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Abalone in Diasporic Chinese Culture: The Transformation of Biocultural Traditions through Engagement with the Western Australian Environment

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Abstract: In October 2017, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development of Western Australia (WA) promulgated a new regulation on recreational abalone harvesting. A notable change was that, from 2017 on, the annual fishing season in the West Coast Zone was reduced to four days, from every December on Saturdays only. During the last decade, WA's abalone fishing regulations have been overhauled frequently because of depleting local stocks. Worldwide, the marine heatwave resulting from climate change and illegal overfishing are considered the two principal reasons for abalone's decline. Today, the highly lucrative abalone market has attracted more participants in recreational fishing in Perth, WA. Based on Asian natural heritage traditions and employing a multispecies sensory ethnographic methodology, this article provides an in-depth case study of the interaction between the local Chinese diaspora and the environment as represented in abalone harvesting practices. Between 2014 and 2016, the authors conducted one-on-one and focus group interviews with Chinese immigrants to Perth, WA, and also participated in abalone harvesting. The analysis reveals a suite of environmental influences on local Chinese diasporic life through heterogeneous forms of interaction between abalone and Perth-area Chinese immigrants.

Keywords: abalone; natural heritage; diasporic culture; food culture; nonhuman species; cross-cultural communication; cultural transformation

1. Introduction

Abalone is a natural and cultural form of heritage. This common marine mollusc has attracted scholarly attention, especially from the perspectives of food and ecology [1–8]. Indeed, abalone is both a delicacy in Chinese culinary culture and a natural resource in the Western Australian (WA) environment. For centuries, abalone has been widely used by Indigenous people living by the seas, mainly in Australia, New Zealand, East Asia, and North America, as an important food resource. For Aboriginal Australian people, abalone is a subsistence food as it is easy to harvest [3,5]. By contrast, in Asian traditions, as one of the most expensive culinary ingredients, abalone symbolizes “wealth and power” [8] (para. 29). In contemporary China, people display their wealth and privilege partly through their diet. This attitude, rooted in tradition, is still practiced by WA's Chinese diasporans. Grounded in abalone's historical presence and multidimensional symbolism in daily diasporic life, this article applies multispecies, sensory ethnography and a food studies framework to a case study of abalone in order to disclose the diasporic Chinese perception of their material surroundings,

diasporic self-conception and identity-formation, and the dynamic relationship between the people and biocultural forms of heritage.

Abalone has many names throughout the world. It is called *baoyu*, *fuyu*, *jiukong*, and *shijueming* in China, *abalone* in North America, *ormer* in England, *sea ear* or *muttonfish* in Australia, *paua* in New Zealand, and *awabi* in Japan [8] (para. 1). Inheriting the thinking of their ancestors, many Chinese people believe that abalone meat provides abundant nutrition while abalone juice has been claimed, in the oldest medicine textbooks, to be an effective treatment for some blood diseases [9] (p. 6). In China, abalone, swallow's nest, shark's fin, and sea cucumber are the four top food sources according to their dietary and esteem values. Chinese medicine categorizes these four premium delicacies by their shapes: sea cucumber and shark fin symbolize the male, strengthening yang, while abalone and swallow's nest emblemize the female and nourish yin [8] (para. 8). In the early sixth century, the tradition of eating abalone spread to Japan and Korea, after which the Eastern Asian people transmitted this culinary culture to the whole world [8] (para. 7). In China, the practice of abalone farming began in the late 1960s and expanded further in the 1980s. The industry has grown extensively in the last two decades. In 2010, China accounted for 86 percent of all production of abalone in the world [10] (p. 27), even though, due to its slow growth cycle and overfishing for years, traditionally, abalone has been a scarce resource only accessed by the privileged class [8] (para. 3).

Abalone has also contributed to a great degree to Aboriginal Australian society. Indeed, certain Aboriginal cultures, such as the Nyoongar of Southwest Australia, have a strong attachment to the coastal environment. In 1844, George Augustus Robinson recorded that abalone was known as *walkun* among the Nullica people of Twofold Bay. This period in Australian history was "the pre-contact story of the Aboriginal use of shellfish resources" [5] (p. xii). The culture of *walkun* inscribes Aboriginal histories and the heritage of coastal livelihoods. The term denotes their everyday experiences of "fishing, processing and the practice of sharing amongst the members of the group" [5] (p. 10). The following years in Aboriginal history are regarded as the "mutton fish" period, covering a phase from the earliest contact between Aboriginal people and European arrivals from the eighteenth century to the 1960s [5] (p. 15). *Mutton fish* refers to modern Aboriginal communities impacted by the development of the colony's industries and agricultural forms [5] (pp. 27–28). Since the 1960s, the name *abalone* from the Spanish American tradition has become widespread, and there is a large-scale abalone fishery for commercial purposes with a worldwide demand for the product [5] (pp. xi–xii). Abalone, thus, signifies the changes in coastal Aboriginal people's lives since "government policies and commercial pressures have taken their toll in the traditional ways of life" [5] (p. 91).

Southwest WA's indigenous people, the Nyoongar, regard themselves "the guardians of the link between land and sea" [11], and are deeply rooted in the country and waterways they care for as well as the natural resources of *country*. In the 1990s, in the midden of early Indigenous people in Kalbarri, which is one of the best-known national parks in Western Australia, one could find big abalone shells the size of a saucerpan (Noel Nannup, pers. comm., 15 June 2016). Nyoongar people also made tools, such as water containers or pretty jewels, with the seashells. However, today it is impossible to harvest such large abalone close to the coast as the wild stock is disappearing quickly. Modern Aboriginal lives have gradually joined the contemporary industrialized society of Australia. As an example, in Shark Bay, 800 km north of Perth, Indigenous people work in the fishing industry (Noel Nannup, pers. comm., 15 June 2016).

Interestingly, in Australian history, abalone has been linked to Asian, European, and Aboriginal peoples' living and livelihood. In New South Wales, with the arrival of large numbers of Chinese gold miners after 1855, "Chinese entrepreneurs set up fishing and fish drying operations in the 1860s just north of Sydney to supply the goldfields. Aboriginal people were employed to collect mutton fish for these traders" with "their traditional diving skills and their extended family labour" [5] (p. 29). It is also recorded at the time that a Chinese entrepreneur, Ah Chouney, "owned up to twenty boats, employing mainly European crews" [5] (p. 29). Afterwards, some Aboriginal employees, who had learned the skills of drying and preserving fresh abalone from their Chinese workmates, started family

businesses to trade with Chinese merchants [5] (p. 31). In the case of abalone, it becomes obvious from these examples that diverse cultures—from China, Australia, and Europe, which had introduced ideas of modernization to China—have been closely involved with everyday practices related to the vital materiality of non-human nature.

