³ For details of my father’s exile please see the Appendix 2.
condition. Sometimes, I consider giving up the good job I have and returning home, but my parents need money so I must continue to work to earn enough for them.\textsuperscript{4} It is a dilemma I have struggled with for twenty years. In line with the tradition firmly ingrained in my mind, taking care of them is my responsibility even though I now live far away in the United Kingdom. I suffer constant feelings of guilt during my exile.

In conclusion, in Taiwanese culture, the eldest son should take care of his parents, and they are his responsibility until they pass away. If he fails to do so, there is no escape from either guilt or family blame, even if he is in exile.

\textbf{4.2.2 Living together - the extended family, fundamental to traditional Taiwanese culture}

The Chinese would not have felt themselves to be the helpless pawns of superiors and family members. On the contrary, there would have been a sense of collective agency. The chief moral system of China – Confucianism – was essentially an elaboration of the obligations that obtained between emperor and subject, parent and child, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and between friend and friend. Chinese society made the individual feel very much a part of a large, complex, and generally benign social organism where clear mutual obligations served as a guide to ethical conduct. Carrying out prescribed roles – in an organized, hierarchical system – was the essence of Chinese daily life. There was no counterpart to the Greek sense of personal liberty. Individual rights in China were one’s ‘share’ of the rights of the community as a whole, not a license to do as one pleased.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{4} I taught in University as a full-time lecturer. In Taiwan, this job is stable and has a very high reputation and good salary.
Fig. 4.2.1. An illustration of a San-He-Yuan (see text below) showing the house structure and family life. Illustrated by Meng-Jia Yao (姚孟嘉).

Fig. 4.2.2. In front of main hall in San-He-Yuan, from the book The Last Distinguished Family in Tsyh-Tong.
In the mid twentieth century, Taiwan was still an agricultural society and usually many generations of the family lived together. Some even had five generations, all living together in a large building, the traditional housing of Taiwan, called a San-He-Yuan (三合院) (Fig. 4.2.1 and 4.2.2). According to a Taiwanese proverb, the more children and grandchildren, the more good fortune, and this underlies Taiwanese thinking on family size.\(^6\) As the family grew, additional accommodation was built alongside existing buildings, so the home was large and seemed like a small community. For example, Bao-Bao Lin's (林保寶) documentary book, *The Last Distinguished Family in Tsyh-Tong*, details the history of his distinguished family.\(^7\) As a descendant of this family, when he saw photographs hanging on the wall in his old home, he was immediately moved by the people in the pictures and began to look into his family history (Fig. 4.2.3). Through his documentary book, he traced back the roots of his large vanishing ancestry.

The definition of a family, in my opinion, is those people living and eating together under the same roof. They share the same facilities, living room, kitchen, and garden for instance. The extended families used to eat at a large round table (Fig. 4.2.4). If there were too many people, they would be separated into several groups and would eat at different sittings. In this investigation, physically living together is seen as significant to family relationships in Taiwanese culture. The close relationship is one of the reasons we are very attached to our relatives throughout our lives, and is also the reason relatives like to live closely together within a community. When a person is in difficulty the first to help are always their relatives, borrowing money, letting a room, or taking care of children or even the whole family.

\(^6\) In Chinese characters ‘多子多孫多福氣’.
Physically living together as a family is a vital part of our culture. However, family structure has been changing quickly since the 1960s.

Fig. 4.2.4. It is our tradition that the family eats at a big round table. This photograph is from the book *The Last Distinguished Family in Tsyh-Tong*.

4.3 The rapidly changing family structure in contemporary Taiwan

4.3.1 From the extended family to the nuclear family

Between the 1960s and 1990s Taiwan dramatically changed from an agricultural to an industrial society due to the needs of economic development. In the 1980s, it was already recognised as one of the newly industrialized countries of the world. Migration from the countryside to the cities reached its highest rate in the late 1970s, with the main reason for moving being the search for jobs and a new life. This resulted in fast urbanization. In 1956, only 33% of the population lived in the cities of over 50,000 residents. However, in 2000, this figure had reached 78%. Young people aged between 20 and 40, in particular, migrated from their hometowns to find new jobs and most remained in the cities. The reasons were various: they perhaps

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9 Ibid. 2.
married city residents, considered it a better life, or thought it good for the next generation.

This change has influenced a transition in family structure from the large, extended family to a nuclear family. A typical example is portrayed in the film A Summer at Grandpa’s (1984) by Hsiao-Hsien Hou (侯孝賢), in which the main character Dong-Dong lives with his parents in the city of Taipei. During the summer holiday, he goes to a country town to live with his grandparents. In this film, the parents need to work during the summer and they only appear in the end of the film to take him back to Taipei. This is common nowadays; parents live in the city with their children, and the grandparents live alone in the hometown. Conceptually, we still belong to the extended family even though, in reality, we are separated. We never feel independence from our large family. This is our tradition and it is difficult to change in modern Taiwan:

The problems of old people are the most problematic human issues in contemporary Taiwan society. Today, so many old people have remained in the countryside that the communities in which they live are aged. Even though they have plenty of descendants they cannot be with them and have to live alone. In our rich society they dreamt of an ideal future and never imagined that they would not fulfil that dream. In the past, no matter how poor they were, they still brought up their own children. Nowadays, when they need care, their children are far away. When they are awake, they either watch television or gossip in the temple. If you asked what they were doing, they would tell you they had nothing to do and were just waiting to die.¹⁰

This is caused by the separation of children from their parents. For example, the novel, Dead Again? by Chun-Ming Huang (黃明春), is based on a real story and is most ironic.¹¹ In this short novel, the old grandmother Fen-Niang is dying. According to custom, her descendants had to surround her to await her death. However, because nowadays people live far away from their old homes, they resented the disruption to their busy lives caused by having to return and wait. But, Fen-Niang did not really die and came back to life when they began to mourn her. At the end of the story, she said “Next time I am really leaving. Next time.” How sad this story is. It

¹⁰ Chun-Ming Huang (黃明春). “Dead Again?” (死去活來). Release the Captured Animal. Ed. Shu-Yi Yu (Taipei: Lian-He Literature, 1999) 14. This quotation is from Huang’s preface to the book. The stories, in his selections from novels of the 1980s and 1990s, are based on I-Lan, my home county. ¹¹ Please see Appendix 4 for the full text of the novel Dead Again?
demonstrates that the changes are not only about the destruction of the traditional family structure, but also about the crisis of the traditional values of humanity.

In my own case, my home county I-Lan is in the north-east of Taiwan (Fig. 4.3.1). Due to its natural geological border, its economic development is slower than other counties in Taiwan and the result of changing family structures is faster. As a result of under-development, this county has started to lose its population. Even worse, the county’s policy is to protect the natural environment, thus heavy industry is not welcome. Under those circumstances, I-Lan county has one of the highest population loss rates in Taiwan. The chart, summarizing formal government statistics, shows that the population structure of my home county I-Lan has undergone enormous change. My hometown Su-Ao is the worst in I-Lan (Fig. 4.3.2). This has had a great influence on family structure. The older generations remain in my hometown and the younger generations have left. Problems of social care for old people are emerging; older parents are deprived of care from their children, because they are far away from home.

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In conclusion, there is a trend towards the nuclear family, but away from tradition and also away from our parents. This has happened very quickly, over the space of only thirty years, between the 1960s and 1990s. In Taiwan, so many people, like me, are forced to accept this crucial change before we can deal with it properly.

4.3.2 The guilt of grown-up children

The masses of people who have to leave their parents for economic reasons, of which I am an example, are the subject under investigation. Due to the importance of parents in Taiwanese culture, most people feel loss and guilt when they move. This feeling is rooted in conflict between the new industrialized society and our traditional culture. Our textbook education is to take care of our parents, but we are physically forced to split from our origin, parents and homeland. This influences us psychologically, causing feelings of guilt and loss.

For instance, a moving piece of prose from contemporary Taiwan, Not Far Away From Home, describes a woman who missed her parents but only realized the
extent of her nostalgia after her father’s death. As an exile, the distance between her old and new home was an excuse; she felt very distant because her mind was not on her old home, but blamed herself because home was not, in reality, too far away. After her father passed away she felt guilty. The prose describes the strong relationship between the writer and her parents, and even her grandparents, although she had married and lived independently away from her parents’ home. However, in her mind, she always belonged to the original home and was the child of her parents, no matter how old she was. Such is our tradition of the extended family; very deep emotion connects children and parents. This example reflects the feelings of most people in this situation, myself included. We have left our old home and parents and suffer guilt without any redemption.

If you come from the small town Lu-Gang, have you seen my parents? My home is behind the Ma-Zu Temple, which is a grocery selling incense. If you come from the small town Lu-Gang, have you seen my lover? When I left she was eighteen, with a kind heart and long hair.
Taipei is not my home; my home has no neon lights. Lu-Gang has its own streets, fishing villages, and those people pray in the Ma-Zu Temple.
Taipei is not my home; my home has no neon lights. Lu-Gang has its own sunrise, sunset, and those roaming tourists from other civilisations.

When people are forced to leave their parents far away, they begin to experience a sense of panic. Normally, the degree of pain increases with distance and time. Many Taiwanese songs describe the compromised and melancholic feelings which result. Take, for instance, The Small Town of Lu-Gang by Da-You Luo (羅大佑). The words of this song express the author’s denial of living in Taipei, missing his parents, lover, and hometown. Lu-Gang is one of those rare towns in Taiwan which still safeguard their traditional buildings and culture. This location is actually a metaphor to contrast with the modernised capital Taipei. The song’s words represent the rejection of modernisation in Taiwan and the desire to return home to the writer’s parents. The feeling in this song can be described in the Chinese phrase ‘悲情’, a typical Taiwanese expression that means sadness with a compromised mind; a kind of pessimism. In Taiwanese tradition, people often cannot do what they really want to

15 Da-You Luo (羅大佑). The Small Town of Lu-Gang (Taipei: Rock Records & Tapes, 1980). This is the beginning of the song. Translated by Ming-Chang Tien.
do and try to compromise. The feeling is one of very low mood and negative emotion without the energy to do anything positive. In the exile’s case, they want to take care of their parents but reality does not allow them to do so. Feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness overcome them. The sense of guilt stems from the fact that they blame themselves for not doing their best.

4.4 Reuniting the family in photography

The frustration at leaving parents, in other words, is a desire to reunite the family. A Taiwanese blessed proverb says “happiness is full of descendants of family” showing that we prefer all generations to live together.\(^{16}\) As shown in the discussion in Section 4.2, we have a culture which recognizes the importance of the family; we have the obligation to support and help each other. We seldom emphasise individuality, but point out how the individual should be dutiful to society. Therefore, for exiles, reuniting children with their parents is not only a personal desire but also a family responsibility.

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\(^{16}\) In Chinese characters ‘子孙满堂’.
Fig. 4.4.1. Shun-Chu Chen, *Assembly: Family Parade* in Fukuoka Apartment Project (Japan), 1999.

Fig. 4.4.2. Shun-Chu Chen, *Assembly: Family Parade* (details), 1999.
The first example Assembly: Family Parade by Shun-Chu Chen indicates the artist’s desire to reunite his family (Fig. 4.4.1). In a mass of single-figure photographs, it represents the figure of the isolated individual as the contemporary social condition; people are always isolated, having left their place of origin (Fig. 4.4.2). However, it also presents an enormous number of portrait photographs which bring to mind the traditional, large and extended family. The parade implies the strong will of people to reunite. The repetition of nine family members in all of these single-figure photographs symbolises the desire to expand the contemporary small family to the traditional, extended family. Through this imagination of reunion, people can take care of their parents, the most important characters in a child’s life. Moreover, it seems people can protect each other but also retain their own identity, as indicated in the representations of individual portraits. This is the artist’s ideal world, to retain the individualisation of westernised society but reunite the big family of Taiwanese culture.

Another example is from China which has a strong cultural influence on Taiwanese culture. The work Family Register by photographers Yinong Shao (邵逸農) and Chen Mu (慕辰) represents contemporary nuclear families reunited through photographic portraits within a family tree (Fig. 4.4.3). The family tree is a way of confirming where we came from and who are our ancestors and relatives. This work depicts the intention to go back to the traditional, large family. China today faces new threats to its traditions; one is the westernised nuclear family and the other is the social policy of ‘One Family One Child Only’. In this work, most nuclear families only have one child. This is an extreme switch from dozens of people to three members, parents and one child, in one family. However, even they are separated by social force. Looking at the family tree, they know they are still a part of the traditional, extended family. This tradition cannot easily be changed. The photographers’ intention is that the visual representation of the traditional family tree, together with Chinese calligraphy, enhances this concept.

Through further exploration of my works, Father and Mother and Me as a Christmas Tree, I will develop certain issues in the next two sections.
4.5 **Father**: a memorial to my father

4.5.1 Images, description and statement

A. Images

Title: Father
Size: 30cm×50cm×4cm each, 9.5cm×28cm each photographic diptych
Quantity: 5 photographic works
Date of taking photographs: 1997 and 2001
Date of working: 2001~2004
Media: Photographs with wooden frame
Display: Fixed to the wall
Installation location: One darkened room (Room 237B in the Painting Studio)
Fig. 4.5.1. Ming-Chang Tien, *Father* (in sequence), 2001.

Fig. 4.5.2. Ming-Chang Tien, *Father* (a framed example), 2004.
B. Description

This is a sequence of five photographic works.

The left-hand side of these five diptychs is the same. It is an old family photograph of my father and me in front of our home in Su-Ao, Taiwan in 1997, one year before my father’s death in 1998.

The five right-hand side photographs in these five diptychs were taken in the same place, and from the same viewpoint, but I stand on the left hand side in the image instead of my father. I stood with: the empty home; my mother; my two-month-old son; my new family, including my wife and son; and with my father’s memorial portrait. These photographs were taken in 2001, three years after my father died.

C. Statement

I have such long hair.

Does father still stand behind me in the same position?

In front of the photograph which I took in 1997,

I re-photographed this image with my family in 2001.
I took photographs again and again, like the act of chanting.
My new family meet with my old family,
New and old.
My newborn son gives me new life, but also reminds me my father died.
Life and death are like a circle.
Now, I meet them at the same time.\textsuperscript{17}

4.5.2 Concepts

Tree wants to rest but the wind does not stop; children want to take care but
the parents do not wait any more.\textsuperscript{18}

This artwork is a memento designed for my father, the most influential man in my life.
Worrying about him is the main reason I feel so melancholic during my exile. I will
never forget my father passed away during this time. I felt guilty because I could not
return home to take care of him.

![Fig. 4.5.4. A piece of Buddhist Scripture. It should be constantly read without stopping.](image)

I still remember when my father died and the Buddhist chanting in my house. It made
me feel easier during the passage of that difficult time. The constant chanting is
round and has no beginning and no end (Fig. 4.5.4). The chanting let me
understand that death is just a part of life and there is a need to let go. It is natural
for everyone to face death. However, because the dead are too close to us, we
forget the meaning of life. When we see our life is occupied with the presence of
death, it is a split from real life and it becomes difficult to pass the time. The fact of

\textsuperscript{17} Written by Ming-Chang Tien.
\textsuperscript{18} This is a Chinese proverb ‘樹欲靜而風不止，子欲養而親不待’, translated by Ming-Chang Tien.
my father’s death has never changed (I wanted him alive) even if I have faced it for a thousand times.

Life, as in the photographs on the right, keeps changing, but death, like the photographs on the left, is fixed. For me, death is like the water in a dead pond, and you do not expect any response from there. It is like a Black Hole in the Universe, no reflection and echo from it.¹⁹

When I met my newborn son a miracle happened. I never expected him to have such a powerful impact. When he came to the world, my father’s death had a different meaning for me. I now see life and death as a circle. It is nature, some people die and others are born, continually. This was a transition, allowing me to understand the real meaning of life; that life is constant and never stops. After this transformation, I felt redemption about my father’s death.

Fig. 4.5.5. A still image from The Apu Trilogy; the redemption through his son.

Related to this life concept, the film The Apu Trilogy by Indian director Satyajit Ray is a good example. In the three films, Apu faced the deaths of his family, his sister, father, mother, and wife.²⁰ After that, he behaved as a wanderer, losing direction in his life and cutting his connections with the world. Then, at the end of the last film, he meets his son and eventually finds a way to go forward. For myself, death seems like a stopped clock. My son’s new life broke the suspension of time and set it moving again (in reality, time did not stop, but I had the feeling of being stuck in time). The fact of death did not change, but my point of view on the subject is different and more positive. I am looking forward to seeing the future rather than lingering in dead pond-water. Life keeps going and never comes back again.

²⁰ The Apu Trilogy (1955) consists of three great films about an exile’s journey and redemption.
Moreover, in the light of Chinese tradition, a dutiful son has to breed the next generation. The happiest thing for parents is that they have had many descendants before they die. In this work, through my arrangement three generations meet together as a big family. I was satisfied with my imagined family get-together. However, my father only met my son in a dream, never in reality.

### 4.5.3 Working process

**A. Repeated photographs mimic repetitive chanting**

In this artwork, inspiration came when, at home in 2001, I saw a photograph of my father taken in 1997 (the photograph in Fig. 4.5.6). I wanted to describe my feelings of mourning using this photograph. Initially, my plan was to create only one image in this artwork, by re-photographing the old 1997 picture. However, during my days at home in Su-Ao I was always surrounded by the sound of chanting, from which came the idea of repetition. This prompted me to take repeated photographs with my family.

![Fig. 4.5.6. The old photograph taken in 1997, self-portrait with my father on the left hand side, and a drawing on the right hand side showing the initial plan and concept of Father in 2001.](image)

**B. The narrative**

In this artwork, the five sets of photographs are in sequence (Fig. 4.5.1). Because the background (my home) is the same for all the diptych photographs, the differences between them have become a visual comparison of details, especially with regard to people. In the first diptych, it is unclear what has happened to my father in the left hand photograph because he was just behind my portrait in the newly taken photograph (Fig. 4.5.6). The second image, with my mother, and the third with my new family, seem to have a gloomy feeling. In the fourth, my ghost-like face with my son is the transition point. In the final image, this set of artworks reveals to the viewers that my father has actually died.
Furthermore, in the fourth photograph I was holding my son, and in the final photograph, I was holding my father’s memorial photograph (Fig. 4.5.7). The posture of holding conveys a meaning of keeping to myself. Moreover, the similarity of the holding position implies the transition from my son’s birth to my father’s death. Fig. 4.5.8 is an example of the ‘holding fast’ of family photographs by exiles.\(^2\) The family photograph becomes a vital possession for the exile, wherever they might be.

