

**Being Overseas Chinese in later life: Narratives and the reconstruction of self  
among older Chinese immigrants**

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This paper explores in a preliminary fashion some of the ways in which narrative serves as a recourse for older Chinese immigrants to reconstructing self within immigration and ageing contexts. Initial and follow-up interviews were conducted with 21 households of older Chinese immigrants, with a total of 32 individual participants who were currently resident in New Zealand with permanent residency or New Zealand citizenship, who were born overseas and entered New Zealand under an immigration programme, and who self-identified as Chinese and were 65 and over years of age. The interviews were carried out from April to October 2008.

In this preliminary investigation narratives play a privileged role in the process of reconstructing self. Three narrative practices have been identified that the participants who were overseas Chinese in their later life engage in. Narratives about repairing the biographically disruptive self, addressing self discrepancy and contending successfully with a once-injured body on a robust spirit of positive ageing—all seem plausibly relevant to the task of reconstructing self in a new culture. By taking part in these narrative-mediated social practices, the participants develop tools for self-reconstruction that transforms how they function inter- and intrapersonally. These tools include the means for establishing one's continuity across time and space, for communicating and evaluating who one is, for assessing other people's impression of oneself, and for reformulating a competent and confident self. The findings suggest that the participant's narrative is a quest narrative, which reframes the biography disruption as a challenge.