2. Historical Context, Conceptual Framework, and Ethnographic Methodology

According to Eric Rolls, contact between China and Australia first occurred during the Ming Dynasty in the fourteenth century [12] (p. 6). Indeed, Rolls postulates that Chinese people travelled to Australia as a result of a growing trade in sealskins and sandalwood long before the gold rushes of the mid- and late-nineteenth century [12] (p. 19). To be sure, the history of mining provides evidence of this relationship between Chinese migrants and the Australian environment they encountered. Scholars suggest that, in the late-nineteenth century, approximately 2000 Chinese people resided in Western Australia [13] (p. 14). Scholars such as Jan Ryan [13] and Ann Atkinson [14] have studied early Chinese immigration to WA in terms of the economic transactions between the Chinese diaspora and Anglo-European settler society. In particular, Jan Ryan employed thick description of “group solidarity against oppression and ostracism” [13] (p. 14). These seminal studies not only concentrate on WA but also on the global movement of labor and capital as a consequence of the expansion of worldwide markets during this era. In contrast to these studies, however, this article focuses on the Chinese diaspora in the context of smaller-scale, everyday, and multisensory practices centered on the WA environment and mediating the adaptation of Chinese traditions to Australian biocultural contexts. Therefore, the concept of diasporic culture formulated in this article is “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’” [15] (p. 52) and emerges from the material interpenetration of geographical places and cultural spaces of various scales. In addition to an emphasis on materiality, agency, and human–non-human exchange through this case study of abalone, the article also makes reference to long-standing Chinese notions of gift-giving, *guanxi* (interpersonal relations), and *mianzi* (one’s sense of reputation) in order to examine contemporary Chinese immigrants’ complex negotiations with the WA environment.

The methodology centralized multispecies ethnography as a means to investigate the materiality of nature-diaspora assemblages in Western Australia. The selection of ethnography—crossing between multispecies and sensory modes—reflects a broad, integrative, and qualitative research orientation that, nonetheless, necessitated discipline-specific grounding, for instance, in anthropology, history, and geography. To be certain, sensory ethnography has roots in Georg Simmel’s “The Sociology of the Senses”, originally published in 1907 [16]. In his essay, Simmel takes the position that mundane interactions constitute vital loci of social exchange. Social researchers accordingly should attend to micro-scalar sensory phenomenon as well as larger social formations. For Simmel, however, the sociological examination of the senses in the early twentieth century focused narrowly on sight and hearing to the exclusion of taste, smell, and touch, thus negating the body and corporeal experience. In response, Simmel suggests that the marginalization of the proximate senses in social research relates to the resistance of gustation, olfaction, and sensation to cognitive rendering: “The impressions of the sense of smell resist description with words to quite a different extent than do those of the two former senses [sight and hearing]; they cannot be projected onto the level of abstraction” [16] (p. 118). Drawing from the Simmelian tradition of sociology, Sarah Pink [17] (p. 49) delineates two criteria for choosing an appropriate cultural research strategy: first, the chosen method should enable the researcher to identify possible answers to research questions; and, second, the method must “simultaneously be suitable for and amenable to the research participants in question” [17] (p. 49). In line with Pink’s recommendations, this project adopted the standard ethnographic methods of interviews and participant observation. In addition to engaging Chinese diasporans as participants, the project additionally regarded the natural world and nonhuman beings (i.e., *abalone*) as agents critically affecting the human interviewees. Finally, as a supplementary data collection method, video and photographic documentation reinforced the ethnographic findings by supplying imagistic points of reference for the transcript information. As part of the data analysis, a sensory framework facilitated

the identification of the participants' and—in auto-ethnographic terms—the researchers' everyday (i.e., commonplace, familial, recreational) interactions with the Western Australian environment.

The interviews comprised a series of one-on-one interviews as well as focus groups. Twelve local Chinese informants were interviewed in-depth. The number of participants was selected for conducting detailed discussions of 45 min to one hour while ensuring a diversity of backgrounds, genders, personalities, and occupations within the pool of participants. All participants spoke Mandarin and were aged between twenty and fifty years. Most of the focus group interviewees were from coastal Chinese provinces, such as Shandong, notably the first aquaculture site for the abalone industry in China developed in the 1980s. The interviewees included in this article are Duanxin (business owner), Lu Fang (restaurant owner), Billy Han (risk assessment consultant), Tommy Zhan (mining engineer), Sun Fengyong (mining engineer), and Yang Chunlong (master chef) (see Figure 1 for a summary). The techniques used to recruit participants included personal contacts (information obtained from friends or Chinese social networks), telephone contacts, referrals to potential interviewees by existing participants (snowballing), and recruitment by a third party (mainly through participants' social networks and Perth-based Chinese organizations). In comparison to other recruitment strategies, such as advertisements and posters, these approaches suited the general tendency of Chinese diasporans to form social relations in small groups and with other diasporans of similar regional, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Some interviews were conducted while walking with participants while others occurred in the field during events such as the annual Perth abalone harvest, thus accentuating the materiality of the environment within the data collection process. Accordingly, Pink calls for a “social, sensorial and emotive” ethnographic practice within “a context of emplaced knowing” [17] (pp. 81, 85).

Interview-Date	Name	Occupation	Location
10/11/2014 10/01/2015 2014–2016-fishing-days 22/11/2014 14/04/2015	Duan-Xin-with-his-family	Business-owner	Charles-Paterson-Park Lu's-restaurant-(group) Marmion-Marine-Park Duan's-home-(cooking) Como-(crab-fishing)
10/01/2015 2014-2016-fishing-days	Lu-Fang	Restaurant-owner	Lu's-restaurant-(group) Marmion-Marine-Park
10/01/2015 2014-2016-fishing-days	Billy-Han	Risk-assessment-consultant	Lu's-restaurant-(group) Marmion-Marine-Park
10/01/2015 2014-2016-fishing-days	Tommy-Zhan	Mining-engineer	Lu's-restaurant-(group) Marmion-Marine-Park
10/01/2015 2014-2016-fishing-days	Sun-Fengyong	Mining-engineer	Lu's-restaurant-(group) Marmion-Marine-Park
20/04/2014 16/05/2015 25/12/2015	Yang-Chunlong-with-his-family	Master-chef	Yang's-restaurant Yang's-home Mandurah-(crab-fishing)

Figure 1. Summary of 2014–16 interviews with Chinese diasporans in Western Australia, compiled by Li Chen.

The use of participant observation in the project highlighted practical and theoretical aspects of local Chinese interactions with Perth's natural environment. Nature-culture imbrications mediate the interviewees' actualization of livelihood within the diasporic place of WA. The “multisensorial and emplaced” practice of participant observation is what Pink understands as essential to “auto-ethnography” [17] (pp. 63–64). Between 2014 and 2016, the researchers took part in five recreational abalone harvests at Marmion Marine Park in Perth and four crab fishing excursions with participants in the Perth suburbs of Como and Mandurah. The researchers also tasted abalone when possible, for instance, in the restaurants and kitchens of participants. These tactile, gustatory and olfactory investigations not only sought to identify participants' sensory experiences of abalone

harvesting and cooking, but also enabled the researchers themselves to develop emplaced responses in an auto-ethnographic mode. More specifically, the project involved two approaches to participant observation. The first combined interviews with embodied participation in events, reflecting John Ryan's conceptualization of walking as "a dynamic interconnection between being and becoming" [18] (p. 55). The second involved the more intimate sharing of food with participants as a means to identify the cultural resonances of ingredients, recipes, cooking techniques, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. The study of food in this project, therefore, adopted a multisensorial orientation as a means to understand Chinese diasporic senses of belonging and becoming in relation to the Western Australian environment.