Fig. 4.5.7. Ming-Chang Tien, *Father* (details), 2001. Two details of holding my son and my father’s memorial photograph.

Fig. 4.5.8. A photograph by Josef Koudelka, Czechoslovakia, 1966.

C. Format
This small photograph (less than 4 by 6 inches in each diptych panel) is related to the family images. It is a kind of private photograph for the album rather than for public presentation. The black frame is also appropriate for traditional memorial photographs (Fig. 4.5.2). Both of these visual strategies are indicative of my autobiographical intentions.

D. My ghost-like face as a transition between life and death

During the printing of the photographs, I needed to reproduce both sides of the diptych with the same tonal quality. This was a little difficult due to the very different nature of the light in the pair of images. Afterwards, I decided to use a more artificial approach to solving the problem, and this became coherent with the theme. I lit my face in the photograph that I held my son and it became like a ghost face (Fig. 4.5.9). This was successful because it was my intention to imply the moment of life and death meeting together; the transition of life.

Fig. 4.5.9. Ming-Chang Tien, Father (detail), 2001. A ghost-like face in the fourth diptych.

4.6 Mother and Me as a Christmas Tree: missing my mother

4.6.1 Images, description and statement

A. Images

Title: Mother and Me as a Christmas Tree
Size: 82cm×82cm×6cm each, 75cm×75cm each photographic diptych
Quantity: One pair of photographs
Date of taking photographs: 2001
Date of working: 2001~2004
Media: A photographic diptych with wooden frame
Display: Face-to-face (1 meter distance), fixed to the wall
Installation location: One darkened room (Room 237A in the Painting Studio)

Fig. 4.6.1. Ming-Chang Tien, *Mother and Me as a Christmas Tree*, 2001.
B. Description

The diptych is the only example of my artwork in which both images are taken in the United Kingdom. One photograph is an abandoned Christmas tree lying down in front of my small flat in London after Christmas. The other is my mother visiting the British Museum and standing in front of a Japanese lantern before she left the United Kingdom.

When my mother came to take care of my newborn son in 2001, she was, like me, an outsider. She could not speak English and was not interested in travelling. She was frustrated by living abroad, because she could not adjust to fit into her new life. Thus, I felt sorry for her.

I never feel happy when Christmas comes and one day when I saw this tree, it encapsulated my feelings.

C. Statement

We stood out of the home.
She was looking back at me.
Was I still behind her?
I have travelled for too long and too far.
I am so tired.
I can’t stand any more,
after my mum’s gaze.\textsuperscript{22}

\subsection*{4.6.2 Concepts}

As a Taiwanese who has a Chinese cultural background, family is always the priority in my life. As an exile, my anxiety is that I cannot return to my home to take care of my parents. I want to draw attention to my mother. After my father died, she lived alone and I was really worried about her when I decided to study abroad.

This work is a further direct response to the issue of exile. The gap between two face-to-face photographs symbolized the real distance between my mother and me. The background to the photograph of my mother is a Japanese lantern, which contrasts with the Christmas tree to highlight the distance between East and West. Mother gazes back at me. I, like the abandoned Christmas tree, cannot look back. Despair and yearning exist in the space between the photographs.

Furthermore, the cutting of roots has a symbolic meaning for me as an exile. The first time I saw a Christmas tree outside someone’s home was very emotional and touched my heart. Like me, the pitiful tree appears useless and abandoned. These are exactly my feelings about Christmas, because the celebration is not for me. I am like the severed discarded tree, a rootless exile. My mother was also away from her home at that time. So both of us are outsiders. In the images, my mother is standing vulnerably outside the railing in front of the Japanese lantern. I am outside my home, lying in front of the fence.

\subsection*{4.6.3 Working process}

\textbf{A. Taking the photographs}

One day in the winter of 2001, as I took photographs of my mother before she left the United Kingdom she suddenly looked back at me. I was fascinated by this and felt it was something I wanted to capture. Thus, I asked my mother if I could photograph her in many other places (Fig. 4.6.3).\textsuperscript{23} Afterwards, I realised the glancing back gesture had a strong meaning related to looking back on the past. It is

\textsuperscript{22} Written by Ming-Chang Tien.
\textsuperscript{23} In my normal life I do not take photographs of her frequently.
a way to see the past, as an exile; he/she is always looking backwards to the past rather than to the future where there is no hope. Moreover, as she looked back at me, she wanted to make sure I was following her. This implies that she was afraid of losing her son, her main carer in the future.

After Christmas, I saw Christmas trees outside many homes and began to take photographs. It is quite common to see Christmas trees on the street after Christmas. I strolled in the community and took photographs, but finally chose the one taken outside my rented house. I thought it was more meaningful to link the discarded tree and my temporary home.

B. Planning this diptych
I did plan for each photograph very carefully, but did not think about the combination of these two photographs. This diptych came about because I was not satisfied with
using a single image as a work. As a photographer used to using multiple photographs in one artwork, I like to see the relationship between pictures. I always feel the single image is too perfect to look at, preferring the fragmentation of images which give a stronger representation of the sense of split and displacement of exile.

C. Narrative of the diptych

When I found a way for the installation to express the sense of sadness, I was really excited. The face-to-face display method makes it uncomfortable for viewers to see both images simultaneously. It is possible to see both but at a very strange angle, and the distortion of the images is disturbing. Standing between the two images one is also aware of a pressure coming from the, too close, photographs (Fig. 4.6.4). This kind of setting fulfilled my idea of hardship in exile. The struggle, therefore, is not only inside the photographic images but also in the installation space. It is unpleasant to look at for long and this feeling is reflected in the images themselves; my mother was looking at me but I failed to look back.
4.7 Conclusion

When I was young,
Nostalgia was a tiny, tiny stamp,
Me on this side,
Mother on the other side.
When I grew up,
Nostalgia was a narrow boat ticket,
Me on this side,
Bride on the other side.
But later on,
Nostalgia was a lowly grave,
Me on the outside,
Mother on the inside.
And at present,
Nostalgia becomes a shallow strait,
Me on this side,
Mainland on the other side.  

This chapter has explored both personal and cultural backgrounds to give an in-depth understanding of my practical works, Father and Mother and Me as a Christmas Tree, which are an imagined return to my parents. Its approach is mainly from an autobiographical point of view but includes practical details to give insight into the creative process.

In the poem Nostalgia (1972) above by Kuang-Chung Yu (余光中), it is quite common to indicate the parents as a longing subject for an imagined return because nowadays the close relationships between parents and children are still significant in Taiwanese culture. The concept of a dutiful son in the light of Chinese tradition is actually based on cultural roots which can be traced back to Confucianism.

Furthermore, in Taiwan, the influence of industrialized society on the issue of family structure was vital. Taiwan was transformed from an agricultural to an industrial society, and the people who lived in the countryside, including me, were forced from their hometowns and parents to the cities. This was the cause of the family structure changing dramatically, from the big family to the nuclear family. Most

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24 Kuang-Chung Yu (余光中). “Nostalgia.” Night Watchman (Taipei: Jiou-Ge, 2004). The poet came from Mainland China and stayed in Taiwan for the remainder of his life. The original text is “小時候，
鄉愁是一枚小小的郵票，我在這頭，母親在那頭。長大後，鄉愁是一張窄窄的船票，我在這頭，新娘在
那頭。後來啊，鄉愁是一方矮矮的墳墓，我在外頭，母親在裡頭，而現在，鄉愁是一灣淺淺的海峽，我
在這頭，大陸在那頭。”. This poem was translated by himself.
did not return to their original homes and settled instead in the cities. Therefore, the desire and despair to return to their parents occupied exiles’ minds.

However, my personal experience remains unique in some ways. My hometown Su-Ao has suffered one of the greatest population losses in Taiwan because of the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society. I was one of the residents who were forced to leave Su-Ao as exiles. Moreover, my father as a political exile from mainland China as the poet previously indicated has enhanced my underlying appreciation of what it is to be an exile.

Finally, the last two sections detail my thinking on my works and the processes involved. They provide insight into the creative approach and vital elements of this practice-based research, and indicate the interaction of thought processes and practice. For instance, my father’s death was a significant event in my life. I was greatly influenced by Buddhist chanting, and represented the concept of repetition in the work Father. My intentions eventually become clear through my practical approach. Therefore, practice and thought are interwoven, and cannot be separated because they are a whole.
Chapter 5 An Imagined Return to the Homeland

5.1 Introduction

Homeland is always a central issue in the history of exile. This chapter explores the aspects of homeland highlighted by my photographic works 1997 and Thirty-Thousand-Miles. First of all, it defines the meaning of homeland, focussing especially on the notion of its stability, and gives two visual examples from Andrey Tarkovsky's films. Homeland is an idea of an extended home and a physical place to which exiles yearn to return. Secondly, it explores two personal locations which are related to the theme. The first is London's Chinatown, an intriguing and illusory place which helps me to recall my own, and also a substitute home. The second location is my hometown Su-Ao in Taiwan. I investigated the abandoned buildings which the town's people had left as a witness to their exile. Two photographic examples exploring the disappearance of homeland are given, The Inhabitants by Wright Morris and The House I Once Called Home by Duane Michals. The final two sections are a thorough exploration to my photographic works, 1997 and Thirty-Thousand-Miles, and their reflections on the concept of an imagined return to the homeland.

5.2 The role of the homeland for exiles

5.2.1 The isolation from home

The virtue of our housing is that it protects us from change: it allows us to stay put, and this is important because that is precisely what we want to do. We wish to maintain what we have, or else to build on it and develop it on our terms and in our time. We seek to be free from intrusion, especially from large impersonal forces that we cannot control or understand.¹

¹ Peter King. The Common Place: The Ordinary Experience of Housing (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 1.
The definition of home in the dictionary is “the place where one lives, especially with one’s family”, or “the district or country where one was born or where one has lived for a long time or to which one feels attached”. Home is a place to which people can feel attached, which is safe and relaxed. Commonly it is “a familiar space, full of familiar things” in our daily lives, and an ordinary place that everyone needs in order to survive away from the possibly cruel outside world. Home signifies an internal place of belonging compared to the sometimes alienating experience of the outer world. One cause of exile is the lost feeling experienced when one has left home. Extending this definition, homeland is someone’s native country, or more precisely the land that feels like home. Therefore, for exiles that have left their country, the things they miss are not only their houses as home but also the wider environment, their homeland. One element of the exile’s identity is where they lived or where they were from. Homeland can be an imagined land only, but in this research it is treated as a physical place. Its physical existence is important because the intensity of homesickness during exile comes from the desire and struggle to return to the homeland.

In a long Chinese history, exiled poets have written substantially about the isolation from homeland. For instance, “I do not need to look back hard to see my homeland, because I know home is far away; seventy-five stations”, describes the desperation and impossibility of a return home. The author, Mu Du, had constantly in mind the distance involved. The ‘seventy-five stations’ both indicated the physical distance and expressed an imagined return which is through the road tracing back to his homeland. He must always imagine travelling back from this station to the next in his mind. In another example, “my home is on a wetland; so even in my dreams a return is not appropriate in the autumn”. The poet could not return in reality and, even worse, was forbidden to do so in his dreams. How pitiful he was! The word ‘wetland’ provides a physical description which enhances the sense of reality of his homeland.

2 This is taken from the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 1995) and is representative of definitions in other dictionaries.
4 For more discussions, see Section 2.4.1.
5 From a cultural point of view, Taiwan has the same roots as Mainland China. Historically, Taiwan used to be a part of China and students in Taiwan need to learn Chinese literature as a main subject. This is the reason I choose the Chinese poems as examples.
7 This is part of a poem by Shang-Ying Lee (李商隱) (in Chinese characters, ‘故鄉雲水地，歸夢不宜秋’). In the autumn his homeland is usually flood, so it is inconvenient for travel. Kuen-Yang Yan. Moon is Brighter at Home: A Volume on Exile (Taipei: New Naturalism, 2000) 194.
The greatest detachment from homeland as exiles can be seen in the film Solaris (1972) by the director Andrey Tarkovsky. In this film, people leave the earth for outer space and are deprived of contact with the ground. Comparing the two spaces in the film, the homeland is open, vivid and earthly; on the other side the spaceship is closed, cool and inhuman (Fig. 5.2.1). Inside the spaceship, the feeling is surreal and uncomfortable, and many unexpected things happen. This is a metaphor; for human beings who have lost their homeland as exiles the experience can be painful and leave them very vulnerable. “Films such as Solaris, The Mirror, Stalker and Nostalgia are concerned with the notion of returning: the need to return, of the possibility of getting back what we have lost, but of the impossibility of any physical return”. Tarkovsky’s films are full of a sense of exile.

In sum, homeland is always an essential for exiles who expect one day to go back, no matter how long or how far the journey. Their mind is always pointed in the

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9 Peter King. The Common Place: The Ordinary Experience of Housing (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 74.
direction of home, like migratory birds that know the direction of return. When conditions permit, they will immediately go home.

5.2.2 The stable homeland

The thing that makes the homeland unique is that it cannot be moved; this contrasts with the unstable condition of exiles. In reality exiles can take their parents, relatives, goods, photographs, furniture, and so on, with them into exile. Loss of the immovable homeland, I suggest, is the one thing the exile feels strongly because it is impossible to transport. Therefore, in the exile's mind, home is always in a place in the world, fixed forever and never moved. Homeland becomes a place to which exiles yearn to return; they do not yearn to carry it with them. Stability is the reason that the issue of homeland is universal for exiles.

In another set of circumstances, exiles may seek a new home to replace their old one. For those who left home so long ago that they are forced to accept the new place as home, the second home is a compromise. If they accept it as a second home, despite their despair of returning to their place of origin, it helps them to feel better. However, the new one cannot replace the old one, either physically or psychologically. The old homeland will still be in the exiles' mind.

A visual example dealing with the stable home is in the film *Nostalgia* (1983) by Andrey Tarkovsky, which describes the Russian poet Andrei Gorchakov who is exiled in Italy whilst researching the life of an eighteenth-century composer (Fig. 5.2.2). In the final scene his Russian home appears to him within the confines of an Italian cathedral. It is an illusion and also a metaphor for redemption for him because he cannot return. An alternative suggestion by Peter King is "we can overlay the alien world with our ruts, just as we see the track leading to Gorchakov's idealised Russian farmhouse, and we see this house rooted in an alien soil. In this way the alien environment can become home".¹⁰ No matter what Tarkovsky really intended, the unforgettable images of his old home are always in the poet's heart.

¹⁰ Ibid. 84.
5.3 Chinatown: a substitute for homeland

I always went through Chinatown from this corner (Fig. 5.3.1). The first time I saw this signpost, which contained the Chinese characters ‘小新港街’, I was so surprised (Fig. 5.3.2). I never expected to see Chinese characters on a signpost in London. The small characters were poorly executed using calligraphy of primary school student standard. It would have been impossible to find such simply written script in the streets of Taiwan. I guessed it was not important for westerners because they were unable to recognise it. However, it announces that the area is a Chinatown. The signpost pointed out the direction of Chinatown. Little Newport Street is small; perhaps more like a big alley. When I passed through it, the right-
hand side was full of Chinese restaurants with narrow entrances. In contrast, the left-hand side was the back wall of several big blocks of modern buildings. When I entered the street I was aware of a differentiation between the two sides; eastern and western. Automatically, this street separated Chinatown from the western world without barriers.  

Fig. 5.3.1. Little Newport Street in London's Chinatown.

Fig. 5.3.2. The signpost for Little Newport Street in London's Chinatown.

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Fig. 5.3.3. The Chinese Gate and a pair of stone lions guarding the gate. Ming-Chang Tien, Nov. 2000.

Fig. 5.3.4. Numerous Chinese posters and signs in the street. Ming-Chang Tien, Nov. 2000.

Fig. 5.3.5. The first photograph depicts roast duck in the window of a Chinese restaurant. The second one shows Chinese leaves and radishes outside a Chinese supermarket. Ming-Chang Tien, Nov. 2000.
In 2000, at the beginning of my life in the United Kingdom, I felt homesick and missed my mother, my hometown, language, snacks, and everything about Taiwan. I had left my hometown Su-Ao fifteen years previously, but this was the first time I had lived abroad. Life was so different and I found it very hard to live overseas. I daydreamed a great deal about my hometown, so Chinatown became a place that fulfilled my desire for home.\(^{12}\) When I arrived in Chinatown, all the Chinese images crowded in on me. First impressions were of the posters, shop signs, Chinese food and some Chinese-style buildings (Fig. 5.3.3 ~ 5.3.5).\(^{13}\) I was also surprised that it had a Chinese Gate because this is rare in modern Taiwan. I saw a lot of Northern and Southern Chinese, and Cantonese and could recognise their differences from their faces, language and costume. Stimuli followed one after another through my mind and I could not stop recalling and comparing it with my hometown. I was so excited but also felt homesick.

Fig. 5.3.6. A pavilion in the street of London’s Chinatown and another pavilion, mid-slope on a mountain in my hometown Su-Ao in Taiwan.