With the grounding of the project in sensory ethnography, the data analysis reflected the posthumanist premise that nature is an agentic, multisensorial nexus where Chinese beliefs and practices can be transformed. The analysis, thus, focused on how the *sensescape* of Western Australia is remembered, imagined, and, indeed, shaped by interviewees through diasporic materialities, such as those related to abalone. In general, the data analysis employed two descriptive modes. The first focused on broad scales including the WA marine environment and Chinese diasporic movements in order to provide sufficient background for the analysis of the one-on-one interviews and auto-ethnographic material. In this way, the data analysis resulted in historicized thick description informed by nature-culture principles from the environmental humanities. The second mode privileged storytelling based on transcript data from the interviews as well as the narrativization of the researchers' experiences in the field. These materials—interview and focus group transcripts combined with auto-ethnographic narratives—were interpreted in a manner linking the material agents of the research to Chinese diasporic ways of being and becoming in WA.

3. Natural Heritage, Global Consumption, and Local Fishing Regulations

There are seventy known abalone species in the worldwide maritime zones [5] (p. xi). Among all the oceans, the mass distribution of the species is along the coastlines of the Pacific Ocean and surrounding islands. The distribution on coastal areas of the Indian Ocean takes second place while a smaller distribution occurs in the Atlantic Ocean and none is found in the Arctic Ocean [19]. In spite of the large distribution of various species around the world, only twenty species of abalone, mainly in the northwest, northeast, and southwest of the Pacific Ocean and the south of Africa, can be fished on an industrial scale. Some commentators regard abalone as a kind of mussel or clam in the subclass Bivalvia. In marine biology, however, it belongs to the subclass Presabanchia and the family Haliotidae [8] (sect. "Species", para. 3).

Abalone has a very slow growth rate. It usually takes about four years or more to grow from a germ cell to a mature size [20] (p. 34). The growth rate declines as the abalone ages, as the weight and length of young ones always increase faster than mature ones. The living environment, seasons, and the foods it consumes are all evident in the patterns and colors of its shell [21] (sect. "Growth", para. 1). The wild ones are typically reddish-brown or brown tinged with green, while the artificially fed abalone are green or wine-colored [21] (sect. "Colours", para. 1). Experienced people can distinguish wild abalone from cultured ones according to the colors of the helix on the shells' tops. Although the two kinds of abalone are comparable in nutritional content, in the market economy, the price of wild abalones is 30–40 percent higher than that of farmed ones [21] (sect. "Colours", para. 3). In Hong Kong, dried abalone with first-class quality can be sold at 30,000 Hong Kong dollars (approximately 5000 Australian dollars) for 500 g. It is said that "one bite of abalone is equal to one bite of gold" [8] (para. 2). In the Chinese market, larger sized abalone can be sold at higher prices. "For example, *Haliotis laevis* [greenlip abalone] from Australia, is sometimes available at about US\$30/Kg, but this product may be imported illegally" [4] (p. 570). The profitability of abalone farming has attracted not only Chinese aquaculturists, but also those in other countries such as New Zealand, Mexico, and Chile.

In Australia, the main stocks of abalone are wild. Abalone output in 2004 was about 6000 tons, with only 300 tons from farms. However, the Howard government announced a plan to raise the

annual output of cultured abalone to 3000 tons [8] (para. 27). Market analysts indicate that the price of abalone will not drop in the future, despite increasing supplies from international markets, because it cannot keep pace with the demands of worldwide consumption [8] (para. 28). Perth, in Western Australia, has a typical Mediterranean environment with hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters. The topography and local geomorphology of the Swan Coastal Plain have formed under the influence of sea-level changes. Its coastline has unique aquatic biodiversity, including wild abalone species.

In Western Australia, among the eleven total species of abalone, there are only three species large enough to be fished, namely the brownlip abalone (*Haliotis conicopora*), the greenlip abalone (*Haliotis laevis*), and Roe's abalone (*Haliotis roei*) [22] (para. 3). Different from the other two larger deep-water abalone, Roe's abalone "mostly inhabit shallow limestone reefs along the west coast, especially around Perth and near Geraldton" [22] (sect. "Distribution and Habitat", para. 1). Since the early 1970s, recreational fishing of abalone in the Perth area has risen rapidly. In the Perth metropolitan area, "nearly 80 tonnes in total of Roe's abalone are taken annually by commercial and recreational fishers" [22] (sect. "Fishing for Abalone", para. 1). The two types of abalone fishing have resulted in a series of restrictions to control the depleted local abalone stock. "Since 1995, the season has consisted of 6 Sunday mornings from 7:00 a.m. to 8:30 a.m., starting on the first Sunday in November. The minimum legal size of abalone taken by the recreational sector is 60 mm, with a daily limit of 20" [23] (p. 167). In 2015, some changes have been implemented in the West Coast bioregion: the "daily bag limit for Roe's abalone is 15"; five fishing days only in the West Coast Zone; and the time was from 7:00 a.m.–8:00 a.m. [24]. In October 2017, the new regulations include four days only on Saturdays in the West Coast Zone. The starting day is in December in order to improve safety in fishing during the better weather conditions.

4. The Fishing Experiences of Diasporic Chinese People in Australia

I am from an inland city of Shandong province in China, while my wife is from Yantai, where she grew up near the sea. Twelve or thirteen years ago, my family settled down in Perth. One morning we had a walk along the sea in Joondalup. She suddenly told me there was abalone. I did not believe her. I thought it impossible to see abalone on the roadside, as it is so expensive in China. Then I saw numerous abalone on the rocks by the sea. I wore sneakers so I kicked them down, one by one. Do you know how many? Almost two barrels full! I immediately bought two barrels from the supermarket nearby. At that time, we did not know that a fishing license is required. My wife told me they were real, edible abalone, so we gladly took them home. (B. Han, pers. comm., 10 January 2015)

Despite various reasons for abalone fishing, Chinese people living in Perth regard the precious natural resource of abalone as a valuable part of their local lives. Since Li Chen interviewed several local Chinese people who have experiences harvesting abalone, their fishing stories made her anticipate the excitement of the activity. In November 2014, on the opening day of the abalone season, she first went to North Beach, near Mettam's Pool, WA, Australia, a popular spot for recreational fishers, with some participants in the project. Duan Xin and Lu Fang, the director and the associate director of the local Shandong association, who grew up in the most important abalone production locations in Shandong Province, are experts in abalone harvesting. At the first sight on the beach, Li Chen was fascinated by the sublime landscape of the coastline. In the early summer morning, the air was cool and fresh, and a little salty from the ocean. The endless blue sky was connected to the giant flat water. The sea was quiet and clear in a pure color of light blue. The slowly waving seaweed on the reef rocks under the shallow water reflected mottled shadows in the morning sunlight. Duan and Lu told her that the abalone live right on the rocks. She could not see any of them at first. After careful observation, she found that the abalone shells are quite different from those she had seen in pictures, as the natural ones are disguised by maroon seaweed. The simple tools for abalone harvesting are usually a 20-cm-long screwdriver with a flat head and a webbed pouch. Experienced people modify the screwdriver's head to curve upward when prizing the shells off the rocks. After coming out of the

sea, the abalone retracts its feet and tentacles into its shell, which feels like a pebble with its round shape with little weight. The fishing limit of one hour is more than enough for proficient fishers, but far from enough for beginners.