Chinatown for westerners is a set of stereotypes which is in a sense ‘oriental’, and also a metaphor for mystery, as in the film Chinatown (Roman Polanski, 1974). It is also a ghetto for Chinese or an exotic atmosphere for tourists, but for me with my

\(^{12}\) Chinatown is a generic name for an urban region containing a large population of Chinese within a non-Chinese society. Chinatowns are found especially frequently in south-east Asia and North America. The first Chinese to settle in Britain arrived in the late 18th century. They were exclusively male, and employees of the East India Company. The Chinese population in Britain remained very, very small in the 19th Century. At the turn of the 20th Century there were just 545 Chinese in Britain, almost exclusively male. They ran small shops and cafes, catering for the extremely transient Chinese population of seamen. By 1914 there were some 30 Chinese businesses in the Limehouse area of London, which had become known as Chinatown. Nowadays, London’s Chinatown is in a central location near the district of Soho and consists of many Chinese restaurants, shops and supermarkets. For more information about London’s Chinatown, see the website Chinatown Online. \(<\text{http://www.chinatown-online.co.uk/pages/guide/history.html}>\>

\(^{13}\) I took some photographs on my initial visit to Chinatown in Nov. 2000. For more images, please see Appendix 5.
Taiwanese cultural background it is full of nostalgia and strangeness.\textsuperscript{14} I have my own memories of my past, but as an exile, “the things we love are not around us, but within us. We are physically separated from them, and we must now rely on the images granted by memory”.\textsuperscript{15} In comparison with my memories, Chinatown is like a museum for the preservation of stereotyped Chinese objects most of which do not exist in modern Taiwan. When I see them, I think of the past. The representation of Chinese style in Chinatown is not exactly the same as the images of bygone Taiwan. Rather, it is a mixed conventional style that consists of mainly Cantonese, North Chinese, and, to some extent, a Taiwanese style. I can identify the differences due to my Taiwanese background. For instance, I was surprised to see a Chinese-style pavilion, because I would not have seen this on a busy street in Taiwan. Pavilions in Taiwan are always in the countryside, park or beside a lake (Fig. 5.3.6). Therefore, an odd atmosphere emanates from the distortion between my surroundings and my memory. I seem to have seen the things around me somewhere in the past in Taiwan, but maybe this is wrong and I never have seen them before. The feeling of ‘déjà vu’ constantly stimulates memories related to my country. Chinatown is full of allusions to home; a substitute and compact version of my homeland.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig5.3.7.jpg}
\caption{The same approach to signposting in my hometown (the left photograph) and London’s Chinatown (the right photograph), but in Chinatown they use a more conventional Chinese red in their signposts and decoration.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{14} The film \textit{Chinatown} (1974) is directed by Roman Polanski. “Forget it, Jake. It’s Chinatown!” the last line of Robert Towne’s script for the film implying the political corruptions of Los Angeles in the 1930s.  
\textsuperscript{15} Peter King. \textit{The Common Place: The Ordinary Experience of Housing} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 74.
When I am an exile in a foreign country, I feel a constant tension in the mind, especially at the beginning of exile. Going to Chinatown allows me to temporarily forget that I am away from my homeland and to enjoy a dreamlike place where I can forget the reality of my suffering, yearning and difficulties in being abroad. It is a good thing for me to find a place I can enjoy, which is home-like, pending my actual return home (Fig. 5.3.7). For most Chinese and Taiwanese in the United Kingdom relaxing in a Chinatown provides us with a comfort zone. Putting to one side the cultural differences of speaking English and eating English food every day, going to Chinatown becomes a ritual of imagined homeland. If our homeland cannot be carried with us, Chinatown is a substitute constructed collectively by Chinese exiles.

Chinatown is, for me, a whole bodily experience as an illusion of home. The illusion inspired my photographic work Thirty-Thousand-Miles which is a viewpoint of the United Kingdom associated with my homeland. This is explained more fully in Section 5.6.

5.4 Abandoned buildings in my homeland

Fig. 5.4.1. Visiting an abandoned house in my hometown Su-Ao.

People can leave but the house must remain there quietly. The abandoned house has had its own remarkable time. I still remember when I was a child,
the community was full of people and children. Neighbours were always visiting from door to door. It was common to treat your neighbour's house as your own. Sometimes I would even go into a house without making an appointment. It was so bustling and exciting. However, nowadays this scene no longer exists. In eight houses there are only three inhabitants: my mother and another retired couple. My childhood there was very wonderful. The abandoned houses are like witnesses. They always remind me of that wonderful time (Fig. 5.4.1).  

5.4.1 Abandoned buildings abound in my hometown

Fig. 5.4.2. Views of my hometown Su-Ao.

My hometown is Su-Ao (蘇澳) town in I-Lan county. It is set in lovely countryside in north-eastern Taiwan (Fig. 5.4.2), and surrounded by high mountains and deep ocean and has a large fishing port. Its significant geography is very different to other places, especially compared to the capital Taipei and my present home in Brighton, England. I did not move away until I was exiled at eighteen years old. When I was a child in the 1970s I lived in a community that was full of people. Houses were very small and people lived very close to each other. The children often played together like a big family. We were quite poor but enjoyed life. However, time has gone by and those scenes now seem only to exist in my memory. People gradually left the community, mostly due to a shortage of work, and the population has decreased.¹⁷

People left their homes and their houses are now empty and abandoned. Nobody cares about them. Most still remain today, because there was no desire to spend money to either maintain or destroy them. In country towns, the land does not need to be used intensively. For instance, my kindergarten has been abandoned for more than 20 years, but the derelict house and the concrete slide are still there (Fig. 5.4.3). This is the reason I have been able to photograph them repeatedly.

Fig. 5.4.3. The concrete slide at my abandoned nursery. Ming-Chang Tien, 2003.

Once I had noticed their existence I became aware of them everywhere in my hometown (Fig. 5.4.4). Most houses remain useless and empty, but some have changed their function. For instance, our main bus station has now become a clothes shop (Fig. 5.4.5). Another house near my home has become a car park,

¹⁷ For more information, please see Section 4.3.1. ‘From the extended family to the nuclear family’.
others are used for storage but, unfortunately, some have totally disappeared. The historical Su-Ao Cinema, the only cinema in my hometown, was one of these. Its disappearance was complete, there are not even any photographs to serve as reminders. Briefly, those buildings are our memories but people have ignored their change and disappearance. Those who still live in the small town of Su-Ao care little about them.

Fig. 5.4.4. Six abandoned buildings in my hometown. Ming-Chang Tien, 2003.

I was sad because the withered houses symbolised the decline of my hometown. When I saw them, I did not do anything; I just watched them with pity. What can I do for them? I was an exile and I did not have any power to help my hometown. I was just like a passing traveller staying at my old home for a short time. When I finished my journey, I had to return to my other home.18

Those abandoned buildings are the most remarkable and permanent things in my homeland. They have become the visual evidence of changes in social structure; people have left their homeland as exiles. The buildings are like human beings frozen in their own places, each with a gesture of pity. The grass grows up in front of them and covers the field of people's vision. The windows are blurred. Some corners of the houses are eroded by the weather or sprout moss. They reflect my own feelings of exile. Every time I saw them, the feeling was as if I was looking at myself; they were like mirrors. This motivated me to photograph them.

5.4.2 The visual representation of buildings in homeland
Fig. 5.4.6. Five photographs from the book *The Inhabitants* by Wright Morris.
In fast changing America, the book *The Inhabitants* by Wright Morris is a typical example of a look at homeland buildings in the 1930s and 1940s (Fig. 5.4.6). In the uninhabited buildings in the photographs, the buildings stand on their own in Middle America. The time- and weather-worn buildings were fascinating. Wright Morris wanted to represent the spirituality of America through them as artefacts. For me, the empty buildings he observed were full of emotion and each had its own personality. In this book, many buildings seem lonely, weathered, and melancholy. I can see the vanishing past in them. "It is a vision of marble imposed on more vulnerable, ephemeral materials, soon gone with the wind". 19 His retrospective views are part of America's past which no longer exists; the buildings have become the evidence which tells people what America was. They also convey the notion of change: "Morris captured things and places that had almost passed away. We think of him as a photographer of passing, of the life of dirt farmers in the Midwest, of small towns emptied of spirit and ambition". 20 This is what he has represented in his photographs. The empty buildings symbolise the vanished inhabitants of those locations.

Duane Michals, in his photobook, *The House I Once Called Home*, revisited his old house and represented it in sequential photographs with verse (Fig. 5.4.7). 21 He felt the loss of a vanished past through a combination of old family photographs and the real abandoned house. He saw that the people had gone and the house was ruined and tried to use sequential photographs to reclaim his past at home, where he belonged. In his sequential photographs, the old photograph represents what the room was like, the mirror, the framed photograph, the lamps and small cabinets. It kept the eternal past in the image that his memory relied upon. Through details, he was able to trace back what happened in that room. However, when Michals visited the ruined house, he was saddened because the details in the old photograph had almost disappeared. The fear of the loss of those details in the photograph was like the fear of their being eroded from his memory. In reality, they had gone and only remained as dust. This is melancholic. Michals wanted to use this sequence against time-worn reality to go back to the past that was still alive in his mind.

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Fig. 5.4.7. Sequential photographs from the book The House I Once Called Home by Duane Michals, 2003.
In this very room, on a February afternoon, when Margaret was twenty and Jack was twenty-three, I became to be. Here stood the bed, where I first cried and mother bled. And above the bed a cross hung on the wall, the day the midwife came to call. Over there, a chair, near where the vanity used to be. Its mirrors now scattered everywhere, like shards of forgotten memories. My yesterdays are this debris and I alas, am seventy.  

The abandoned buildings are the inspiration for my photographic work 1997, a project that involved returning to places in Taiwan which were familiar to me. This is addressed in the next section.

5.5 **1997: a project on the theme of return**

5.5.1 Images, description and statement

A. Images

Title: 1997  
Size: 40cm×20cm×7cm each, 30cm×9.5cm each photographic diptych  
Quantity: 12 photographic works  
Date of taking photographs: 1997 and 2001  
Date of working: 2001~2004  
Media: Photographic diptychs with wooden frame  
Display: Fixed to the wall  
Installation location: One darkened room (Room 237 in the Painting Studio)

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22 Ibid. (No pagination, counted as page 17). A verse written by Duane Michals.
Fig. 5.5.1. Ming-Chang Tien, 1997 (part one), 2001. Six photographic diptychs in which the photograph on the left was taken in 1997, the one on the right in 2001.
Fig. 5.5.2. Ming-Chang Tien, 1997 (part two), 2001. Six photographic diptychs in which the photograph on the left was taken in 2001, the one on the left in 1997.
Fig. 5.5.3. Ming-Chang Tien, 1997 (a framed example), 2004.

Fig. 5.5.4. Ming-Chang Tien, 1997 (installation views), 2004.
B. Description

This work is a re-photography project. I took photographic self-portraits in Taiwan in 1997 and then returned to re-take photographs in the same location in 2001. Afterwards, I put them together as diptychs. The work contains twelve diptychs with self-portraits, showing only locations of cities in which I have lived. In each image, I have selected an example of some man-made constructions from my personal places. Comparing the two images in each diptych, some of these constructions have changed a little but some are now totally different.

When I moved to the United Kingdom in 2000, I missed Taiwan very much. The photographs, which I took in 1997 and kept with me, became a reminder of Taiwan. When I had the opportunity to return, I wanted to revisit all of the places in my works and memory, to take photographs again.

C. Statement

So strange a feeling, when I came back to the places.
Some have totally disappeared; some have become ruined,
Some are similar.

They have changed without me,
I changed also without them.
I wonder what happened in the place and in me between these two points in time, 1997 and 2001.
The jump time.23

5.5.2 Concepts

When I went home I used to walk through the familiar places as routine, my primary school, the nursery, the old market, the riverside, seaside, and the temple. And now I added one more place, my father's cemetery. It was like a ritual that I took time to walk from one place to another.

On this ritual journey I could see many everyday places where I used to play in my childhood. I always liked to visit them as my old friends. I just sat down to watch them quietly and think about my past. At that moment, my feelings jumped out of my busy working life to enter a space-time in the past.

23 Written by Ming-Chang Tien.
My mind flashed back to my childhood. Suddenly I was aware I was not a whole person because I had found another self, my childhood, apart from me. This personal experience has stayed with me as a 'memory box' for a very long time.24

In relation to my concept, changes in personal places are more important than those in public spaces, because they are my private memories of my homeland which established a real sense of Taiwan for me. The concept of home comes not from textbook or story, but from my experience. Therefore, places which are personal - around my hometown, the city where I studied, and the city in which I worked - as the twelve places in the photographic work, are all meaningful for me, and this formed a personal identity of 'home'.

When I looked at the buildings, both in the photographs and in reality, the differences between them were odd and surreal. Consciously I know that time has altered everything, but I cannot accept this. Changes to my homeland have affected me greatly. I am afraid that they are going to disappear in the fast-changing world, especially without my witnessing such changes. I feel lost, anxious and insecure about such matters during my exile.

5.5.3 Working process

At the beginning of this artwork, I had an idea that I wanted to photograph the same places as appeared in my 1997 photographs but did not know whether I should change or mimic my earlier pose. After visiting some of the places, comparing the present location and the past photograph, I felt a strong sense of nostalgia in the old photographs (Fig. 5.5.5). I began to imagine returning to the past in those places. My body moved in the same way as at the moment the photograph was taken in 1997 and I began to repeat the gestures in the old photographs. These actions gave me a feeling which carried me back to the past, so I decided to adopt the same poses as those in the 1997 photographs.

Furthermore, I liked the idea that my present and past selves could be linked together in a whole portrait. The joined and split self-portrait has always fascinated me (Fig. 5.5.6). It represents conflicting feelings during exile between the desire for and frustration of my imagined return.

Fig. 5.5.5. Working in front of my nursery in Su Ao in 2001. I was holding the photograph of 1997.

Fig. 5.5.6. Ming-Chang Tien, 1997 (detail), 2001. An example of a joined and split self-portrait in a photographic diptych.
5.6 **Thirty-Thousand-Miles**: an associated project

5.6.1 Images, description and statement

A. Images

Title: *Thirty-Thousand-Miles*
Size: 260cm×82cm×15cm each
Quantity: 5 photographic works
Date of taking photographs: 2001
Date of working: 2000~2004
Media: Photographic diptychs with wooden block frame
Display: Free-standing on the floor
Installation location: Two darkened rooms (Room 234 and 235 in the Painting Studio)
Fig. 5.6.1. Ming-Chang Tien, *Thirty-Thousand-Miles*, 2001. The left-hand photograph in each diptych was taken in the United Kingdom, the right-hand photograph in Taiwan.
Fig. 5.6.2. Ming-Chang Tien, *Thirty-Thousand-Miles* (installation view), 2004. An installation view showing the wooden frame.

Fig. 5.6.3. Ming-Chang Tien, *Thirty-Thousand-Miles* (installation view), 2004. An installation view of Room 234.

Fig. 5.6.4. Ming-Chang Tien, *Thirty-Thousand-Miles* (installation view), 2004. An installation view of Room 235.
B. Description

For the five photographic works I have collected evocative images of old buildings in the United Kingdom, each associated with a specific building in Taiwan. I visited each pair of buildings and have taken self-portrait photographs in front of them. Afterwards, I took the pairs of photographs and joined them together at one edge to make a diptych. On the junction I overlaid a life-size self-portrait.

C. Statement

I stand isolated in front of the two buildings.
I seem to recall and sympathise with the buildings.

My exile is being held
between two lands, the present land and the homeland.
There is a stillness of condolence.
Memory tries to bridge the gap.
But as exile, the gap has never vanished.25

5.6.2 Concepts

In 2000, when I came to the United Kingdom to study, I roamed around Chinatown in London. Feelings of exile suddenly emerged, having been hidden in my mind for a long time. I had so missed my hometown. The Pavilion and the Monumental Archway in Chinatown evoked the specific buildings in Taiwan. I was momentarily deluded, able to recall my out-of-reach homeland. I allowed myself to be transported into this association of images. Eventually I collected those buildings in my mind and represented them in photographs. Chinatown became the starting point for this work.

The two photographs in each diptych represent the long distance between the United Kingdom and Taiwan, and the split self-portrait between photographs symbolises the tension of exile. When I think about home, Taiwan is always in an easterly direction; so in the work, places in Taiwan are on the right-hand side of each diptych. I wanted to use photographs in my work, even though these two places are several thousand miles apart and this would involve me in a great deal of travel.

Considering a building as a body, it is capable of storing impressions and events. They seem to contain extensive stories which they are waiting for me to

25 Written by Ming-Chang Tien.
explore. I have a strong sense of being an exile. In front of the buildings in the United Kingdom, I felt homesick. My heart was touched deeply. The old buildings are strongly evocative and serve to stimulate the memory although they are quiet and still. Furthermore, buildings cannot be moved and this reflects my predicament, feelings of exile in the United Kingdom and an inability to go back to my homeland.

5.6.3 Working process

A. Gesture
To begin with I tried many gestures in my portraits, then discovered that I wanted to produce more dream-like images, like those in my imagination (Fig. 5.6.5). I often daydreamt and wanted to demonstrate this kind of dream effect through this project. Therefore, I decided to close my eyes and stand still without hand gestures in front of the camera, as a sad daydreamer.

![Gesture experiments](image)

Fig. 5.6.5. Gesture experiments.

B. Frame
The frame is inspired by the shape of the seashore with a slide as a boundary between land and sea. The block wooden frame is like an emerging landmass which implies I live on two islands; England and Taiwan (Fig. 5.6.6 and 5.6.7).

![Frame](image)

Fig. 5.6.6. A model of the wooden frame for the work Thirty-Thousand-Miles.
C. A long process

Producing this set of artworks was a very long process. It took me about three years to accomplish. The distance between two locations in one photographic diptych is immense. Fortunately, I had two patient photographic assistants to help me: Jion-Ching Liao (廖俊卿) and my wife Hsiao-Ching Wang (汪曉青). The list below gives a brief idea of the process involved. The explicit planning which went into this artwork contributed to its ultimate achievement.

1. Roam through the streets of London
2. Search for appropriate buildings
3. Photograph them as examples
4. Go back to Taiwan to take photographs (Fig. 5.6.8)
5. Come back for the formal photography
6. Final selection
7. Print out in darkroom on A4 size for the digital inkjet printer
8. Scan and print out (Fig. 5.6.9)
9. Mounting and sealing (Fig. 5.6.9)
10. Make a frame model (Fig. 5.6.6)
11. Make the frame and fix the photographs onto it
12. Installation plan (Fig. 5.6.10)
Fig. 5.6.8. In 2001 I was working in Taiwan. The first photograph shows me carrying my 6x9 medium-sized camera. The second photograph shows my assistant Jion-Ching Liao in front of the temple in Lo-Gang.

Fig. 5.6.9. In the first picture the photographs were just out of the inkjet printer. They were laid out as shown to check the tone. The second picture shows the images after mounting.
5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the meaning of homeland, with special focus on the notion of stability. When exiles leave their homes they want to carry essential things with them, such as photographs, family, furniture, and so on. Some elements of homeland, especially man-made constructions like buildings, are impossible to carry. They remain in the hometown and become witnesses of their owner’s departure. The abandoned buildings inspired my photographic works, 1997 and Thirty-Thousand-Miles. This concept runs through the whole chapter.

In the United Kingdom, Chinatown was a substitute homeland. It became a comfort zone for me, an area in which I felt free to roam, to watch, listen, eat, smell, and communicate with other Chinese subjects. It created such an illusion that I could temporarily forget the difficulties of surviving in a foreign land.