In good weather conditions, Duan and Lu only need ten minutes to reach the fifteen abalone limit. In the time left, they advise friends. On the beach, there seems to be a secret race. If someone finds a large abalone, a crowd soon gathers around him and the other fishers try to harvest bigger ones. After fishing several times, she found that each time the experience is different; for example, the following fishing day was windy and gloomy, and harvesting in the strong waves was indeed a challenge as well as an adventure. According to Surf Lifesaving (Balcatta, WA, Australia), in 2015:

[...] five rescues were reported, with one person requiring an ambulance as a precaution for a suspected spinal injury. Lifeguards warned another 40 people who were in the water amid concerns for their safety. Three people have died in Western Australia in recent years while fishing for abalone. [25] (para. 4)

There are also plenty of accidents each year. During an interview, Duan recalled that the previous year, a young Asian man stood beside him on the slippery underwater reefs. That morning the waves were furious and suddenly he found the man had disappeared. He immediately squatted, groping for the man in the waves. Fortunately, he grabbed the man's back and pulled him out of a dangerous water hole between two rocks. Another participant, Han, who collected two barrels of abalone on the beach near his home when he first moved to Perth from China, is no longer interested in abalone harvesting. He said:

Several years ago, one friend asked me to go fishing with him. I bought a license, but, before I went, he broke his leg. How did it happen? When he was fishing, the waves were so strong and a big man, who was standing in front of him, fell down and sat right on his leg. He was in hospital for two weeks. I think fishing abalone is quite dangerous. (B. Han, pers. comm., 10 January 2015)

As the director of Shandong Association, Duan decided to teach new members safe ways to harvest abalone in part of discussing local living experiences at their regular meetings.

To find an appropriate fishing place, you should drive along the coastlines, watching the waves to seek some rocks inside. Choose a spot near the rocks but you have to make sure it is a permitted fishing place. When you step into the water, if you stand facing the waves and the water is as high as your knees, you may be swept away by the waves. I stand sideways to reduce the dragging power of the waves. You must be careful of the rocks. When the tides are falling, it is safe. The water is just above your ankles and you can find abalone by hand. My experience is not to be in a rush when people nearby have taken some abalone out. You need to concentrate and look into the water. Stand in one place and turn around. After searching in front, look at the area behind. Change to another place after one place is cleared. Pay special attention to the cracks in the rocks. (X. Duan, pers. comm., 10 January 2015)

Duan regards himself as a suitable Australian fisherman as he has a talent for fishing. Many beginners, especially new arrivals from China, have benefited from Duan's experiences when adapting to local life. Over the last two fishing seasons, learning from Duan and Lu with other Chinese novices, Li Chen has obtained not only the knowledge of abalone and the skills of harvesting, but also a respect for the local natural world and the importance of environmental regulations.

Another participant, Tommy Zhan, joined the Shandong Association several months ago. The first time he harvested abalone with Duan he received numerous scratches on his legs from sharp rocks when he escaped from big waves. He thought the experience was "very nice":

For me, all outdoor activities are entertainment. We cannot try surfing [at our age]. Fishing *abalone* is a pastime. I do not care about the harvest. [I want to go fishing because] firstly, I heard that there are many people waiting until seven o'clock [in the morning]. They swarm into the water like being at a fete. I am curious about the scene. The second is that I know what abalone looks like but I do not know more about harvesting it nor the places where it lives. (Tommy Zhan, pers. comm., 10 January 2015)

For fishing enthusiast Duan, abalone harvesting is a way to enhance his health. "Every time, I go to the beach without breakfast, so I can test my physical condition. Body strength differs between 15 pieces and 60 pieces" (X. Duan, pers. comm., 10 January 2015). Seremetakis [26] (p. 74) argues that in the union with nature, nature is not "the proper naming of flora and fauna, but an instructor in physical, training, and expression". In the global context, nature has become "a part of the modern project" [26] (p. 75), which is also increasingly transnational and diasporic.

Abalone fishing as an embodied environmental practice is particularly related to the tactile sense. Zhan describes that, during his first abalone harvest, he could not feel anything under the water. "Duan told me it feels like a hard bump on the rock. In the first half hour, I learned slowly, then I found several. I got eight abalone the first time. It was not bad" (T. Zhan, pers. comm., 10 January 2015). For immigrants, the sense of the new place awakens their senses of the original place. Following Seremetakis' analysis, "the awakening of the senses is awakening the capacity for memory, of tangible memory; to be awake is to remember, and one remembers through the senses, via substance" [26] (p. 28). Participation in fishing allows people to bond, consolidate Chinese identity, and enact memories of home. Additionally, abalone harvesting becomes a kind of cultural resource in the new life in Western Australia. The coastline environment and the knowledge of abalone play important roles in engendering environmental awareness among recent immigrants. As Seremetakis argues, "the senses in this place are moving constantly, they are not stationary. They blend, combine and recombine, shifting positions and transforming contexts" [26] (p. 30). Abalone is an agent connecting Chinese people to the local natural world. Harvesting wild free abalone is a great pleasure for the people every year. Although some of them had eaten abalone dishes before they arrived in Perth, most local Chinese people did not have experience fishing. During the abalone harvest, "tactility extends beyond the hands" [26] (p. 29). They go into the sea, smelling the fresh air, watching through waves, and using their hands to find the shells between rocks—even being injured by the rocks. Through the engagement of the senses in the practice of fishing, they learn about the coastline of Perth, the currents of the Indian Ocean, and about a coastal environment totally different from their home cities in China. As Seremetakis notes, "the senses defer the material world by changing substance into memory" [26] (p. 29). The practice of abalone harvesting has expanded their diasporic sphere with the blending of memories from China and Australia, and, thus, local nature becomes a lived space and living space for diasporic people (see Figure 2).