In the work 1997, I returned to places in Taiwan to re-photograph them. This was because I kept old photographs of those places with me, and the things they reminded me of had become intriguing objects to which I wished to return. As I am an exile and cannot live in my homeland, these photographs of home as reminders of places in Taiwan are important to me personally. These private places are more...
representative of homeland than those public spaces. Revisiting them through rephotography is a ritual of mourning for the longed-for, but impossible return.

Furthermore, the work *Thirty-Thousand-Miles* is a project of association. The buildings in the United Kingdom recalled the specific buildings in Taiwan and helped me to represent my intense homesickness through my imagination. In my view, they were no longer simple buildings; they carried the memory of my homeland.
Chapter 6  An Imagined Return to Childhood

6.1 Introduction

The concept of childhood as it relates to exile is a complex issue. It involves a distance of time that parallels the distance of space experienced during the period of exile, and is a broad concept in exile, rather than a specific subject. This chapter explores the personal aspects of early life highlighted by my photographic work entitled Childhood. Firstly, it discusses how the memory of home generates memories of youth in the exile’s mind. Leaving home as a teenager at 18, I had no idea what homesickness was. But after my long exilic journey and the yearning to return, the loss and memory of my home finally became synonymous for me with the loss of my childhood. Secondly, childhood is seen as a metaphor for exile. It is impossible to return to the time when one was a child, and this mirrors the exilic condition of the impossibility of return. Therefore, the notion of innocent childhood is a redemption for exile; a period of life which exists as a distant paradise in the mind. Exiles keep their childhood in mind whilst living in another land, so that it becomes a nostalgic consolation which cannot be forgotten. A photographic example by Christian Boltanski which illustrates these points is discussed. Finally, the section entitled Childhood explores my photographic work in depth and demonstrates those concepts which are discussed in this chapter.

6.2 The memory of home generates the memory of childhood

6.2.1 A innocent child leaving home: the action of cutting loose
Fig. 6.2.1. The river and mountain in Su-Ao where I used to play as a child.

When I was a child,
I never moved house.
I never changed my kindergarten.
I never changed my elementary school.
I never changed my junior high school.
I never changed my senior high school.
I never went to sleep after 10:00 pm, even though I studied hard.
I never lived away from home.

In 1985 when I was eighteen I went to University in Taipei. This was
The first time I lived without my parents.
The first time I lived out of my homeland.
The first time I lived in a big city.
The first time I knew what McDonalds’ hamburgers and chips were.
The first time I drank Coke Cola.
The first time I ate pizza and steak.
The first time I was away from mountains, rivers, and seas.
The first time I knew what nightlife was.
The first time I had a birthday cake.
The first time I had my own room and slept alone.
The first time I listened to the radio.
The first time I danced with girls.
The first time I had my own motorcycle.
The first time I went a whole night without sleep.
The first time I spoke Mandarin all day.
The first time I missed my parents and hometown.¹

When I was a child, I lived a simple and unpolluted life in a rural area (Fig. 6.2.1). I did not know much about the outside world. I had never moved before I left Su-Ao, my home in Taiwan. At the age of 18, I began a series of endless moves from one place to another. I moved fifteen times including once across the ocean to the UK. I have never felt these other places to be my home and always thought of myself as temporarily living in them, as an exile does. This period of constant movement ended the period of my ingenuous childhood.

Looking back, I understand that exile is like cutting away from one’s roots. I feel I have cut off my own roots and become a wanderer. This sense shaped the gap between my hometown and the cities in which I lived. The physical displacement is as if I were forced to split myself in two, with one part as the here and now, the other as there (my homeland) and in the past. This is reflected in the self-portraits in all my photographic works (Fig. 6.2.2). The other reason I felt cast adrift was because I realized my life styles in rural Su-Ao and the other modern cities were very different. When I went to University in Taipei, I felt excited because everything was so fascinating. I thoroughly enjoyed the wonderful city life, but after three years there I began to feel I had lost something. I remember feeling upset and wanting to go to the seaside, but there were none near the city. To help me deal with this disappointment, when I visited home I immediately went to the seaside and deep into the mountains. It was a good healing activity for me to make contact with nature and reenact the pastimes of my childhood. City life was like a dream, a happy dream but also a loss of my childhood. This distinct contrast in life styles which began when I was 18 years old - rural and urban, natural and artificial, leisure and work - has for me become a split in my life.

Nowadays, I feel the discontinuity of my life. When I started to look back on myself, I feared the loss of my childhood. My whole childhood is a complete unit which represents continuity. My adulthood is another unit, also representing continuity. The two parts, childhood and adulthood, have a gap between them. The cutting off from my roots as an exile is like this gap. It stands for two periods that are not entirely connected to one other. Similarly, my diptych works always have a gap, or fold, between the two photographs, which I aim to join together as a whole person. In the work *Childhood*, the metaphor of the distance of time translates to the space distortion represented by the real folding (Fig. 6.2.3). The folding of the self-portrait symbolizes the discontinuity of time. This feeling of discontinuity runs throughout my whole exile.

When I began to miss my parents and homeland, I started to recall memories of the past. Exile became a mental activity of recalling the past, school, the playground, and the natural environment. I have so many daydreams of my hometown. I realized that the period of my childhood covered just the time when I was at home, before I left. I started to compare life between now and my youth. In psychology, the comparison of the condition of present and childhood life determines what people think of their past. I always think that life in my childhood was better than it is now. The fast and competitive contemporary world is not my preference
and is one to which I cannot adjust. I prefer a peaceful and helpful world. This is one of the reasons I feel the loss of my past and yearn, as an exile, to return to my childhood. Therefore, the loss of exile is literally the loss of some elements of childhood.

Furthermore, childhood for me always connects to memories of the neighbourhood and playing with nature. I remember I had a very close relationship with my neighbours (Fig. 6.2.4). I was part of a group of children who played and lived in a small community. We were quite poor but the children were very happy. There were between 8 and 10 of us, aged between 5 and 15, who played games which are no longer popular, rope skipping, can kicking, and grid jumping, for instance. We did not have computers, mobile phone or electronic gadgetry. In my childhood, even though we lacked material things, we used our imaginations to create or invent our own games. For us, playing with other children was the most important thing, not consuming, reading, or travelling. Moreover, we enjoyed playing with nature, venturing into the mountains, river or seaside, fishing, and catching insects. I can still imagine the sound of playing children and see them in my mind. I miss the neighbourhood and the natural environment. For me, this was the closest to an ideal society in my life.

In the long journey of exile, my childhood seems to have become the final target of an imagined return. My exile ended my childhood and also my childhood became a subject for an imagined return. The result highlighted the distinction between childhood at home and the present in other lands. I could probably move back to my hometown in the future, but I can never go back to my youth. As an element of exile, childhood has become long distant in time and space.

Fig. 6.2.4. Two photographs showing my elderly neighbours; friends from my own generation that have all gone.
6.3 The metaphors of childhood in exile

Childhood is the first period of one’s life and is a complex metaphor in the state of exile. It is a memory land to which I cannot return in reality but also which I can not delete. It is an innocent time, compared to the complexities of adulthood; a comfort zone in opposition to the hard world. The film The Mirror by Andrey Tarkovsky illustrated the function of childhood memories in exile: “What it shows is that our sense of the ordinary does not just depend on where we are, but on what we have. This allows us some ability to adjust: when we are alienated from our immediate environment, we can draw on our memories, and use these for our dreams and visions”. Memories of my early lives are a base which sustains me in the alien land through dreams or visions of the future. In my work Childhood, the moment of fruition is when the viewer moves through the installation from dark to light and sees the huge portrait of Childhood. Through this practical experience, I came to recognise a number of complex underlying themes.

A. Looking back to the self
The memory of childhood for an exile is an action of looking back to the self in the homeland. When exiles think about homeland this equates to using their memories to recall the past. Deeply rooted memories help them to imagine a return to the homeland. Looking back at childhood also gives a psychological connection between one’s childhood and adulthood. It redeems the fact that we as exiles do not live in the world without our roots; we carry our past with us. We know where we are from and why we become ourselves. Psychologically, we feel the continuation of life from birth to the present, thereby allowing exiles to accept more about their present lives.

B. The impossible return to childhood mimics the state of exile
However, time passes and the return to childhood is impossible because we cannot go back in time. This is a metaphor for exile, as in the exile’s mind too return is impossible. At least, at the moment when the exile is thinking about return, they are still imagining return, but cannot do so in reality. Exiles living out of their homeland have always thought about going home, but have failed to do so thousands of times throughout the ages. This struggle makes them feel melancholic, the long period of sadness imprinted on their minds. The action of looking back mourns vanished childhood, the time to which we can never return.

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C. Idealising childhood as redemption

Moreover, children give us hope and ideals because they are innocent. Thus, idealising our childhood is in order to recognize a positive way for exiles to survive. As previously mentioned, my childhood was enjoyable. When I feel frustrated and unsatisfied from my present life, the memory of that time has always been my comfort zone. It lets me, as an exile, temporarily jump out of reality and go into the happy childhood of my imagination. A good example of this comes from the Russian director Andrey Tarkovsky’s film Ivan’s Childhood (1962) (Fig. 6.3.1). The film depicts Ivan, a boy who joins a partisan regiment to avenge the death of his family. Tarkovsky commented: “Something incalculable, indeed, all the attributes of childhood, had gone irretrievably out of his life. And the thing he had acquired, like an evil gift from the war, in place of what had been his own, was concentrated and heightened within him”. However, in the final scenes Tarkovsky creates a short but very important ending: a dream of Ivan’s happy childhood. This sudden ending shifts the narrative of the film from misery to redemption on the death of Ivan.

D. Memories of childhood as a dilemma

Having lived away from home for a long time, memories of childhood have gradually been hidden in my mind. Memories which were once strong, but are now increasingly vague, introduce uncertainty into the state of exile. I will no longer insist on my identity as an exile because I have fewer memories of my ‘home’. But from another point of view I have begun to fear the loss of my past and homeland, so have begun to grasp at the memory of my childhood. I constantly struggle with this dilemma.

6.4 Childhood in family photographs

6.4.1 Collecting abandoned family photographs

They (abandoned family photographs) once had an owner. But after they were given to the outsider, they started an endless journey of abandonment.⁴

When I first saw the old family photographs in the second-hand shop in Brighton, I was quite shocked. In Taiwan, I have never seen photographs in the market. Photographs are normally either in the hands of their owners, in a museum or in some relevant institution, but family photographs never become an object for sale. Photographic critic Hsu claimed that this is because in our culture we still believe the reality of photographs, so selling images of our ancestors is like selling them in person. This would constitute a lack of respect to the family.⁵

When I saw the images in the shop in Brighton, I felt sorrow and pity for them because they were abandoned. With regard to the concept of ‘this-has-been’, they are once the ‘real’ person inside the photographs. At the moment when the photograph was taken they were standing in front of the camera as a family. However, the people in the pictures have all passed away and the photographs have become a memorial to their past lives. “But even when looking at family portraits of somebody else, the familial gaze is activated. We almost immediately assume the potentiality of a whole network of familial relations and an intertextual network of family pictures. The familial gaze, enacted by family portraits, projects familiality onto the portrayed subjects, but also draws the looker into this network of familiality”.⁶

This is one of the reasons why I collected those abandoned family photographs because they reflected my own experiences of family (Fig. 6.4.1). The loss of people in the photographs symbolises the loss of my family when I was in exile. Collecting them is a way to compensate for that loss.

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⁵ Chi-Ling Hsu. (許錦玲) "Looking for Our Ancestor through the Broken Mirror? -- Discussing the Transition and Revival of Taiwanese Family Photographs." Chung-Wai Literary Monthly. 29.2 (July 2000): 75. In this paper, she explained that Taiwanese people do not allow their family photographs to leave the family because they respect the photographs as much as their ancestors. Nowadays, collections of old photographs in Taiwan are very rare.
Fig. 6.4.1. My collection box in the MPhil Transfer to PhD examination, 2003.
Fig. 6.4.2. Three examples of my collections of family photographs. The first two are Cartes-de-Visite, the final one is a Cabinet print.
Furthermore, I like to collect older photographs, such as Cartes-de-Visite and Cabinet prints (Fig. 6.4.2),\(^7\) because in the distant past people in these images were not familiar with the camera and space in the photographic studio, and hence generated the very stilted look in the photographs. This symptom of unfamiliarity has fascinated me for a long time. The subjects are aware of the existence of the camera but also look innocent. Their formal gestures are very different to those in contemporary family photographs, where people are more familiar and relaxed in front of the camera. In the book Family Photographs, “While formal photography is about condition and being, candid photography is about process and circumstance”.\(^8\) I suppose this is because we are very keen on the camera nowadays (cameras are everywhere in our daily lives, digital cameras, mobile phone cameras, and so on). This partially explains the difference in atmosphere in the old photographs, in addition to Roland Barthes’ second punctum, time. When gestures of unfamiliarity emanate from the pictures, the feeling of alienation is generated in myself and reminds me that I am an outsider.

### 6.4.2 Childhood in family photographs

![Fig. 6.4.3. (Left) Photographs at the family altar, from the New York area (c1920s-1930s).](image)

![Fig. 6.4.4. (Right) A migrant holding his family photographs, from Migrations by Sebastião Salgado.](image)

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\(^7\) Cartes-de-visite made from 1859 to c1905. The Cabinet print dates from between 1868 and 1914. For more details, see the book, *Victorian and Edwardian Photographs*, by Margaret F Harker. pp. 22-25.

It is important for people to keep family photographs around their home altar (Fig. 6.4.3). They show our ancestors as repositories of family legacy, where our family blood comes from. The home altar is the spiritual centre of our family, protecting our future life. When people are exiled, they may leave with only a simple suitcase but must carry their family photographs. They carry their family member’s photographs, either alive or dead, holding them in their hands as if they held the real person (Fig. 6.4.4). This represents the close relationship between the person and the people inside the photographs, but also represents the unstable situation for those in exile, who carry as much as possible with them rather than settling down. Photographs depict the fragment of time captured in the images and perpetuate the story through the owner’s memories. Through photographs exiles can imagine a return to their homeland in their daydreams.

Ironically, Christian Boltanski’s work, *Ten Photographic Portraits of Christian Boltanski, 1946-1964* (1972), created an illusion of childhood apart from the main concept of holocaust (Fig. 6.4.5). He used different people to portray himself at ages 4 to 16 and in so doing, as was his specialism, illustrated the collective consciousness and inferred the disappearance of childhood as a result of the holocaust. Nevertheless, this work also implied the desire to look back to childhood through family photographs. In tracing himself back through those portraits, he re-established his own childhood in his imagination.

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Fig. 6.4.6. My only three family photographs of my childhood. I consistently stood on the left-hand side.
I only have three photographs of my childhood (Fig. 6.4.6). After my father passed away in 1998, my brother fabricated on the computer a photograph of the whole family. Suddenly, I realised, and regretted that I had no whole family photographs, with parents and all three children. We will never be reunited again either in reality or in the family photographs. For me, this is like a defect in my childhood. I do not have a family-get-together photograph as a memorial to my past. This made me very sad, especially since I am an exile; I always feel my life has been torn in two. This sorrow was the motivation for my artwork, Father (Fig. 6.4.7). I have a desire to return to the time before my father died. The action of making this artwork was similar to that of imagining a reunion of family which I have lost in exile. Finally, I achieved this end in my own way. The artwork, Father, is the first time both of my parents appeared with me in the same photograph.

Furthermore, I used one of my early life photographs in the work Childhood. The re-photography with my siblings is the reunion of our collective past, our childhood. I will discuss this in further detail in the next section.

6.5 **Childhood**: return through the imagination

6.5.1 Images, description and statement

A. Images
Title: Childhood
Size: 350cm x 290cm x 30cm
Quantity: 1
Date of taking photographs: 2001 and c1980
Date of working: 2001-2004
Media: A photographic diptych with wooden frame
Display: Two photographs standing at an angle, fixed on the floor
Installation location: One large room with natural light (Room 211 in the Painting Studio)

Fig. 6.5.1. Ming-Chang Tien, Childhood, 2004.
Fig. 6.5.2. Ming-Chang Tien, *Childhood* (installation views), 2004.
B. Description

This project involved re-taking photographs of the same people as appear in an old family picture. On the right hand side of the diptych is an old family photograph, one of only three I possess. I stand in front of my home with my brother and sister. This photograph was taken around 1980, when I was about 15 years old, by my cousin-in-law who had a manual camera. I brought this photograph with me when I came to the United Kingdom. The people on the left-hand side of the diptych are the same as those in the old photograph. I stood on the right hand side in the image with my siblings. This photograph was taken in a restaurant in Taipei after a family meal in 2001. It was a rare opportunity for us to be together because for more than fifteen years we have all lived in different places.

C. Statement

We used to live together in our home.
We used to play together.
We used to be so close.
Now,
We live in different places.
We play with other friends.
We are separated by the outside world.
As an exile, living for long period of time out of my hometown, I gradually forget my childhood. I am so afraid of losing my childhood permanently. It is my past, the first part of my life. I want to trace back my life to link the present and past in my imagination. Bitter and sweet.\textsuperscript{10}

\subsection*{6.5.2 Concepts}

This artwork is an exercise in nostalgia. I try to use my imagination to go back to my childhood. I seldom take self-portraits close to other people because I feel isolated as an exile. In this work, I imagined returning to the circumstances of close relationship with my siblings when I was a child. Brother and sister used to play together, but now we are separated and socialise with other friends. This work, in the company of my brother and sister, gave me a warm feeling I had not experienced for a very long time.

In the jointed self-portrait, I want to emphasis self-identity as combining the present and the past. The self is represented by the diptych of self-portraits. These two images symbolize two periods of time, the present and the past of the self. Two parts become one whole figure, thus, I feel the existence of my own self by looking back on my life.

Furthermore, the static portrait stresses the personal being rather than gesture or action. In all of my works, I portray myself standing still, causing viewers to concentrate on me to ‘see’ who I am. The whole aura is sealed rather than open and those self-portraits focus more on my personal existence.