Knowledge of abalone is part of coastal cultures, both in China and Australia. Through abalone harvesting, people such as Duan bring memories and experiences of the past into the present as "a transformative and interruptive force" [26] (p. 31). In this activity, abalone is something that belongs to the tidal environment, but it is also an agent that extracts fragments from the past memories of diasporans "in order to create passageways between times and spaces" [26] (p. 31). Harvesting abalone is a two-sided experience linked to memories of both the homeland and experiences of the hostland. Therefore, "it reveals the extent to which the senses are entangled with history, memory, forgetfulness, narrative and silence" [26] (p. 2). The abalone in China embodies allusions to distant epochs where the relation between food and origins was more explicit in cultural narratives. Since migrating from Qingdao, a seaside city in Shandong province, Duan has enjoyed every local opportunity to harvest abalone as he recalls familiar experiences in China since his childhood. The abalone in Perth has melded with the Chinese abalone in his mind and together they generate "a mosaic of enmeshed memories" [26] (p. 2), tactility, and tastes (see Figures 3–6). In addition, Duan has passed his knowledge of abalone and his new experiences on via his mentoring. Through sharing sensory practices, all the

participants in abalone harvesting are transforming their perceptions of the local living environment. As Seremetakis indicates, sensory changes “occur microscopically through everyday accretion” [26] (p. 2) such as the memories of traditional cooking and dining.



Figure 2. Abalone harvest at Mettam's Pool, near Perth, Western Australia, in December 2016, photo by John Ryan.



Figure 3. Abalone harvesting requires embodied and sensory acts integrated with the shoreline environment of Western Australia, photo by John Ryan.



Figure 4. Abalone harvesters near Perth during the 2016 season, photo by John Ryan.



Figure 5. Abalone harvesters encounter demanding conditions, photo by John Ryan.



Figure 6. The abalone harvesting site contains dangerous rocks with algae that harvesters must negotiate, photo by John Ryan.

5. Cross-Cultural Communication through the Agent of Food

Although eating abalone is a tradition of both the northern and southern areas of China, according to Tong Zhou [8] (para. 16), in modern times, the art of cooking abalone has reached the peak of perfection in Cantonese cuisine. In our understanding, to some extent, remarkable Cantonese skills of cooking abalone explain why abalone has been in high worldwide demand even in the nineteenth century. Early global Chinese immigrants were mainly from Chinese seaside provinces such as Guangdong, the cradle of Cantonese cuisine. According to Jan Ryan, “the overseas Cantonese make up almost forty percent of an estimated fifty-five million Chinese outside the mainland” [27] (p. 7). Among the earlier Chinese immigrants to Australia, there was the same population structure with a majority of Cantonese speakers. Some were “either eighteenth and nineteenth century sojourners or descendants of those who arrived in Australia via Southeast Asia nations like Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore” [28] (p. 5). The Chinese diaspora in Perth, with its historically Cantonese background, particularly appreciates the gift of abalone from the natural environment. However, since 2006, over sixty percent of new immigrants originating from mainland China have been Mandarin speakers [28] (p. 5). Unlike earlier generations, new Chinese arrivals include young skilled immigrants and overseas students who have become more accustomed to foreign cultures and local lifestyles. For immigrants from the midlands of China, abalone is a legendary food and the activity of harvesting is adventurous entertainment. With the onset of each fishing season, information on gathering and cooking abalone is shared by word-of-mouth and through ethnic media, such as newspapers and local Chinese social networks. For instance, in a video posted on YouTube in 2010, on a reef platform, participants with Asian faces engage in recreational abalone harvesting as the majority, rather than minority, of fishers in the scene [29]. For Forrest and Murphy, food is “the nexus of the ‘sensing’ self and the ‘sensible’ society, the meeting point of the individual and the communal” [23] (p. 353). Forrest and Murphy argue that the experiences of “tasting, smelling, touching, seeing, and even hearing food” offer diasporic individuals a means to encounter a new culture, and thereby become more integrated into the host society [30] (p. 353).

5.1. Western, Eastern, and Aboriginal Recipes

The difference between Chinese and Western cookeries is about dietary habits. Chinese food culture is sophisticated: thousands of years of history, varied ingredients, and diverse cooking methods. In Western countries, the cookery is comparatively simpler. With the same food source, in China, we cook a wide range of dishes with different cooking skills. Sometimes, this is because the source in China is not as good as it is in the Western countries, and we need more complex processes. (C.L. Yang, per. comm., 20 April 2015)

Chef Yang is an important participant in our research into abalone, as he worked in one of the most luxurious restaurants in Shanghai for over 18 years. In Chinese history, the social status of chefs was not high, yet famous chefs, especially those who could cook delicacies for the upper classes, were quite respected and rich. For example, Yang Guanyi, the founder of “Ayi Abalone” in Hong Kong, has entirely changed Eastern abalone cuisine. His achievement in abalone cooking has been recognized with the highest Medal of Honor from the international chef association. The average price of one piece of Ayi abalone is near 6500 Australian dollars [8] (para. 21). His success demonstrates that Eastern gastronomists relish abalone not only for its rareness but also for the chef’s cooking skills. Abalone meat is plain tasting; thus, in Chinese dishes, the delicious taste of abalone dishes is due to the flavors blended by chefs. In every Chinese restaurant, abalone sauce, usually made with chicken, duck, dried sea scallops, and ham, is a personal secret recipe:

In the Chinese restaurant, we use the snakehead fish because it can be cooked into a state like jelly. A 2–3 kg fish is perfect, and we deep-fry it to a golden color. A mature hen is also deep-fried with some ham and pork rind. Stew all these sources in a soup with dried longan, which adds a little sweet flavour to the soup. This soup should be prepared in advance. Then, stew abalone with the soup for 5–8 h. Finally, serve the abalone with some sauce made by the soup. (C. L. Yang, pers. comm., 20 April 2015)

The famous Chinese gastronomist Shen Hongfei [31] (para. 1) states that abalone as a food source is of two kinds: “dried” (sun-baked) or “wet” (fresh). Cooking dried abalone is the pinnacle of Cantonese cookery, but its preparation also reflects the wet-dry dialectic of traditional Taoist thought, as investigated by Tong Chee-Kiong in his sociological research into Chinese death rituals in Singapore [32]. Shen Hongfei argues that the abalone in the so-called Chinese “four treasures of seafood” actually refers to dried abalone [31] (para. 5). He explains that the best quality abalone is due to three elements [31] (paras. 10,11). The first is the long process of drying. This process does not involve simply laying the fresh abalone on the beach for periods of time. Instead, the traditional method is to shell fresh abalone, marinate it in salty water, boil it in salty water, smoke it on charcoal fire until half dried, then sun-bake it to a completely dried state. With ideal weather conditions, the whole process will last several months. Although the weight of an abalone is reduced by ninety percent during drying, compared to the fresh weight, its price on the Chinese market increases tenfold. The second point is that cooking dried abalone is a serious challenge for a chef. Gastronomists believe that cooking with dried abalone can demonstrate the skills of an experienced chef because he must accurately control the heat and time to deal with the hard meat. Therefore, in Chinese cuisines, abalone dishes can be brand-named, such as “Ayi Abalone”, as only the top master chefs have the opportunity to demonstrate superb culinary skills with an expensive ingredient. The last but most important point is the dual aspect of its flavor and texture. Forrest and Murphy argue that, physiologically, “taste is rarely experienced in isolation, but rather as an intimate joining with flavor” [30] (p. 360). What are the tastes of a cooked dried abalone? According to a Chinese master of painting, also a renowned gastronomist, Zhang Daqian, it should be smooth, soft, appetizing, and tender. The taste of the rim is like eating honeycombed tofu while the middle is as tender as jelly, crystal-clear, and amber [31] (para. 11). His description echoes the “third sense” which, for Forrest and Murphy, “happens in the mouth [as] the somatosensory, which includes pain (for example, capsaicin) and pleasure, but also mouthfeel, which can often change with textures of food, but also components such as fat” [30] (p. 360).