When I took the photograph in 2001, I intentionally did nothing to influence the clothes we wore. The result in the two photographs is interesting. In the right-hand photograph taken c1980, our costumes are similar; my brother and I wore the same colour jacket and all wore the same slippers. In the left-hand photograph, I have changed more than my siblings; long hair, a green long-sleeved shirt and black shoes. However, our gestures, the smile, the gaze and the hand positions, are the same. Although the outside world has changed considerably, some things from our childhood are unaltered. These are our roots, either from our family or from our blood. Julia Hirsch, discussing family photographs stated that “The photographers who portrayed them needed no special effort to show their ties because the physical resemblances are clear enough”.\textsuperscript{11} Furthermore, the backgrounds are different, the

\textsuperscript{10} Written by Ming-Chang Tien.
The left photograph is indoors at a poorly decorated restaurant in Taipei and the right one is outdoors, in front of some plants at my home. This reflects the difference in lifestyles between adulthood with artefacts in the city and childhood in the more natural countryside.

I have always thought of myself as a ‘big child’ who wishes to return to his youth, because there were some wonderful things in that period. The natural environment, the neighborhood, family, and home food, for instance, all of which have gone since I grew up. I hate the adult world, the competition, the trickery and the pressure. Where are the happy times in my adulthood? Perhaps, I feel this way because I am an exile, an exile leaving his happy childhood. But even though I can go back to my hometown, the conditions of my childhood are lost to me because the town has changed whilst I have been away. People have left for a new life. Therefore, my feelings of loss are not only about the physical displacement of exile but also about the lifestyle in my hometown, which has changed. The past time and place are all far away from me.

I cannot return to my childhood. The impossibility of return has become a way of releasing myself in an unyielding exile, because I have to accept this universal truth: time cannot turn back. Therefore, the imagined return of childhood becomes a comfort, especially after the long journey of exile; I experienced the pain of leaving my parents and cutting off from the roots of my homeland for 18 years. Finally, I have found this way to redeem myself.

6.5.3 Working processes

A. Post-production

Fig. 6.5.4. Using photocopies to adjust the sizes of the two photographs.
I appreciate the traditional process of photography, but do not insist on using it through all my works. I am more concerned with how to fulfill my ideas and am no longer a traditional photographer, but a photo-based artist. I am free to use different processes either analogue or digital, specific frame, or even installation and this concept reflects my contemporary situation.

The whole production process was complicated (Fig. 6.5.4 and 6.5.5). For the first steps, I used traditional methods, for shooting, developing films, enlarging and cropping the photographs. Then I turned to digital processes for post-production, scanning, retouching (only to erase the dust produced from scanning) and printing with the large inkjet printer. The result is a kind of mixture; a traditional way of using a contemporary digital medium.

B. Frame angle

Fig. 6.5.6. A small model of *Childhood* showing the frame angle, in the MPhil Transfer to PhD examination, 2004.
When considering how to represent the ‘passage of time’ in this artwork, I thought about using the shadow of sunset to imply that time had passed. I used the symbol of the oblique light of sunset to translate to the angle of the frame. Thus, the time issue exists not only in the two images but also in the use of the angled frame. I produced a small model to test the frame (Fig. 6.5.6 and 6.5.7), having learned that if I want a precise result from the finished work then modelling is essential, because there are differences between a two-dimensional drawing and the three-dimensional object. The concept is the same as that in the installation; I tested the photographic works in the real, three dimensional, environment to make the final decision (Fig. 6.5.8).

The result of this is that the diptych cannot be seen in the same plane. It presents an unusual way to think about the relationship between these two images. The angle implies time - the two different times in the diptych - and points out the meaning of geographical exile and time passed by.
6.6 Conclusion

For time is the longest distance between two places.\(^{12}\)

When exiles are away from home for a long time, the issue of exile is no longer simple. The distance of location interweaves with the distance of time, and an exiles’ childhood is the past in a distant home, in contrast with the present in his/her current one. Therefore, an exiles’ memory of home is normally in the memory of childhood.

This chapter explores the issue of childhood based on my personal experiences of exile. Having been away from my home for a long time, the only thing I have kept is the memory of my childhood. Childhood is a land to which nobody can return in reality but also which nobody can demolish. The metaphor of the innocent child is something to which we can all relate; redemptive childhood becomes a period of time and a place that people wish to keep in their minds, especially in the case of exiles who have lost their home and hold fast to their memories. Although during exile we still receive news from our homelands it is not physical attachment to the far away home. The only thing about home which is always fresh in our minds is our memory of the past. Therefore, the memory of home is the memory of the past at home; for me this is my childhood.

The final section of this chapter explores concepts behind the practical work, including frame, size and frame angle, to give an indication of the process. It articulates and reflects the thoughts discussed earlier in the chapter. In the image itself, my siblings and me gathered together, are like the past in my childhood; we had many neighbours, used to play together and had fun. Today, however, we are no longer like that. I have lost all the neighbours from my childhood and am a lonely exile. Therefore, this work has become my redemption in the face of this reality; imagined returning to my childhood from exile.

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7.1 Introduction

To learn from experience is to make backward and forward connections between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence. Under such conditions, doing becomes a trying, an experiment with the world to find out what it is like; the undergoing becomes instructions – discovery of the connections of things.¹

The photographic installation is a new form for me, providing me with fresh experiences through which to investigate the entire practical process. This chapter explores in detail the planning and execution of, and retrospective thoughts on, the installation Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile. It highlights those elements of my own creative and artistic knowledge which are tacit, rather than deduced. The chapter looks at the way I ‘think’ as an artist, during and through the artistic project, and what thoughts it generates afterwards.

There are four parts to this chapter. The first outlines the experiments for this particular photographic installation, drawn from my studies. The second describes the investigation and planning of the whole installation space, and my aims and intentions within it. The third part explores the outcome of the installation and psychoanalyst Rollo May’s concept, ‘the intensity of encounter’. The final section examines thoughts and feedback following the exhibition, including the audiences’ response.

7.2 Experiments for the photographic installation

The traditional hunger for art that possesses exultant feeling and intellectual stimulation is in no way diminished by installation. Simply put, art has redirected and expanded its borders so as to comprise new areas of content

and experience. With the medium of installation, art may be said to have reinvigorated itself.²

As explained in Section 3.3.1 ‘The reason for creating a photographic installation’, I was not content to attach my photographic works to the wall, - the conventional way to display photographs. I had noticed that the physical exhibition space was vital, and gradually applied the principle of installation to my photographic works. Once I had made the decision to take account of the environment in which my photographs unfolded, I had to make sense of it with regard to the logic and intentions of my images. I have been experimenting with different sites since producing my first photographic work in 2002.

A. Presentation at a Group Meeting in 2002³
I presented my work Thirty-Thousand-Miles at a Group Meeting in 2002, following my return from Taiwan, and set up the presentation inside the darkroom at Grand Parade. The room is small and lit by a red safety light for rolling film into the tank. I put the photographs onto the wall and allowed only one person at a time to see with a small red torch. I worked frequently in the darkroom and chose this room because I wanted the atmosphere of darkness to reflect my feelings of melancholy. This approach surprised my supervisor and colleagues, but the room was too dark to view the photographs adequately. The viewers struggled to see the photographs and were unable to appreciate their content. I found that my goals for this particular photography installation were not achieved and, as a result of this experiment, I determined to use better light the next time. However, this was the first time I had used the concept of installation and it gave me the initial idea for the installation.

B. Thesis Outline Approval in 2002

³ The Group Meeting is a weekly gathering which I have attended regularly since I enrolled in October 2000. It is held by my first supervisor, Dr. Chris Mullen. The topics for discussion include various visual-based themes, students’ presentations and guests’ experiences. The main members are the research students under Dr. Mullen’s supervision, but include other guests, such as other research students, ex-students, artists, designers and researchers. It has formed an excellent and supportive research culture.
In the Thesis Outline Approval meeting in 2002, I installed the same set of photographs, Thirty-Thousand-Miles, with one image being projected on the wall in a projection room (Fig. 7.2.1). I darkened the room and set up two bulb lamps for the photographs. I was greatly surprised at the result, because it was really quiet and had the quality of subdued light. I received very positive feedback from the assessment panels. In this installation, I learned the value of bulb light in place of the usual gallery spotlight, and the technique of free-standing the photographs on the floor, instead of conventionally hanging them on the wall. After this experience, I began to plan for the full-sized exhibition.

C. The MPhil Transfer to PhD examination in 2003

In 2003, I set up the installation for the MPhil Transfer to PhD examination. The installation was a rehearsal for my final show in the following year and was housed in two rooms, the installation room and the diagram room (Fig. 7.2.2). In the installation room, I installed my first set of work Thirty-Thousand-Miles, which I had
already enlarged to life-size. It was time to test putting the works into an actual space to observe the interaction between them, and also with the audience. I was nervous about this because it was a departure from my usual photographic working methods, but the outcome was better than anticipated. I suggest that the main reason is the use of the lighting, the isolated works, and freestanding displays. The bulb lighting has a wonderful quality, and the lampshade and wires also became elements in the installation as a whole. This result distinguishes from gallery lighting that is separated from the artworks. Therefore, all of the elements were included in the installation: photographic works, lighting, and the empty space in the room, which the audience can experience as an entire visual experience. This experiment gave me the confidence to show my photographic works beyond the gallery wall. Furthermore, in the diagram room I balanced the proposed artworks with several research diagrams. I found this very exciting and felt that the quiet, empty environment and the scale of the diagrams were extremely enjoyable and appropriate. I displayed some very large diagrams of my thought processes and working methods. When I finished this installation, I knew I had discovered my own way to express my feelings. The installation became the prototype for my final exhibition.

![Image of the installation](image)

**Fig. 7.2.3.** Site views of *Don’t Look Back* at Stanmer House in Stanmer Park in Brighton.

Furthermore, I was much influenced in realising the possibilities of unfolding a narrative in existing space by a visit to the site performance *Don’t Look Back* in 2003. This was a journey through the rooms, corridors, hallways and stairwells of a specially chosen site, a journey inspired by the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice; this involves the transition between light and darkness, between past and present, and the loss and sadness that Orpheus felt (Fig. 7.2.3).

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4 This performance was created by the company [dreamthinkspeak](http://www.dreamthinkspeak.com/dont.htm). For more information, see its website <http://www.dreamthinkspeak.com/dont.htm>.
Before my final show in August of 2004, I did a test for the path as part of the Big Picture Show (Fig. 7.2.4). I installed small models of works linked together by a line of red plastic dots, to be used in the final show. The result was interesting. Some colleagues said the effect was quite comic because of the shape of the red dots. This was not my intention and I decided to adjust the shape of the path in the final installation. In this test, I found that the passage was vital to the final exhibition. The integration of complicated elements of the environment to form part of the installation was my main concern.

During my experiments I realised a deeper meaning of the diptych form which I had adopted. Looking at the diptych, it is as if I am at the margins of society, as in a single panel photograph, but trying to re-locate myself in the centre of the work. I am decentralised but at the same time trying to recentralise myself. I have pursued my art from multiple photographs, to the diptych, to the installation. It was not my purpose to change the format in order to make it special; rather, it was an experiment with a new form, developed to show that in exile I am always in a state of adventure. I live with exile and it is the essence of my life and my art creations.

In conclusion, during my study I gradually realised that installation and works cannot be separated; the experience must be seen as a free-flowing whole, not fragmented into isolated parts. I considered the issues of setting in space, lighting, angle of view for the spectator, foreground and background, and the viewer’s sequences of movement. However, I still wished to emphasis the importance of the photographic works; they were to be at the heart of the installation. This is why I call my work a ‘photographic installation’.

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5 This is an annual event held at the end of the academic year in the Group Meeting. Every student has to give a visual presentation that is related to his/her study.
7.3 Planning the photographic installation

The difference between the artist and the non-artist is not a greater capacity for feeling. The secret is that the artist can objectify, can make apparent the feelings we all have.6

7.3.1 Investigating the space

In 2003, when I completed the installation for my transfer meeting in the Painting Studio in Grand Parade, I found a degree of freedom in using this non-institutional space, when compared to my past exhibition experiences. Therefore, I decided to use the same location for my final exhibition. There are three main spaces in the installation, as described below.

A. The Painting Studio
This studio provided several positive benefits in line with my requirements. It can be blacked out and has several individual rooms. It is an enclosed area, between the front door and the door at the end of a corridor, and it provides a quality of interior which I liked, sparse, with poor decoration. The space as a whole offers the basic elements for my installation, but still needed some adjustments.

B. The Path
The path in my plan provides a route from one space to the other. I like the spiral shape of the stairs from the North Gallery to the upper floor studios, but when the viewers climb the stairs, they can be distracted by the surroundings and it may be difficult to find the right direction (Fig. 7.3.1). This is the reason I finally set up the red-dot path to guide the viewers.

C. The North Gallery
When I investigated the space in the North Gallery, I found it too bright and full of street noise to display my photographic works (Fig. 7.3.2). The space almost worked against my photographs. However, it serves as a suitable empty space, as a starting point for the journey.

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7.3.2 The plan and my intention

The main concept of the photographic installation, ‘an imagined return’ in the photographic installation, was covered in depth in Section 3.3. This unit examines the details of the plan, showing the artistic process and my specific intentions; in other words, my thoughts throughout the planning process.  

Title: 流離三萬里/ Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile
Subtitle: 田名璋攝影裝置展/ A Photographic Installation by Ming-Chang Tien
Time: 23 Aug (Mon) ~ 5 Sept (Sun) 2004
Place: A journey from the North Gallery to the Painting Studio

Fig. 7.3.3. The initial plan for the installation space.

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7 For further details of the installation, please see Appendix 6 ‘Exhibition Proposal for My Thesis’. 
A. The gallery: an empty space

The North Gallery consists of only carpets, a lamp and a suitcase (Fig. 7.3.4). The huge space was empty and all the windows blacked-out. The lamp and big circular carpet formed a small interior space, like my rented house in Hove. The empty space surrounded this interior space to symbolise loss and isolation as conditions of exile. The suitcase is a significant object for an exile, as I always carry a suitcase when moving from one place to another place, from Taiwan to the United Kingdom. In this installation, the suitcase became the central point and was also the starting point of a journey of imagined return. This very emptiness also reflected the concept of ‘reserve the emptiness’ from my cultural background of Chinese aesthetics, which means the emptiness is not nothing but a greater possibility for exploring our sense.⁸ The emptiness questioned and challenged the established subjects. This implied the following adventure of the journey which I set up in the installation for the audience.

B. The path: a transition through colour

The path moved from a big circle to the small circular carpets which, as visitors leave the North Gallery, turn into plastic dots but remain the same colour (Fig. 7.3.5). When going into the corridor in the Painting Studio, there is a transition to the red

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light. I wanted to use this transfer from real object (carpets), to symbolic object (the plastic dot) and finally to red light, to imply the transition from real life to the imagined world. Therefore, when viewers go out of the North Gallery, it symbolizes leaving the real world and entering the journey of the artist’s imagined world.

C. Individual rooms: isolated works
I used visual strategies to represent the sense of isolation. In the rooms of the Painting Studio, I installed each artwork in six separate rooms to indicate the passage to further situations of isolation (Fig. 7.3.6 and 7.3.7). Most of the works were surrounded by great empty space, especially in the first and third rooms where tiny photographic works were to be found within a huge void. The empty space echoed with the photographic works, enhancing the sense of loneliness.
**D. A dark tunnel with an on-and-off bulb light**

The idea of constructing a tunnel before the final room served several functions in the installation. Firstly, it prevented the natural light projecting from the final room. I wanted viewers to enjoy the darkened space without a disturbing light. This idea was suggested by my working experience in the entrance of photographic darkrooms. Secondly, it symbolised a time tunnel to embrace the work *Childhood* in the next room, which emphasises the passing of time. Thirdly, I put a light bulb at the end of
the tunnel, which was switched alternately on and off to issue a warning about the unknown next stage; the transition from darkness to light. When people pushed away the heavy curtain at the end of tunnel, the sudden bright, natural light came to the eyes as a form of redemption after experiencing the long darkness.

E. The culmination of the journey in one big bright room

The end of this narrative will be in bright light. It is not simply a happy ending but can be likened to the purity of the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791). I set up the five artworks in a sequence from dark to light; from the memorial of my father to the memorial of my childhood, to be experienced after the long journey from the North Gallery. I wanted viewers to finish the journey in a big bright room bathed with natural light. The transition was inspired by piano concerto No.20 in D minor by Mozart in the moment between the first and second movements, from the expression of sadness to the light of recovery. I frequently listened to this music during my planning and deeply sensed the enlightenment of humanity from Mozart. Moreover, the culmination of this journey also reflected the process of my own exile. Now, I have a better understanding of my exile and am able to appreciate my situation. My experience of exile has changed little by little over the years. The journey proposed by the installation thus reflected the process of my exile, from emptiness into darkness, and eventually to a brightly lit redemption.

F. Diptych: separation and joining everywhere

My constant intention of using the form of diptych embodied in the installation; such as the two main spaces of Gallery and Studio, the first room with the work Father combined two separated rooms, the work Thirty-Thousand-Miles within two rooms, and the huge work Childhood and the tiny family photograph in the corner in the final room. This form of separation and joining always reflects myself being separated into two worlds, the actual and the imagined world, the present and the past, the alien land and homeland, and the adulthood and the childhood.

7.4 Practical installation

This section gives an account of the practical work I undertook towards the final stages of the exhibition and discusses the realities of the process.

7.4.1 The exhibition outcome
In the field of observation, fortune favours only the prepared mind.  

I was very pleased with the final outcome of this exhibition (Fig. 7.4.1). The sense of loss, anxiety, recall, and imagined return were well represented in the installation, which went beyond my expectations. Initially, in my plan, I was thinking primarily about the narrative of rooms, the sequence of five sets of photographic works and the contrast between Gallery and Studio (bright and dark, noise and quiet). Afterwards, in the installation, my intentions were featured in those details in the visual exploration; I felt the distinction of individual spaces (the North Gallery, the red-dot route, the red-light corridor, each installed room, and the tunnel), especially in the sequence of six rooms in the Painting Studios, each room with its theme and very strong characterisation of space.