Compared to the complicated culinary skills required to prepare dried abalone, the fresh abalone in Chinese cuisines contributes its simple “fresh” taste with the easiest cooking method. The main difference between dried and fresh abalone is that the latter is only produced in particular seasons. Summer is a “lucky” season for harvesting the plump and sweetest abalone. Cooking is simple: shelling, gutting (the poisonous guts are not suitable for eating raw), cleaning, and slicing. Another highly finessed technique is to knead the meat with rock salt to peel away the outer slime and make the meat chewy. The dipping sauce for the raw abalone slices is similar to that used for Japanese sashimi: mustard and soy sauce. In Japan, the pickled guts are also eaten as a popular drinking snack [31] (para. 2). The idea of simple cookery with abalone is universal in many countries. The first time Li Chen went abalone harvesting, she met a local Australian lady on the beach. Her cooking method was to finely slice the fresh abalone, heat a frying pan with a little olive oil, fry some diced fresh garlic, put the abalone slices on the pan, and grind some sea salt on them. It is ready to eat in no more than three minutes of frying. Li Chen tried this method once with the fresh abalone she harvested. It is so different from the dried abalone dishes she had in China, sweet and fresh and associated with a smell of the sea. When she interviewed Duan, he told her another cooking method he learned from his Western friends:

Some Western people cut the abalone in half and tenderize it with a kitchen hammer. Then marinate it with salt and pepper for a while before grilling it on the barbecue oven. It looks burned outside but the meat inside is tender. (X. Duan, pers. comm., 10 January 2015)

However, he regards this method as “a reckless waste of abalone” as “in China, even abalone porridge is luxury” (X. Duan, pers. comm., 10 January 2015). In the inland areas, people can hardly access abalone except in cans or frozen fresh in some supermarkets. However, this kind of abalone is only suitable for soups. It is not tasty in itself but is used for adding more flavor to soups. In America, “the shellfish must be cooked very quickly, usually pan-fried, or else it toughens” [33] (p. 2). In conversation, Nyoongar Elder Noel Nannup repeated twice that abalone tastes rubbery. He said that is the reason why Nyoongar people usually stew abalone with the shell, to keep the meat juicy and tender (N. Nannup, pers. comm., 15 June 2016). On the whole, during the interviews, most of the participants did not think abalone per se is delicious, but is instead tasteless and chewy. Li Chen directly asked Han whether the price of abalone is the main reason for his harvesting practice. He hesitated for a second and agreed. From these interviews emerges the powerful narrative significance of abalone. To Western people and Indigenous people, it is a living resource and an ordinary food; from a Chinese perspective, although the people have already lived in Australia for some time, abalone retains a powerful material narrative symbolizing a high social status. The symbolic importance of the abalone is common throughout the interviews, even with participants such as Duan and Han who have detailed physical knowledge of the species and its environment. They still acknowledge the status value of abalone in their daily diets.

Shen indicates that the Chinese style of dried abalone corresponds to Chinese traditional philosophy [31] (para. 8). In Chinese cultures, the fresh material is regarded in the raw state as uncivilized. Only after continuous treatment, the raw material becomes refined. No matter whether food sources, such as abalone, or works of literature, all “watery” matters should be dehydrated in order to get to the essence. Therefore, by contrast to the Western appreciation of natural states, in the Chinese understanding, dried abalone is symbolic of the essence of Chinese food sources. Along with this particular feature of Chinese culture, abalone is a luxury delicacy only for the wealthy and privileged social classes in tradition. However, in Western Australia, as abalone has left the high altar of Chinese food culture and appears on the dining table of ordinary people because of its availability in the environment, the mollusc influences and embodies diasporic experience through its use in everyday recipes.

5.2. Restaurant Dishes and Home Cooking

After we carried two barrels of abalone [home], we made abalone dumplings and fried abalone with vegetables. Two whole shelves in our fridge were full of abalone [...]. At last, my child asked me whether there was abalone in the dumplings. If yes, he would not eat them [laughing]. (B. Han, pers. comm., 10 January 2015)

You cannot eat raw abalone directly. It must be frozen for a while for sterilizing. After defrosting, it can be easily sliced. You can make fine slices like sashimi, serving with wasabi and crushed ginger. Ginger is necessary because abalone is cold-natured [in Chinese medicine] but ginger can neutralize the coldness of abalone. (X. Duan, pers. comm., 10 January 2015)

In the interviews, we collected several homemade abalone recipes, which we had never thought could be prepared at home because of the expense of abalone in China. In abalone cuisine, there are two attitudes among local Chinese people. The first one, from those who have lived close to Chinese coastlines, mostly in the provinces of Liaoning, Shandong, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong, is that abalone is a food source in the domestic kitchen. Some other people from inland areas, such as Li Chen's hometown in southwest China, present another attitude that abalone is a restaurant food. For Margaret Mead, food habits refer to "the culturally standardized set of behaviors in regards to food manifested by individuals who have been reared within a given cultural tradition" [34] (p. 18). For the people who have had the experience of living near Chinese coastlines, the given cultural traditions are intimately related to those environments. Conversely, inland people are not familiar with abalone as it is a part of coastal culture. Learning to cook abalone at home is an innovation and alteration of their existing food habits and behavioural patterns. In this regard, Mead concludes:

[...] the interaction between the cultured individual and his environment has two aspects in any consideration of food habits, interaction with the food producing and food distributing systems, that is, adjustments to the physical environments, and interaction between the individual organism and the actual food. [34] (p. 18)

In the first aspect, different attitudes toward abalone reflect the ways local Chinese people inherit and accept traditional food habits associated with their previous living environments. This difference, in our understanding, is a dynamic description of the food habit pattern of regional sub-cultures, which are components of traditional Chinese food cultures. If the first interaction between food and its distribution is a public experience, the other aspect of the food habits provides personal perceptions of the "actual food" of abalone, although the perceptions stem from collective memories and historical narratives. For the individual, food habits are not constructed as isolated, but refer to an assemblage of perceptions constituted by different factors, such as knowledge, occupation, and physical conditions. For example, as a master chef, Yang cooks abalone in his restaurant by:

[...] soaking the dried abalone in cold water for five to eight hours. In winter, at least one night is required as swelling abalone meat easily absorbs the flavors. Then carefully wash it and cook it into the pre-prepared soup with low heat. It is better to add some ginger and spring onion in it and boil it for a long time: three or four hours for small abalone and six to eight hours for big ones. (C. L. Yang, pers. comm., 20 April 2015)

Yang has never doubted the standard process for abalone cooking, which he learned from culinary school in China. Only through such processes can abalone be treated as a delicacy, since abalone in its raw form is insipid. However, cooking at home, he recommends fresh abalone as it is better for alimentation and digestion. "You do not need to add the mass of ingredients. Choose the fresh ones, thinly slice, and eat in hotpot. In a restaurant, it is expensive, while at home it is ordinary. This is different" (C. L. Yang, pers. comm., 20 April 2015). Other than the restaurant dishes emphasizing flavors, tastes, and presentations, home food habits focus more on convenience and health. As an ordinary food, abalone can even be served at breakfast:

We cook abalone porridge at home in the morning. Thinly slice the abalone after washing them carefully. When the porridge is done, put the slices in and turn off the heat of the oven. Stir the slices with the hot porridge. The meat is tender. If over-cooked, the meat becomes chewy. (X. Duan, pers. comm., 10 January 2015)

Only within the category of food, abalone becomes a cultural term with particular Chinese labels. In the local diasporic experiences, abalone blurs the distinction between the food culture of social classes as well as public and private food patterns. For wealthy and noble people, it is a decoration and emblem of their social status and economic strength; however, to ordinary people, it becomes merely a part of everyday life. Local Chinese people will not praise the taste for its legend in tradition; some people obviously prefer to catch crabs during recreational fishing. Their changing personal perceptions of abalone may result from the cultural traditions transposed from China to Australia and inculcated in the diasporic generations.

Williams-Forson and Walker argue that food as “a social marker” “can be used to indicate cultural belonging and identity” [35] (p. 287). Through everyday practices, food “acts as a system of communication identifying social group dynamics” [35] (p. 288). In a diasporic context, the next generations of Chinese immigrants, mostly born in Australia, may feel alienated from Anglo-European people when they eat Chinese foods. Belasco argues that food as “an access point creates an awareness of the estranged position adoptees find themselves in and the incompleteness of their cultural memory” [36] (p. 33). One friend, who is second-generation Malaysian-Chinese, has harvested abalone for ten years. He never eats it, but his mother of Cantonese origin loves abalone. Other young Chinese migrants in their twenties generally prefer crab to abalone. One likely reason is that they did not have many opportunities to eat abalone in China as it is not a homemade food. Moreover, when they grew up in China, they had a deeper attraction to Western fast food, such as McDonalds, as it seems cosmopolitan, modern, and “precisely because it was not Chinese” [36] (p. 33). Therefore, even though there is easy access to free abalone in Western Australia, for the young people, fishing abalone seems less about its taste and more about recreational pleasure. Considering the stricter fishing regulations and danger in abalone harvesting, they would rather go fishing or net crabs. Moreover, more Chinese immigrants have started trying simple abalone recipes at home rather than complicated cooking procedures used in traditional Chinese restaurants. Through the changes in everyday recipes, people have transformed their knowledge of local material culture. As a result, their self-conceptions and social identities are transformed through the accretion of sensory experiences.

6. Nature's Influence on Diasporic Social Life

We have argued that abalone harvesting and preparation create a bridge between wild nature and the diasporic space. Through the practice of abalone harvesting, local Chinese people interpret the natural world differently and come to regard themselves as part of the diasporic natural environment. Every Christmas for the past three years, Duan has invited some Chinese families for a fishing trip to Albany, WA. “In Albany, one is allowed to harvest abalone every day, 20 pieces limit for each time. We camped on the beach and fished crabs and lobsters with nets at night. The lifestyle was amazing” (X. Duan, pers. comm., 10 January 2015). For them, fishing for abalone or other species, however, seems less about its taste and more about recreational pleasure, and also allows a mode of participation in a cultural tradition transposed to Australia. “This is the attraction of living here. Life is leisurely and comfortable. You can enjoy real pastimes. It is not like tours in China where the purpose is travelling to more places within a limited time” (T. Zhan, pers. comm., 10 January 2015). Many new Chinese immigrants start to accumulate a sense of the new place through their participation in local activities, such as fishing and camping. “In action people opened up new sensory registers, saw new horizons and by doing so constituted themselves into new identities”, including new collective identities, in which “people were incited to and given the possibility of producing new individual identities” [26] (pp. 74–75).

“Whose sense of place?” is the question that George Seddon raises in his book *Sense of Place* [37] (sect. “Author’s Note”). Through abalone harvesting, sense of place for local Chinese people involves two aspects. The first is sense of place as a cluster of memories from the original place, which helps people resist change and cling to the past, particularly when the future is unsure. Sensory memory, for Seremetakis, “is a form of storage. Storage is always the embodiment and conservation of experiences, persons and matter in vessels of alterity” [26] (p. 28). Abalone is a living form of storage permeated with previous personal living experiences, original cultural values, and strong senses of the motherland. The second is that local outdoor activities foster another ethos in the diasporic Chinese group. When we go into the natural world, we not only take pictures and enjoy the scenery but have embodied experiences in nature. This is more possible in Australia, in the opinions of the participants. Ingold argues that “the world can only be ‘nature’ for a being that does not inhabit it, yet only through inhabiting can the world be constructed, in relation to a being, as its environment” [38] (p. 40). The example of abalone harvesting also illustrates the implicit transformation of diasporic people’s perception of interpersonal relationships and the connections with previous biosocial networks.

6.1. A Proud Gift

Some experienced abalone enthusiasts such as Duan forge new social networks in Perth when they help other novices in harvesting or share abalone with new friends. As Mary Douglas argues, society is a “cycling gift system” [39] (p. ix). The exchange of gifts such as abalone between local Chinese is one means through which new social relationships are created. The first time Li Chen interviewed Duan on the beach, just after harvesting, he immediately gave her half of the abalone he had just harvested. From the gift, she felt that he is warm-hearted and sociable. The abalone was a sign that he had accepted her. Duan has a nickname known by his Chinese friends, “Big Brother”. It has two meanings: it signifies the familial closeness of their friendship and represents Duan’s role of a leader in their group. He is known for his expertise in fishing and is respected by friends. In addition to his role in teaching fishing, Duan also acts as a mentor in building a local life for new Chinese immigrants. Through harvesting together or sharing recipes, local Chinese have expanded and deepened their diasporic space. Abalone, an expensive gift in China, helps them to reinforce social networks in the new land.

At Li Chen’s first few abalone harvests, she did not know how to cook the piles of abalone at home. She gave them to master chef Yang as a gift when she interviewed him at his house in Mandurah. After several days, when she had a second interview with him at her office, surprisingly, he brought her two containers. “What is inside?” she asked him. “The abalones you gave me last time. They are ready to eat. I cooked them with the chicken soup I made. It is very hard to find the proper ingredients here, so it cost me three days”. He kept the abalone for her because he regards it as an expensive food, despite her easy procurement of it from the sea. After three days’ preparation, the new abalone dish was no longer the free gift she sent to him. Rather, for her, it is a precious gift from a new friend. In Chinese culture, gift giving is “an integrative part” [40] (p. 604). Abalone giving constructs or reinforces a trustworthy relation among individual members of a social group, as well as the acceptance of fellowship. To be certain, gift giving in the diasporic Chinese-Australian context inscribes aspects of the broader gift economy in China. In *The Flow of Gifts*, Yunxiang Yan examines gifting activities in everyday life in China, emphasizing routine social transactions, including food exchanges between neighbors, as well as special events and ceremonies, such as weddings [41]. In a study of the gift economy and state power in China, moreover, Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang observes the biopolitical relevance of the gift economy as a mechanism for “exerting some measure of control over the conditions of the dominant form of power embedded in the state redistributive mode of exchange” [42] (p. 52). In Yang’s view, one function of the gift is to subvert the authority of the principle of state distribution.