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Fig. 7.4.1. The sequential documentary photographs of the installation.
The first room in the Painting Studio was full of mystery. The work Father was isolated in a room within a room. The entrance to it was dark, with only a line of light coming from the inner room. The tiny blue light holes happened purely by chance. When they suddenly appeared in front of me, I intuitively accepted them as a permanent feature (Fig. 7.4.2). They reminded me of the opportunities that ‘chance’ provides for Dada artists. The unpredictability of the holes gave me great inspiration, because they offered the chance to free my thoughts from the fixed plan for the installation. In the second room, which exhibited the work Mother and Me as a Christmas Tree, there was a narrow space between the photographs. The lighting was in quite a low position that mirrored the dinner table lighting at home. Suddenly, a big empty space appeared in the third room, the centre of which was unoccupied; only the work 1997 was to be seen in the opposite corner. Conversely, the floors of the fourth and fifth rooms were occupied by the freestanding work Thirty-Thousand-Miles. The large-scale, framed photographs were wholly supported by the floor. The change from hanging photographs on the wall, in the previous rooms, translated to heavy loading on the floor to give a sense of transition from light to heavy. This was an entirely different means of presentation for the viewing of photographic works. Finally, through a totally dark tunnel and into bright, open space with a life-size work Childhood, these were the main characteristics of a dramatic conclusion at the end.

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10 Please see Fig. 7.3.7, the first room is Room 237b in the Painting Studio.
of the journey. The transitions were like an equivalent to my exile: from one room to the other; from sad memories to redemption.

In conclusion, the installation suggested to me a magical story where the experience unfolded from one chapter to the next. I was relieved to find that the installation, as realized, did not lead to a separation of the parts; a major worry in the planning phase was the possibility of losing coherence because of the number of rooms involved. As I walked around the completed show I felt I could not draw breath until I arrived at the final room. The exhibition achieved a totality, the coherence of an exile’s journey of an imagined return drawing on themes of emptiness, parents, homeland and finally childhood, with its loss, uncertainty, threat, and memory, undiluted by fragmentation of the experience.

7.4.2 The intensity of encounter

Creative people, as I see them, are distinguished by the fact that they can live with anxiety, even though a high price may be paid in terms of insecurity, sensitivity, and defenselessness for the gift of the ‘divine madness,’ to borrow the term used by the classical Greeks. They do not run away from non-being, but by encountering and wrestling with it, force it to produce being. They knock on silence for an answering music; they pursue meaninglessness until they can force it to mean.11

I would like to draw attention to the method of ‘research through practice’ at the doctorate level of study. Throughout my project I have achieved a synthesis of practice and research, of making images and objects while simultaneously reading and writing. Putting my exhibition into practice equates to testing the arguments contained in a written exercise, or the procedures used in a laboratory to test a hypothesis. The exercises in systematic planning were ways in which I was able to test my own thoughts, be they logical or intuitive. They are my response to the ways in which painters test possibilities in a sketchbook. In this approach I practised and tested visual elements, creating something visually, but also deriving thoughts and reflections from the very act of making and juxtaposing images: the generation of visual propositions. It was this method within my practice-based research that allowed me to structure my thoughts and express them through images. In this way, practice itself is not banished to a separate compartment of the thesis.

The psychoanalyst Rollo May’s concept ‘the intensity of encounter’ is reflected in my thoughts on practice. He stressed the concept that real creativity stems from

encounter with the real world; the more strong or intense the encounter, the more productivity of creativity is the result. Throughout the physical process of creating the installation, my own sense of encounter with the images and objects increased and I suggest that ‘practice’ as a means of ‘encounter’ is one method of achieving both the creative process and product. Within this concept, researching the structures of the installation without admitting the intuitional and accidental would have rendered the work false, and not true to the experiences, because real experiences never adhere rigidly to plans. During the practical stages the plan needs to be adjusted, as encounters with reality always bring about differences.

However, plan in imagination is never stronger than practice in the installation. The gap between planning and actuality can never be filled without testing in practice. It was a strong belief I developed during the project but it was only at the end of the exhibited installation that I could fully explore the significance and indeed value of what I had done. This was a unique opportunity to achieve the great encounter which allowed me to confront and engage with many different conditions: excitement, anxiety, and creativity. The concept of encounter has become the basic principle for my research for dealing with ideas, themes, time, people, the material world, and technical challenges.

### 7.5 Afterthoughts

#### 7.5.1 Audience responses

Fig. 7.5.1. A viewer alone at the exhibition.
During the exhibition, I observed the reaction from the audience when they arrived at the entrance to the installation (Fig. 7.5.1). About two in ten visitors became confused in seeing the empty space at the entrance of the Gallery and quickly left. About five of the ten wandered into the Gallery, hesitated to go further for a while, and finally encouraged themselves to continue their journey. Only about three of the ten embarked on the journey with confidence. This overall result is contrary to my expectations. I did not seek to confuse my audience but I need to bear in mind that not all of them were able to finish their journey. I realized that this resonates with the nature of this exhibition, the loss, anxiety, memory and redemption. I needed to let them go on the journey by themselves, recognizing their right to do whatever they wished. Balanced against this, I had produced what I wanted to in the exhibition, without thinking too much about the future response of my audience.

Moreover, I went to the exhibition every day to collect the audience's own stories. I wanted to collect their testimony through their expressions remembered as an observer; their tears, sadness and moving reactions. It was such a beautiful thing to see and it fascinated me. Their tales began to give me many ideas. At the beginning of the project, I had rejected the concept of researching audience responses always thinking I would not include it in my research. However, after the first contact with my audience, I was drawn to their stories and could not stop myself from listening to them. I longed to see their reaction and hear their various reminiscences, so began to collect their responses.

On further investigation, I found that different spectators are affected at different points in the exhibition. What they have lost is what they feel most poignantly but they also relate to the redemptive aspects of the exhibition. For instance, an Englishman thought of himself as an outsider, apart from his wife and child. He was very moved by this exhibition, especially those works involving family, although he is not an exile at all in the conventional sense. Another lady, who feels the loss of her identity with her homeland, was especially touched by the work Thirty-Thousand-Miles. She had never felt she was an exile because she had no idea of her confusion over her own multiple nationalities. A South African migrant living in England felt the loss of her childhood when she was moved by the work Childhood. She still had the very 'real' dream of childhood despite being absent from her homeland for forty years; she claimed she could almost touch everything in her dream. Contrarily, one girl was less concerned about her loss when she had finished the journey through the rooms. She was happy to have left Italy, her homeland, and was satisfied with her present life in England, which she felt was better than her childhood.

The responses from audiences were moving and enormous. I will take them as the inspiration for my future exhibition.
7.5.2 Generating thoughts after the exhibition

As an art practitioner, I suggest that more insights from the installation will emerge following my practical work. Below are some points I had not considered seriously before the plan.

A. The artist is the first audience
When I passed through the space, I was aware that it had achieved a totality that avoided fragmenting into smaller pieces as I had feared it might. I could enjoy the rhythm of body movement, the footsteps, my breath, the emptiness of space, the quietness of photographic works, the natural light in the gallery, and the gloomy light in the rooms. I felt the isolation within the installation, and also the mood of meditative ambience in which I could encounter the work. The quietness and stillness enhanced my senses so that I was better able to encounter the exhibit; aware of the nuance of change within the environments I had designed. My body and mind became alive and sharper because of the reduction of sight and sound stimuli. The continuous sense of involvement was deliberate and carefully designed yet without disturbances from the outside world. It was like an imagined journey of my own through some other time and space. When I emerged into the final room, I was very aware of the previous power of darkness and the transition from darkness to brightness. The heaviness of feeling, a density and resonance arrived in the culmination of the final room. It was, in miniature, a shift in my mind from the bottom of hell to the top of heaven that reflected my own journey of exile in a sense of growing redemption.

B. A further redemption
This installation had the power of personal psychological release. In four years of living abroad, this was the first time I had felt such an intensity of emotion in the presence of my own work. Through the installation, I could recall so much of my history, my childhood, and the relationship with my family and homeland. The emotion was sustained throughout the two weeks of the exhibition, a period of being confronted with my own exile. I encountered the pain of exile in the imagination, like a sting to the skin in reality. When I wrote my autobiography I had similar feelings, but the artworks provided a more immediate route unlocking my memory. This kind of strength in pursuit of the past is like the act of chanting, again and again, without ending. I enjoy facing the consequences of memory. It is the main reason I intend to design spaces for my photographic works.
C. The power of darkness and emptiness

I admire the ability of cinema to generate great intensity in the audience while set in a dark and voluminous space. Similarly in my installation, audiences can involve themselves in the journey and can enjoy the experience. This is like a daydream. After they finish their journey, their recall of the whole journey process is very powerful. I have learned how to set up an installation that represents a powerful, intense and continuous journey, which is free from any form of disruption.

The exhibition presented the audience with many surprises and anxieties when making decisions. When they arrived at the Painting Studio and went into the outer room within the first room which is empty and dark, it is a similar experience to John Cage’s 4’33” (1952) in which the score is played, without a single note heard. This also reflects the Chinese aesthetics of emptiness as I applied it in the empty gallery in the installation. After the long journey, the audience will be suspended in this situation - as there is nothing obviously placed there to see in darkness - and anxious about going further into the inner room. It will heighten their awareness of their situation rather than give them a helpful direction or obvious focus. I prefer this idea as it strongly projects my own feeling of loss, especially as the inner room shows the work Father. The inner room is intended to convey the attempt to identify my feelings about my father’s death, so difficult to express in words, a question hidden in the corner of my mind for so long. Nevertheless, if John Cage’s 4’33” is ‘Absolute Zero’ of minus 273 degrees Celsius in music, my father’s death is like the absolute lifelessness to wake up to the very life I am living.

D. Body movement

This is an interesting investigation involving the sense of body movement from here to there, from the ground-floor to the second-floor and from right to left. The location of the destination, higher than the starting point, provides a metaphor for the positive result at the end of the journey; it compares with the ending in the underground. Furthermore, within the installation the options are to take the direction to the right or to the left. Coincidently, the journey requires constant turning to the right from leaving the gallery, going up the spiral stairs, entering each room, and finally the process is concluded as the visitor turns to the left, emerging into the brightly lit room.

The change from turning right to turning left has a powerful resonance for exiles who

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12 John Cage put Zen Buddhist beliefs into practice through music. He described his music as "purposeless play", but "this play is an affirmation of life to an attempt to bring order out of chaos, nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we are living, which is so excellent once one gets one mind and desires out the way and lets it act of its own accord." One theory is that the title of the work 4’33” refers to ‘Absolute Zero’ which is minus 273 degrees Celsius - the lowest temperature that can be obtained in any macroscopic system. The time of 4’33” expressed in seconds is 273 seconds. The information is from the following website. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Cage#Black_Mountain.2C_4.E2.80.9933.E2.80.99.2E2.80.99.2E2.80.99](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Cage#Black_Mountain.2C_4.E2.80.9933.E2.80.99.2E2.80.99.2E2.80.99)
experience a regularity of moving until suddenly there is a shift from guilt to redemption.

E. A proper balance between the space and photographic works
During the planning phase, I worried that the huge space might be overpowering. Fortunately, the result was a successful balance between the space and the photographic works. They were equally weighted in this installation, neither overplaying their role to suppress the other. Even more, they shone more brilliantly in each other’s company. I have learned this and will apply this principle in my future work.

7.6 Conclusion
This chapter explores the photographic installation Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile and gives an in-depth investigation of what I have achieved in this practice-based thesis and how my artistic/creative process can be understood. It looks at the whole process of experimenting, planning, making and drawing conclusions. Every stage has been considered in the production of a unique and whole installation in this doctoral thesis.

The first part of the chapter, outline the constant plans and experiments during my study that represent the processes used to create the installation. They demonstrate the ways in which, step by step, I developed my ideas on lighting, darkened space, and the journey. Most ideas in the final installation can be traced back to these experiments which, therefore, represent constant change and adjustment from beginning to end. Furthermore, it also explores the idea that my daily life provides inspiration for the installation. Life has greatly influenced my practice in that I enjoy dark places such as in the dramatic settings of the theatre. I inevitably project my daily experience into my installation.

The next section discussed the role of continuous exploration, as in the previous experiments, in practising my final installation. The installation is an integration of those previous experiences. I contemplated every aspect of installation in order to co-ordinate them into the final result. My ambition has expanded due to the confidence I have achieved, based on my experience. Moreover, I have been influenced unobtrusively by Chinese aesthetics of emptiness and applied this to the installation, which is in the empty gallery and the first darkened room in the Painting Studio.
Finally, I am satisfied with the installation, which is better than I had anticipated. The practice has successfully reflected the theme of this research. The installation is a journey of an imagined return from exile, from the emptiness, loss, anxiety, mourning, and recall, to final redemption. The huge but separated spaces have well presented my idea as an integral and sequential trip. The audiences' responses have added various thoughts on the installation which I had not previously expected. The human emotions involved with exile, which are evident in the interaction between the audiences and me, have great impact. This gives me, as an artist, valuable support and inspiration to continue my work. The afterthoughts represent some of the deeper insights emanating from the installation. They are a good end-point for this piece of work and also a good starting-point for future installations.
Chapter 8  Conclusion

This chapter summarises my achievements in this thesis: a significant contribution to knowledge and project related to changes in my approach to exile.

8.1 A significant contribution to knowledge

Four major contributions are described below.

A. The research methodology: research through practice and autobiographical research

Throughout the study I have felt a desire to know what is inside the black box; to understand the creative and artistic process. I have always believed that the methods of practice-based research should differ from those employed by other art subjects, such as art history, theory or education. Through lengthy exploration, I found that the most appropriate method was ‘research through practice’, in which investigation is mainly based on artistic/visual practice in the exploration and generation of new knowledge. This is a unique way to approach this type of research, but its practical application raises a number of questions. To clarify this, I need to explain my learning process during the study.

When I considered the form of the thesis, the problem became apparent. What would be the context of the written component? What is the relationship between practical works and the written component? Should I produce both installation and written component at the same time? What proportion of the total thesis should each represent? Early in my study I allowed myself to experiment with the possibilities. I completed many kinds of visual practice, including sketches, photographs, diagrams, and plans, and knew I had an instinct for pursuing the art in practice. The MPhil Transfer to PhD examination in 2003 was a milestone in my studies because I had by that time established the methods I would use to explore the research. I completed several huge diagrams showing the thesis context, concept, and structure, collected some keywords, and also installed small models of proposed works and one full-scale installation. The positive response to the visual elements of my presentation at the meeting gave me confidence that I could apply this method to the thesis for both the practical works and written component. In terms of strategy for the method, I am an artist undertaking research, and I often follow my intuition and
enthusiasm to make artworks and visual representations. This means that when I make a decision, I allow my artistic/intuitive mind, rather than the logical thinking, to take over. From this point of view, I could see no difference between myself and professional artists. I suggest that practice-based researchers, such as artists and designers, should keep their role strongly practitioner based: “What artists do, of course, is to make art, and as an object and subject of study art has been well picked over by aestheticians, historians, psychologists, sociologists, critics, and cultural commentators for a long time. But what artists do in the practice of creating artworks, and the processes, products, proclivities, and context that support this activity is less-well-studied from the perspective of the artist”.¹ I further suggest that this is the role and opportunity of artists in practice-based research; a specific reflection from our own practical experiences. This is essential, and if we lose sight of it the value of our research will diminish.

Nevertheless, ‘practice’ is not a simple issue, it is usually complex, plural, chaotic, creative, tacit and intuitive. Again, I state that this is the nature of practice. Practitioners such as I must allow creative practice to flow out of the mind, and not forbid or limit the possibilities because of the constraints of academic research. When the practice starts, practitioners can begin to research the concept and context of what they have achieved from various dimensions, possibly entering into a cyclical process of action and reflection on their work and writing. The written element is thus complementary to, and instrumental in, the practical works. Therefore, I claim that the research context is mainly generated by practice, whether related to theoretical, historical or critical texts, and that practice thus provides the conceptual proposition of the thesis. This is certainly the case in my own work and I suggest that it is a feature of practice-based research in general.²

Recording is another important element of ‘research through practice’. Regardless of whether my practical work was fully understood at the time, my former supervisor Dr. Chris Mullen urged me to always record my ideas in a diary, sketches, plans, short notes, or photographs. Reviewing those records helped me tremendously to reconsider and re-organize my thinking. I turn to my records for inspiration whenever I feel confused or experience a mental block. This method is similar to the painter’s sketchbook that safe-guards every fragment of visual experience for possible use later in the work. It thus has two functions. One is that it can be used to trace back what I have done in the past and is good evidence for the

research outcome. The other is that the records can become sources of inspiration. I have learnt and achieved a great deal in this respect.

Furthermore, I suggest that the autobiographical research as ‘looking into the self’, which explores the author him/herself written in the first person ‘I’, is distinguished from the other types of research which are ‘looking out at others’. It can generate different aspects of knowledge. In this thesis, I used the autobiographical research as a further method, writing down the topics of my autobiography surrounded by the subjects generated by my photographic works; family, buildings, and childhood. In order to understand my work as personal reflection I needed, as a visual artist, to stare deeply into the visual works to find something meaningful which could then be written into the autobiography. The autobiography is, therefore, directly linked to my visual work and is not drawn from theory or other areas. I have freed myself to write expansively, and the questions and issues behind the autobiography are those which subsequently led to the three subjects, parents, homeland and childhood for ‘an imagined return’.

B. Establishing the theme ‘an imagined return’
The theme ‘an imagined return’ was established as the main concept for discussion in the thesis. Its origins are to be found in my artistic practice which, in turn, sprang from a personal perspective. I believe that the imagined return is one of the most distinct concepts of exile and is neglected in contemporary Taiwanese photography.

When I reviewed the photographic works related to exile in contemporary Taiwan, I was surprised and dissatisfied. As a result of that review, I argue that it is rare for artists/photographers to relate their works to the concept of exile, and that most of them are trapped in conventional visual representations such as the atmosphere of suffering and depression. Nowadays, according to my investigation, the condition of exile is to be found everywhere in Taiwan, due to the mass of migrant workers forced from the countryside to the city to survive. However, the visual representations of exile in contemporary photography are few. I suggest this is because the concept of exile has not yet been recognised in photography in modern Taiwanese history, not in the works themselves, and barely in the critics’ reviews. In Taiwan, we have our history of exile, but due to government suppression people have tended to forget this. The veterans who left China after World War Two are one significant example. Most were young soldiers who suffered in exile; my father was one of them and I think I began to produce this work because I have been influenced by my father’s situation since I was a child. This is all the result of political suppression, still very much in existence until the order of martial law was lifted in 1987. Nowadays, I suggest that people’s minds are still under the shadow of this long suppression.
The concept of ‘an imagined return’ I have chosen here is not dictated by theory, but by reflection on my practice. Through five sets of photographic diptychs and their installation, my intention was to strongly represent the desire for but also frustration concerning the return ‘home’; I can eventually return, but only in my imagination. Through Roland Barthes’s last book Camera Lucida, I focus on the concept of ‘this-has-been’. I chose this book not only because it parallels the theory of my practice, but also because it mirrors my personal experience. Barthes and I both lost very close parents, his mother and my father, and whilst grieving for them, we produced work in different ways to express our deepest mourning as a memorial. The book explores ‘this-has-been’ through two photographic punctums, partial feature and time, which enhance the sense of existence of that place in the past, and I have further developed this concept in terms of the spatial attachment of the bodily experience inside the photographic image. ‘That world’ has become a place that attracts the viewers’ desire to ‘an imagined return’ via the realm of photographs. This essence of photography has supported the thesis concept of ‘an imagined return’ from exile and no other medium can replace it.

Nevertheless, I suggest that Barthes’s principles can be supplemented and extended by the application of the photographic installation. Nowadays, due to the ease of communication, photographs are to be found everywhere in our daily lives. Barthes claims that in these circumstances, ‘this-has-been’ does not disappear, but is masked. I have the same feelings when I visit galleries where it is very easy to be distracted by day-to-day images and surroundings. Therefore, my aim in this photographic installation is to help viewers concentrate on the works. The concept of isolation and tranquillity are applied within it and the unusual use of space provides viewers with a way to concentrate on the works and also on themselves. In this way, the work represents the journey of my personal exile and also reflects the viewers’ stories.

Finally, the whole installation, which combines the diptych photographs, huge spaces, dark and bright rooms and a path, works together in a complementary manner. This entirely reflects the concept of ‘an imagined return’.

C. Understanding the subjects for ‘an imagined return’ through personal perspectives and a cultural approach

As an exile, I see my homeland from a distance. This is the essence of exile but also a benefit because it allows me to see home from another viewpoint. The understanding of ‘an imagined return’ comes from my personal and cultural background as a Taiwanese exile.

The three subjects, parents, homeland and childhood, have their origins in my photographic work. In the early stages of practical work, I did not intend to categorise
in this way. I worked according to my desires and intuition, knowing what fascinated me, but unaware of the deeper meaning beyond the images. It was like an experiment, putting myself into the adventure. After the work was planned, I started to explore my personal and cultural experiences. Therefore, I wrote my autobiography and tried to understand the meaning beyond my works. Feelings about my homeland, parents and my past childhood strongly occupied my exilic mind. The deeper I dug into my past, the deeper the thoughts I unearthed. I was shocked at the extent to which my practice was rooted in my past. For instance, the abandoned houses in my hometown were imprinted on me, and this directly influenced the choice of abandoned buildings in my photographic works 1997 and Thirty-Thousand-Miles. I found that individual memories determined my perception of existence, whether an exile or not. I realized that it is difficult to let go of my past childhood due to the sudden loss of ‘home’. That is the rationale for my exile.

Furthermore, I projected these thoughts about myself as an individual onto a larger scale, my culture. To understand the influence of my roots, I looked at Taiwanese culture and society and identified Confucianism as a great influence in Taiwan. The concepts of the obedient son and the extremely close relationship between parents and children are rooted in my culture. As a Taiwanese, I cannot escape this influence.

Another factor is the social change which accompanied the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy. The modernized cities are attractive but are also a place for exiles. People leave their homes to look for a wonderful new world and if they can accept the displacement this brings they will adjust to the new environment. If, like me, they cannot adapt, then feelings of exile are imminent. This is the fate of the industrializing or developing country and so far I see no solution.

**D. Creating the form of the photographic diptych and its installation**

I have achieved a successful completion of a photographic installation which has justified the thoughts in the written component. The photographic installation is not new to contemporary art, but the concept of an imagined return in an installation is original. Applications such as darkened rooms, a travelled path, empty space, the red light corridor and large free-standing photographs are integrated as a whole to support a journey for ‘an imagined return’. The installation reflects on my personal experience of exile and an imagined return to parents, homeland and childhood, and also Chinese aesthetics of emptiness, the cultural background I inhabited.

I use the medium of photography because it enables me as a photographer to explore such imagery of exile, loss and memory. Through its nature, photography raises visual questions about human experience and emotion. But when the single photograph cannot satisfy me, I will look for another, complementary, way. The
photographic diptych is a highly suitable form I have applied throughout the whole thesis, because I realize the concept of separation cannot be expressed intensively in single images. The self-portrait in the diptych form is what I feel about myself in the two photographs; anxious and desirous to return in my imagination. During my research, I found myself unable to easily accept what I have lost of the ‘home’. This is the reason I feel I have split into two parts, here and there, present and past. The psychological effect influences what I see in the world which surrounds me. I have been melancholic about my exile for 18 years. The diptych form with self-portrait confronts the plight of my exile and an imagined return.

8.2 Project related changes in my approach to exile

I have gone through my memories of ‘home’ in this research. My memories have not changed, but my viewpoint on those memories has, and in this way, my study has had an influence on me. I sensed intensely the existence of ‘time’ and ‘being’, something which was new to me. The time of past and present, the sense of being ‘here’ and not ‘there’, are all about the experiences of exile. The status of being is inspired by my visual works. When I embarked on my work with the photographs, I felt profoundly that I inhabited the time and space inside the images; that is, the past there of ‘that world’. This heightened and extended the difference between here and now and there and then. The experience, as a parallel experience, mirrors and strengthens my sense of existence in the here and now. Physically, it does not change anything, but psychologically the cognition of time and space has altered in my mind; intensely revisiting the past has strengthened my existence in the present. Eventually, I recognized the characteristics of the status of exile, achieved a greater level of respect for my past, and now cherish my present existence because I know I have to live for the moment. This reminds me of the Chinese proverb describing three steps of understanding: “In the beginning, seeing a mountain is a mountain. After a while, seeing a mountain is not a mountain. Eventually, seeing a mountain is again a mountain.” As with the mountain, I remain as an exile and that does not change, but my way of looking at it does. This understanding gives a positive

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3 This proverb comes originally from the Chinese scholar Guo-Wei Wang (王國維, 1877-1927, Ching Dynasty) who described the progressive state of mind of reading poems. The original Chinese is “見山是山，見水是水，然後見山不是山，見水不是水；最後見山又是山，見水又是水。”
viewpoint which, I think, is where the redemption comes from. As a result, I have re-evaluated my life experience.

Furthermore, the installation space has become a place in which my heart can rest. Regarding the long departure from my home and myself (because my mind refers to my homeland constantly and therefore I feel that I have departed from my own presence), the installation has become a spiritual site in my mind that I will imagine frequently in the future; a site that can accept myself as an exile and return to my homeland in the imagination.

Moreover, during my research, looking into the broad human history of exile, I have realized I am not alone. So many people, poets, artists, musicians, migrants, refugees, either voluntarily or under duress, undertake a similar exilic journey, and I feel I am a part of that group. Empathy helps me to feel better and is a further source of redemption, unexpectedly fuelled by the reactions of viewers of the installation. We shared our personal stories of exile, and I was able to identify with them on a personal level. This had a stronger impact than reading any history of exile. In the future, I will practice and research continuously because I know this is the best way to further redeem myself and other people.

I am grateful for enlightenment about my exile during my research. Nowadays, I still have a strong will to go home, but following my realisations of exile my attitude is different. Except for my emotional desire, the motivation of returning home seems more rational, because I understood why I became an exile. I seem to struggle and suffer less with accepting the present home, and view my situation more reasonably. Inhabiting my present deeply is like accepting myself further. In future, I will definitely return to my home, but I am still living well in the present.
Appendix 1

The Plight of War Veterans in Taiwan

Here the term ‘veteran’ (荣民) is specific to the group of soldiers who came with Chiang Kai-Shek to Taiwan around 1949. Since then, more than one million people have followed the government in the migration from China to Taiwan. Around 600,000 are military people and most of them were humble soldiers. This paper focuses mainly on these veterans and their plight in Taiwan.

When they left their homes, most veterans were teenagers who knew nothing about the army or war. They were forced to leave home to join up and fight against the Japanese invasion, and the internal conflict caused by the Communist Party in World War Two. When they crossed the Taiwan Straits, they did not realise they were fated not to return home for forty years. At that time, living conditions in Taiwan were better than in mainland China, which had been at war for some time. Also, these were strong adults and it should not have been difficult for them to re-start their lives in a new land. However, due to government policy and cultural differences, they never fitted into Taiwanese society.

In 1952, the government’s aim was to quickly recover mainland China and, to this end, they picked the young soldiers who had war experience to lead the army. These men were forced to rise through the ranks to higher positions, and to extend their army service. Lowly soldiers had to reach around 40 years of age before they were allowed to retire. The military act, in an effort to minimise family distractions, prevented soldiers from marrying. Therefore, when they retired from the army, they were often too old to marry and knew nothing about the Taiwanese culture or language. (In China, people were married during their teenage years at that time.) These policies combined to make it hard for veterans to fit into the new society. It was very difficult to settle down in Taiwan, but at the same time impossible to return to China. They were alone and helpless, with nowhere to go.

After retiring from the army, they tried to settle and make ‘homes’ for themselves somewhere in Taiwan. Normally, veterans who had family lived together in places called Military Dependents’ Villages. The houses were tiny and the living conditions were poor. This was because they had no family in Taiwan to give them a

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place to live, whereas the local Taiwanese already had their own land. Most single veterans would live in a Veterans’ Home, a special place for elderly bachelors. These were isolated from the outside world, the inhabitants living out the lonely remainder of their lives with only memories of their old homes.

Even though retired from the army, they still contributed to their new land, Taiwan. They normally undertook the hard work that other people did not want to do. For example, in the 1960s, around 4,500 veterans constructed the undeveloped eastern Taiwan. Others opened up a road in the deep mountains which linked the western and eastern sides of the island. This was a highly dangerous job and some of them died during the process.

Furthermore, most veterans are honest, obedient and cooperate with the government. In 1949, there was a slogan, “One year to prepare, two years to recover, three years to wipe out, and five years to success”. Some veterans even tattooed those slogans on their bodies. Most believed that they would finally go back to their homes. However, almost forty years passed, during which they grew old, and the ideal of recovering China and returning home was never achieved.

In 1987, the government declared an end to martial law and allowed veterans to visit China. This was great news for them because it meant that they could finally go home. However, time has changed everything, and the loss of their parents, relatives and home must be sad. This is a terrible human tragedy; a group of teenagers who left home and finally returned at the end of their lives having lost everything of their past. What did this mean for them? One veteran was asked “You have lived in this condition of exile for your whole life. Do you hate anyone?” With trembling lips and eyes full of tears, he said “I do not blame anyone. The only one I blame is myself, because I had the bad luck not to die in the war. So, now I have to bear this sorrow for the rest of my life”.

Nowadays, news about veterans is rare; they are forgotten by the majority of Taiwanese and most are either old or have passed away. Veterans as a group of people will disappear soon and will only exist as a term in Taiwanese history. Or, perhaps this group of humble soldiers will be completely forgotten.
Appendix 2

A Veteran’s Story – My Father’s Exile²

A. My father’s exile

My father, Shi-Yi Tien (田世義), emigrated with our government from China to Taiwan when he was 19 in 1948. He never expected to wait for the rest of his life to return to his homeland.

When I was a little boy, I remember my father talking about his childhood in his hometown in Chang-Le County, Shan-Dong Province. When he was a child he used to skate on the surface of the White Wave River in winter, play with icicles from the eaves, and sometimes his nose and ears were frostbitten because the weather was so cold. He also mentioned his parents often, but I cannot remember the details. When he recalled his childhood, it seemed to have been the best time in his life, but he always finished his story in tears.

Even though he lived in Taiwan for more than forty years, he would often describe his life in his hometown in Mainland China. He seldom talked of his new life in Taiwan, and only sometimes told stories from his army years or from the pineapple factory where he worked after retiring from the army as a veteran. After I went to University, he never again spoke to me about his childhood in China.

Father rarely socialised with neighbours and had only a few old friends who came from China. They, as a group of Chinese, could speak Mandarin together. He never learnt, or even tried to learn Taiwanese, so could not communicate with our neighbors. We lived in a small house of the Town Hall which was surrounded by Taiwanese. This was quite common because people from China were actually a minority group. Therefore, he seemed to be isolated from society and lived with his family, few friends and his own memories of the past. He never travelled and liked to stay at home. His life was extremely simple, taking care of his family, gardening, taking exercise, shopping and watching television, for forty years that was his daily routine. He was less interested in the outside of his second home from which, perhaps, he felt alienated.

I did not really understand or feel my father’s pain when I was a child. Maybe he did not want to pass on too much of his sadness to his children. However, when I

grew up and had similar experiences of exile I was able to understand and feel his pain deeply. I realize now that the influence on me of my father’s exile was enormous. I have carried his exilic blood since I was born.

B. I took him home

Can you imagine my father who had lived away from his homeland for forty years? Can you imagine he had never seen his son who was forty years old? Can you imagine a young boy who has become an old man when he finally returns to his old home? Can you imagine that when his parents died he did not even know? This is because of the war, the inhumanity of the war. How could he bear this kind of inhuman displacement? How could he take this sorrow for the rest of his life?

Fortunately, I eventually took my father back to his home. With the lifting of martial law in 1987, people were allowed to go to China and many veterans returned to their homes. My father was one of them.

After I finished my military service, I was able to travel abroad and my mother and I agreed that I should take my father home as soon as possible because he had developed a serious illness during my time away. It was suspected that he had Parkinson’s disease. My mother and I were afraid that his health might deteriorate, so I took him home immediately, before he became too weak. This was the one wish he had still to fulfill and I needed to take him home to satisfy his desires before he passed away.

The journey was very hard, due to his bad legs, but we finally arrived in my father’s homeland in September of 1991.

Story one:
When we got off the aeroplane, we were met by a relative who drove a car to the airport and then relaxed into the journey. I was nervous because this was my first time abroad. It took three hours from the airport to my father’s home. The roads crossed the hills in Shan-Dong Province and it was really exciting because of the very beautiful landscape. My father seemed speechless, having been away for forty years. Now, in three hours’ time, he would be home. Finally, we arrived at ‘Tien Village’ (Tien” is my father’s surname). The villagers all came out to welcome us. People repeatedly said: “It is good that you finally came back”. Even though this was a simple sentence, I could perceive the heavy feeling in the words. My father did not know how to respond to them, he had nothing to say after forty years.

Story two:
My father had a wife who had just become pregnant before he left his old home. However, due to the length of time without any communication and no hope of return, he was allowed, under Taiwanese law, to get married again, this time to my mother. In his old home, his Chinese wife never re-mariied. When he saw his family, he could only recognize his two elder brothers. He could not recognize his wife. It was the first time he had met his son, my half-brother, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. Whilst we were there, my father’s first wife did the routine work, changing her husband’s clothes, washing his legs, just as normal, as if she has done this for forty years. I could not bear to see it, it was too intensely sad for me. At that moment, no one seemed able to speak.

**Story three:**
Before we left my father’s hometown, we decided to hold a memorial ceremony for my grandparents. Due to my father’s bad legs and the rough road, only my half-brother and I went to the tomb, which was in their peanut field. Each of us rode a bicycle and after about ten minutes we arrived. We then walked into the field and my half-brother picked up some peanuts for me; they were delicious. It was near dusk, the western sky became orange and there was a soft wind. I asked my half-brother where the tomb was, and he pointed out the direction. Initially, I could not see it, but when I looked hard, I saw two small, barely noticeable, piles of earth in the peanut field. My half-brother looked at me and nodded his head. Suddenly, I felt desolate because I could imagine my father’s feelings concerning his exile and the loss of his parents. At that moment, I looked at the sky and asked why this world was full of sadness.

**Story four:**
When we left the town at 3:00 am, many relatives gave up their sleep to accompany us. They talked to my father and me and waited until the time came for us to leave. All of us knew this was possibly a last farewell, because we all knew my father was old and not very well. It was so cruel that they had been separated for forty years and had met for ten days, then would never meet again. They had fulfilled their dream, but so what? If they had not met perhaps each of them could have had a peaceful life. But now they were going back to their everyday lives, and their minds could not help but be disturbed. I was not sure whether this was good or bad for them. Nevertheless, from my personal point of view, I was deeply affected. I was aware that the feeling of exile had been strengthened in my mind.
Appendix 3

On My Way Home

I like to go back to my old home by train, from Taipei to Su-Ao (蘇澳). It takes two and a half hours, and during the journey I experience a lot of up-and-down emotions.

When I lived in Taipei, I was always busy. I did not have time to book a ticket before going to the station, and did not even know the train timetable. I would just go straight to the station to catch the next available train. When I arrived and had bought the ticket home, my tensions would suddenly disappear and it seemed as if I was going on holiday. Therefore, the way home was a journey of transition from busyness to leisure.

Travelling by train is my favourite way to go home, especially seeing the scenery on the journey as it changed from city to countryside. When the train departed from Taipei station on the underground, it went into a long dark tunnel. After a few minutes, it arrived at the station Song-Shan (松山), above ground; this is still in Taipei with tall and crowded modern buildings and people everywhere. Normally, this station fills the train with passengers. When it went forward and arrived at the next station Si-Zhe (汐止), a town on the edge of Taipei, I saw many country folk on the platform. Most of them shared my destination, I-Lan County (宜蘭縣). I recognize them by their shy and honest faces which are typical of I-Lan villagers, even though they wear the smart clothing of city people. This feeling of déjá-vu lets me suddenly enter into another, long-forgotten, world. For me, these villagers are not vulgar but very familiar people, because they come from the same place as me. Sometimes, when I see young naïve faces, it reminds me of the first time I came to Taipei alone.

That was in the summer of 1985. When I passed the examination and was able to enrol at the National Taiwan Normal University in Taipei. I travelled alone by train with a suitcase and a duvet. I was 18 and that was the first time I went to Taipei alone. I was surprised by the tall buildings and crowds of people; it was so different to my hometown. I still remember the first night I slept in the University dormitory, being awakened by the car noise outside at midnight. At that moment, I wondered why so many people had not gone

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home to sleep.\textsuperscript{4}

The next station was Ba-Du (八堵), outside crowded Taipei. There were high surrounding mountains, but also manufacturing factories. It was quite an ugly and untidy landscape, more like ‘behind-the-scenes’ storage for Taipei. Here, the natural environment and human construction conflict with each other. Then comes the scenery between Ba-Du and Fu-Long (福隆) in Taipei County. The train passes into a place that consists of rivers, river valleys, mountains, farmland and small villages. Compared with the previous views, I liked this place because it had a stunning landscape mixing harmoniously with small villages. It was very quiet and let me feel peaceful and relaxed. The train shuttled between places and through tunnels, and whenever it emerged from a tunnel, the scenery had changed. This was like the background to a Taiwanese puppet theatre, one change leading continually to another. Whenever the train arrived here, I began to feel my homeland was near.