6.2. An Admirable Life

After the promulgation of “reform and opening” policies in the 1980s, the trend of going abroad prevailed in China. Chinese people regard living in Western countries as affording more freedom and space in healthy and modern environments. Chinese people who live abroad, especially in European countries, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, are generally admired by their relatives and friends. Lin, a businessman as a participant in this study, is proud of his current Western style life in Perth:

Playing golf, fishing, drinking, and walking dogs, I feel I am leading a common Western life. You may notice that many Western people, although not very rich, can enjoy blue sky, white clouds, and seafood. Nature is equally shared. Rich people eat abalone in restaurants or you can harvest abalone yourself to save money. (L.Q. Fan, pers. comm., 15 March 2015)

His view implies that in contemporary phenomenon in China, only rich people are capable of accessing the natural environment. The idea of nature to most Chinese people means the elements of sky, clouds, plants, and rivers. Due to the dense population and the crowded urban areas of China, ordinary people cannot afford the cost of living with more natural space in the big cities. However, in Perth, nature is equally shared by everyone. Furthermore, in Chinese people’s understanding, the concept of nature involves all natural elements, the natural space, and a new way of life. Among Australian Chinese people, it is easily to see photos and videos on Facebook, Instagram, QQ, and WeChat filled with details of everyday life, such as breakfast with a cup of fresh ground coffee, walking or jogging on the beach, drinking wine with Western friends in wineries, and, of course, fishing. After every abalone harvest, on various social networks, most friends are willing to post photos of abalone, fishing, coastal scenery, and even the process of cooking. Images of their diasporic lives attract appreciation and admiration while enhancing their social status and interpersonal relations both in Australia and China. In *Social Media in Industrial China*, Xinyuan Wang observes two concurrent migrations in industrial China—one from rural to urban and the other from offline to online [43] (p. 183). In Wang’s view, the ruptures, displacements, and hardships faced by internally diasporic Chinese factory workers have exposed them more completely to the potential of the offline-to-online shift.

In Chinese culture, *guanxi* (interpersonal relationships) and *mianzi* (social image, or face) are essential for understanding social behaviors especially insofar as these principles differ radically from the highly individualistic ethos of Western societies, including Australia. *Guanxi* and *mianzi* “refer to one’s own sense of dignity and reputation in a community” and reflect the collective features of Chinese society [43] (p. 8). Moreover, *mianzi* pertains to “front-stage behavior” and denotes the consequences of either upholding social harmony or losing face [43] (p. 15). Different to the universal values of justice and equity in Western concept, to some extent, the perception of Chinese righteousness is defined by one’s social role and interpersonal relationships [44] (p. 20). This social self considers “how to obtain various resources from external environment to satisfy one’s needs” [44] (p. 21). In Confucian principles, in social networks, all the parties may evaluate an individual *mianzi* along the moral standards and one’s social performance. According to Hwang, the public image of an individual “formed in other’s minds is called ‘face’ [...] the greater performance one has, the higher position one occupies, or the more resource one controls, the greater ‘mientze’ [*mianzi*] one has” [44] (p. 21). When people leave Chinese social networks, they still tend to maintain *mianzi* and *guanxi* rules to interact with Chinese families and friends via technological and social media platforms. Harvesting free wild abalone contributes to their exposition of Australian new life. Participating in the outdoor activities is not merely a way to form social relations and expand local networks; it is also necessary to elevate their social status and consolidate their public image in the eyes of Chinese social groups in the homeland.

7. Conclusions

The first time I tried the traditional Chinese abalone dish was about twenty years ago. On the day of Chinese New Year, my family went to the most luxurious restaurant in town and ordered one piece for each person. The waitress placed a giant white plate on the table in front of me. In the middle of the plate, the cooked abalone was large, with the size of a child's palm, covered with brown thick sauce. Beside it, there was a goose's foot also with the same sauce. The edge of the plate was decorated with a small piece of broccoli and a redbud flower. It was hot and my mother told me to eat immediately, otherwise, the meat would become tough. We used knife and fork, which made me feel unskillful. However, the flavor was so delicious that I could not wait to try. The meat was a little chewy, not as nice as I expected. Now I can guess the reason involved two factors, which are the chef's cooking skills and the quality of the abalone, as my hometown is far from the sea. Although the first abalone dish was not better than my mother's home cooking, for a long time, I was very proud that I had eaten the most expensive abalone in the most expensive restaurant in my town. (Li Chen, a memory of China, pers. comm.).

As indicated by Han's surprise at the abundance of abalone close to the road in Joondalup, Western Australia, local abalone has converted Chinese peoples' perception of Perth's material environment. In mainland China, abalone is associated with power and wealth, but in WA it relates to health, entertainment, memories of origins, and the sensory dimensions of the new place. Through the embodied practice of harvesting, Chinese people have acquired knowledge of abalone as both a common marine species and an important component of local coastal culture. Early immigrants retain and return to the memories of their hometown through the flavor of the delicacy, while the younger newcomers may have their first taste with a sense of enjoyment of their new life and place.

WA's abalone, a treasure of nature, first, is a bridge joining the memories of motherland and the nature of Australia. On this bridge, traditional Chinese culture brought by the Chinese diaspora has been translocated through the Australian natural world. Second, the abalone is an agent combining Chinese and Aboriginal histories, as well as worldwide cultural traditions. Third, the Australian Chinese diaspora is characterized not only by "migration between the various nodes where Chinese have settled", but also by a broader relation of geographic groups and dialectal origins [45] (p. 36). Fourth, abalone is a carrier assisting the transmission of Chinese traditions to diasporic generations, particularly to the Australian-born Chinese who are increasingly alienated from Chinese culture and heritage. Finally, local abalone also changes the self-perceptions of local Chinese people since they start forging relationships through the practices of harvesting. Abalone harvesting amplifies the diasporic memories in a particular time and space to help the people obtain new senses of belonging in the collective. From another aspect, regarding their connections to the origins, free, wild Australian abalone is a signifier of a healthy and positive lifestyle, which is a common image of Australia in the minds of Chinese people. Local Chinese people are perceived as leading a respectable and admirable life by their Chinese social networks. All these dimensions of abalone demonstrate the importance of nature in the construction of the living space for the diaspora. Rather than focusing on transnational identities, this article's consideration of the materiality of nature in the conceptualization of a diasporic space offers a basis for articulating the significance of everyday sensory practices.

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