I looked forward to arriving soon at Fu-Long station, because it sold the delicious lunch boxes we call Ben-Dong (便當). Sometimes, I chose to take the lunchtime train just because I wanted to enjoy this treat. Another kind of lunch box is also sold on the train, but I preferred Ben-Dong and was prepared to endure my hunger until our arrival at Fu-Long. The Ben-Dong box is simply made from slices of bamboo which exude a pleasant smell when the food is served. The food consisted of steamed rice, two slices of stewed pork, dried soybean curd, Chinese cabbage, stewed egg, and pickles made with white radish. Even thought it was an unsophisticated lunch box, the food they chose, the way it was assembled, and the box itself were extremely satisfying to me and it tasted wonderful. Nothing in Taiwan, or indeed the world, could replace Fu-Long Ben-Dong. This again made me feel I was nearly there, my homeland.

Some details on the scenery I still remember very well. For instance, in one place where the train comes out a tunnel, there is a river on the left-hand side and a small village on the right. Then there is a farmed field, after which the river reappears. At the end of the farmland, is a small house. Another example is near a train station. When the train goes through the valley in which the station is located I always look very hard to see inside the station house. Normally, only the station manager is there, in this small and desolate place, and there is nothing special to see. At the end of the valley, there is a family house which is very close to the rails. I again try hard to try to see what the people are doing. Even though I do not get off the train, I like this visual game, viewing the outside world from a comfortable seat. It is like visiting the cinema in real-time in front of me. Every time I come home, the same cinema show of

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid.
scenes appears again.

I usually settle back in my seat and think about my complicated life in Taipei as the train departs from the big city. As it nears my homeland, I gradually begin to think about my family, always the cause of some worry or other. This journey is a piece of time and space that allows me to jump out of my life both in Taipei and in my homeland. It is thus a special time and space, similar to going to church for confession. Normally, I think about my childhood, my parents, my new life in Taipei, or my future. It allows me to sum up what I have done recently and gives me space to examine myself. I do not know why this confession, which could happen at any time and anywhere in my daily life, so strongly and inevitably takes place during the journey home. Perhaps, because I am removed from my busy routine, I suddenly have free time to reflect. It always crosses my mind that I have not thought about my past in my homeland for a long time and that the life style is very different when compared to my present life. This ‘life gap’ is the reason I feel uneasy. Now, I am soon to confront it, I have to prepare myself in advance.

After the journey through the valley, the train goes into a long dark tunnel and I anticipate the moment when it comes out. The vista which dramatically appears is the vast ocean and plain that are my homeland, I-Lan. I can see I-Lan’s landmark, Turtle Island, a small area of land in the middle of the I-Lan gulf. My gaze relaxes in this totally different landscape. I can almost hear the sound of the waves at the nearby seaside. Even though I have travelled this way many times, I am still surprised at the visual experience of the first few moments when the train comes out of the tunnel and into I-Lan. I am so proud of my homeland. At that moment, in my mind, I say to myself ‘that is right, that is my homeland, I grew up in this splendid landscape’.

The train gradually departs from the coast and moves in the direction of the Lan-Yang Plain (蘭陽平原), an area of lovely farmland with occasional country houses. There are no high buildings, such as those in Taipei, and the landscape is flatter. The houses and the natural environment are harmonious. The plain is surrounded by high mountains on the west and the South Pacific Ocean on the east. High mountains, great ocean, and smooth plain, that is my homeland.

Finally, the train travels right through the Lan-Yang Plain to my hometown Su-Ao at its far end. The weather is usually cloudy in I-Lan, and looks darker and even worse in my hometown to the south. Thus, I am never surprised to find it raining when the train arrives in Su-Ao. My parents always remind me to carry an umbrella when going home, but I forget because it is usually good weather in Taipei. It seemed always to be raining when I arrive and, walking home, I puzzle over my feelings of anxiety. Are they caused by the rain or my timidity at coming home?
Appendix 4

Dead Again?\(^{5}\)

By Chun-Ming Huang (黃春明)

It was not an illness. The doctor said the old tree’s roots were shot and there was nothing you could do about it. They all knew that elderly villagers hate the idea of dying away from home. Time was the enemy now, so the ambulance that had brought her rushed her back up the mountain while there was still breath in her.

Eighty-nine-year-old Fen-niang was the oldest living member of the Hsieh family, its matriarch. Back home, she hung on for a day and night, as if waiting for all her relatives to come home, and had already outlasted the hospital’s prediction. Not everyone in the family was able to get home, but forty-eight of them, young and old, managed to make the trip from all over the island. A rare occurrence, since for years many of them had come up with all sorts of excuses to stay away from mountain village and the ancestral rites, even over the New Year’s holiday. This time, some had come home to look over the land they could expect to inherit soon. Member of the family living abroad couldn’t make the trip, but they were all contacted by telephone.

On top of a pile of hempen funeral clothes that had been prepared there were quite a number more in bright red. She was a great-grandmother, so instead of four generations, there were now five; it would be as much a celebration as a funeral. No wonder the atmosphere felt different. The grief felt by Yen-k’un, her youngest son, and her six married daughters was diluted by the mood of the rest of the family. There wasn’t much of a sense of loss. Taking advantage of the unique reunion, some of the returnees passed the time under the family camphor tree, while the youngsters walked beyond the bamboo grove to enjoy the scenery and take some pictures. Yen-k’un ran his legs off, seeing to the needs of his visiting kin, taking time out every so often to go inside to see how his mother was doing. On this latest check, he drew the curtain back and couldn’t believe his eyes. Fen-niang said she was

hungry. Shocked by the news, everyone ran into the room and huddled around her bed.

After she asked them to help her sit up, she was thrilled to see all the sons and grandsons at her side. “Has everybody eaten?” she asked, eliciting an outburst of laughter. They were happy, of course, but couldn’t help feeling that there was something comic about the situation.

Her son wanted to see if she knew who they were. “Who, who I am?”

“You? You’re Yen-k’un the fool, everyone knows that.” They all roared with laughter, then the questions resumed. Every time she got the name or the family ranking right, she was rewarded by applause and laughter. But more than half of the gathered family went unidentified, even with a little coaching. One of her great-grandchildren was pushed up close to her, and immediately burst into tears. “I want to go home,” he said in Mandarin. “I don’t want to stay here.” “What did he say,” Fen-niang asked. “I didn’t understand a word.” But then she blamed herself for having too many children, and blamed herself for being old and losing her memory.

The night all the visitors left, some by car, others on the last train out of town, more than one with kids complaining about all the mosquito bites they took with them from the mountain. On the day before, the old family dog, true to form, raised howls of warning to the hordes of clamoring strangers, scaring the hell out of the small children, which earned him a whipping from his master. How could he have known they were the master’s kinfolk? Now he hid out in the bamboo until the last sign of invasion had disappeared, when he returned home, wagging his tail. Even then he was unsettled and confused as he looked up at his master, who returned the look, appearing to have forgotten what had happened the day before. His master got up and turned off the TV, cutting the mountain family in its bamboo grove off from the rest of the world.

Early the next morning, just before sunup, even through Fen-niang was still weak and needed support to get around, she lit some incense to the gods and ancestors. She sat in her rattan chair at the head of living room, feeling remorse because she lacked the energy to go into the kitchen and make tea for an offering to the gods. She was thinking about what had happened yesterday. It was yesterday, wasn’t it? She wasn’t sure, but she knew for certain that her family, adults and children, had all come back to the mountain. It was an exciting thought, and if it hadn’t actually happened, at the very least, she knew she’d dreamt it. So she thought.

Not finding his mother in her room, Yen-k’un rushed into the living room, and was surprised to see her there. “Mother!” he cried out, and walked closer to her.
“Go make some tea,” she said. “I lit incense to the gods and ancestors, but couldn’t make them any tea. I told them everybody came home, and asked them to protect them all and help them make a lot of money and let the kids grow up quickly to attend college.”

Yen-k’un stepped up on a bench to straighten the sticks of incense in the two burners. “Mother,” he said, “please don’t climb around anymore. Let me take care of the incense.” With a look at the red-checked and octagonal tables, he found it hard to believe that his frail mother had actually managed to put sticks of incense into the burners.

“I told the gods and ancestors that the whole family came home…
“You just said that.”
“Oh!” Fen-niang had already forgotten.

While Yen-k’un was making tea, Fen-niang relaxed in her rattan chair hands on the armrests, a smile on her face, as the gazed up at the images of the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin, Goddess of the Sea Ma-tsu, and the Earth God. She watched the red tips of burning incense, which, like her own life, emitted a red halo in the darkening space; their sandalwood fragrance slowly filled the room, then the curling smoke began to seep outside, where it filtered into hazy morning light.

Less than two weeks later, Fen-niang slipped into coma again, and was rushed back to the hospital, where the doctors, while amazed over her step back from the brink of death, nonetheless urged then to take her back without delay if she had any hopes of dying at home.

Once again, she hung on at home. The doctor who accompanied her in the ambulance had checked her pulse, listened to her heart, and looked into her eyes with a flashlight. “It won’t be long now,” he had said.

Yen-k’un sent someone on a motorbike to fetch his daughter from school. She called all their relatives, but most insisted on talking to Yen-k’un himself.

“Will it be like the last time?”

“Speaking as her son, I hope so,” Yen-k’un said. “But the doctor said, and I could see for myself, that Heaven won’t listen to me this time.” When the person on the other end started hemming and hawing, Yen-k’un continued, “You’re her paternal grandson, and your father’s no longer around, so you have to come back. When you all came home last time, she was so happy she talked about it for days.”

That is pretty much how every conversation went with those who insisted on talking to Yen-k’un personally. They wanted him to know how hard it would be to make another trip home, but weren’t willing to come right out and say it. As a result, six of her daughters, themselves getting on in years, came home, as did three of her surviving sons. Few of her grandchildren, paternal or maternal, made the trip, and
none of the great-grandchildren, who their mothers said, were too young, which meant their mothers had to stay home to take care of them.

Another day and night passed, and Yen-k’un, who assured himself that she had neither a pulse nor a heartbeat, invited a Taoist priest over to perform the rites. But the gongs and drums had barely begun to sound when the Taoist noticed that a corner of the shroud had slipped to the floor, and that the body was lying on its side. He shouted to Yen-k’un to come look, and when Fen-niang saw her son, she told him she was hungry. They fell all over themselves removing the sacrificial water and bowl to be smashed upon her death, the sand-filled incense burner, as well as the spirit money and the Taoist’s altar behind her. Nineteen or twenty of the family members passing time under the camphor tree went inside and stood around Fen-niang, who sat up with help and looked into their doubt-filled faces. Apologetically, she said, “I’m sorry you all had to make another trip for nothing. But I did leave you, I went there and saw your grandfather, who said this is the seventh month, a bad month, and he asked me what I thought I was doing.” As proof that she’d really made the trip to the netherworld, Fen-niang continued, “I also ran into Grannie A-jui, who said her roof was leaking badly, which is why her grandson was born with a harelip.” The looks on the faces around her were of absolute befuddlement.

“Next time,” she said anxiously, as if taking a vow, “next time I’m really leaving. Next time.” The final “next time” was barely audible. She was obviously embarrassed; a weak smile appeared on her face, and didn’t say anything more.
Appendix 5

Images of London Chinatown

These photographs were taken by myself when I visited Chinatown for the first time in November 2000.
Appendix 6

Exhibition Proposal for My Thesis

1. Rationale

a. General: This exhibition is the heart of my thesis. I see my practice based project as an opportunity to achieve a balance between research and practice. Last year, I installed my research in two rooms in the Painting Studio for my transfer meeting. Afterwards, I decided to use the same place and extend to the gallery for my final exhibition. Therefore, I spent more than six months observing these places and planning to use them for the installation.
b. Examination: This is the main purpose of this exhibition.
d. Public response: Since it is important to me that my images and the thinking that underlies them communicate directly with the audience, I will set up several documented interviews with viewers. I am interested, 1.) in their experiences as participants in the exhibition, and 2.) in sharing their own experiences of exile.

2. Concept of the photographic installation

In my project, I consider not only the making and substance of artworks themselves, but also the space in which they exist. For me, the exhibition is an entirety. I am interested in occupying the space beyond the conventional exhibition space, creating spaces in which the viewer moves and experiences the feeling of exile, memory and loss. Below are more issues I will address in this installation:
a. Empty space as loss.
b. From space to space – an equivalent of a journey into exile: the viewer’s real physical movement as well as psychological response. This map of space matches my emerging definition of exile.
c. From a bright whole space to several dark separated spaces.
d. The route, a line that traces movement from downstairs to upstairs.
e. Informal space: the sense of unfamiliarity and exploration.
f. Isolated artworks.

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6 This was the proposal I submitted to the research panel in June of 2004.
g. Five dark rooms as the sense of memory past and passing.
h. Termination in one big bright room: as the hope of exile.

3. Proposed title (both in Chinese and English)

Title: 流離三萬里/Thirty-Thousand-Miles of Exile
Subtitle: 田名璋攝影裝置展/A Photographic Installation by Ming-Chang Tien
Time: 23 Aug (Mon) ~ 5 Sept (Sun)
Place: A journey from the North Gallery to the Painting Studio

4. Proposed time

a. Painting Studio:
13 Aug (Fri) ~ 22 Aug (Sun) 2004: 10 days for preparation
23 Aug (Mon) ~ 5 Sept (Sun): 14 days for exhibition
6 Sept (Mon) ~ 10 Sept (Fri): 5 days for tidying up
Total - 29 days.

b. North Gallery:
20 Aug (Fri) ~ 22 Aug (Sun) 2004: 3 days for preparation
23 Aug (Mon) ~ 5 Sept (Sun): 14 days for exhibition
6 Sept (Mon) ~ 8 Sept (Wed): 3 days for tidying up
Total - 20 days.

c. The path between the North Gallery and the Painting Studio:
20 Aug (Fri) ~ 22 Aug (Sun) 2004: 3 days for preparation
23 Aug (Mon) ~ 5 Sept (Sun): 14 days for exhibition
6 Sept (Mon) ~ 8 Sept (Wed): 3 days for tidying up
Total - 20 days.

5. Proposed spaces

b. The path between the North Gallery and the Painting Studio.
c. The corridor in the Painting Studio between two safety doors.
d. Six rooms in the Painting Studio (Rooms 237, 237a, 237b, 234, 235 and 211).
6. Technical support 1 in the Painting Studio: space construction

Details for working:

a. Clear out the six rooms in the Painting Studio.
b. Black out Rooms 237, 237a, 237b, 234 and 235. Using paper card to cover all of the windows in those rooms.
c. The windows of two corridor doors in the Painting Studio need to be covered with black paper cards.
d. A wooden construction to fine finish in Room 237a.
e. A wooden construction to fine finish in Room 211.
f. After exhibition, need to recover.

7. Technical support 2 in the Painting Studio: lighting and installing artworks

Details for working:

a. 10 bulb pendant lighting fixed to the ceiling in the rooms. 5 red bulb lighting and one fluorescent lamp fixed in the corridor of the Painting Studio.
b. 10 pieces of free-standing heavy artwork (8 Kg, 90×130 cm each) will need to be fixed to the floor.
c. One large, free-standing artwork (340× 280 cm) on the floor, with a safety wire fixed to either the ceiling or wall of Room 211.
d. Fixing another 19 small artworks on the wall.
e. After exhibition, need to recover.

8. Technical support 3 in the North Gallery

Details for working:

a. Clear out the Gallery.
b. Set up 10 lighting fixtures on the ceiling.
c. Stick the exhibition information (title, time, places, and so on) on the window.
d. Stick the carpets to the floor.
e. Fix the suitcase to the carpet.
f. Fix a light bulb to the ceiling.
g. Close the blinds and blank out windows, those without blinds.
h. Open the door for the entrance and exit.
i. A block wood board for divided entrance and exit.
9. Technical support 4: the path between the North Gallery and the Painting Studio

Details for working:

a. Clear out the path.
b. Clean the floor for sticking the plastic dots.
c. Volunteers’ support for sticking the plastic dots.
d. After exhibition, need to recover. Clean the dots and glue.

10. Safety advice

I will fill in the form Sculpture proposal form - proposal for work installations and send it to Mr. Terry Hill. If these safety issues cannot be resolved, I will discuss about the alternatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety issues</th>
<th>Alternatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red light corridor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The path with plastic dots</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artworks safety (free-standing)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Material fees support

I have spent more than two thousand pounds on my artworks and would like to request your financial support. These costs are directly incurred through the very nature of my research programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Sum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lampshade (pendant)</td>
<td>£20 × 9 = £180</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light bulbs</td>
<td>£1 × 20 = £20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint (with tools)</td>
<td>£50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper board</td>
<td>£120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A suitcase</td>
<td>£40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpets</td>
<td>£100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic adhesive tapes</td>
<td>£100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fluorescent lamp (with</td>
<td>£20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Cost</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red-light lamp (with lampshade)</td>
<td>£20 × 5 = £100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement (Photographic postcard)</td>
<td>£100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaflet</td>
<td>£60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition display</td>
<td>£60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total                                      | £950  |

* This list does not include fees for wood constructions or technicians’ fees.

12. Storage support

I need space to store my artworks from July 2004 to Sept 2004. Below is a list of the larger artworks:

- 90 x 130 x 15 cm x 10 pieces
- 90 x 140 x 30 cm x 8 pieces
- 100 x 100 x 5 cm x 2 pieces

13. My other preparations

a. An information pack for the examiners. It will include a plan of the installation, images of the artworks and all artwork statements.

b. Detailed planning for the exhibition.

c. Writing my reflections on the installation into the thesis.

d. Documentation: still image and video.

e. Selected audience interviews.

f. Arrangements for voluntary assistants: preparation, exhibition and tidy up.

g. Texts: leaflet, titles on the Gallery window, titles for each artwork and all artwork statements.

h. Finishing all artworks.

i. Finding the proper materials.

j. Posters and postcards.
Bibliography


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