

MAKING THE ICS HOME: REFLECTIONS ON LIFE AS AN HDR STUDENT

Home can mean a place of residence, one's birthplace or a feeling of comfort and safe-haven. But what does it mean to 'feel at home' at an academic institution? Furthermore, what is the impact of such emotion on one's research?

We spoke to our PhD candidates Christopher Cheng and Linda Marsden, who told us they feel at home at the ICS, despite being hundreds of kilometres away from the Parramatta campus.

For the past five years, Christopher has been conducting fieldwork in Southern China, Sydney and Queensland for his PhD thesis 'Australian Migrant Heritage in South China: The Legacy of Diaspora-Funded Schools in Twentieth-Century Zhongshan'. Chris's research is part of a larger ICS-led project, The China-Australia Heritage Corridor, which aims to enhance public awareness of Australia's history of connectivity with Asia by showing how buildings and places created by Chinese migrants in Australia were and are linked to facilities and locations in China. Chris has an undergraduate degree in architecture and a master's in Anthropology, which is a perfect combination for his research which examines the schools built in Zhongshan county by Chinese emigrants.

Linda is in the third year of working on her thesis, *The Self, Selfies and the Performance of Health Identities by Young People* at the Young and Resilient Research Centre. Linda's research focuses on young people's health and sense of identity related to their online presence. Linda has an undergraduate degree in Human Movement Studies. Before starting her PhD, she spent 15 years in leadership positions at not-for-profit organisations in the sport and education sectors. Her experience of liaising with academics on the Boards she worked with led her to consider becoming an HDR student. She initially started her HDR journey at the School of Health at Western. After seeing a scholarship opportunity advertised which aligned closely with her research on health and young people's digital



My Uncle from Cairns with family from Australia peeping at his former school in Heng Mei village, (photo by Christopher Cheng 2016)

practices Linda transitioned to the ICS's Young and Resilient Research Centre to work with Amanda Third. In addition to Amanda, Linda has Tony Rossi and Nicki Taylor from Health Sciences as her supervisors.

As an institute that champions multidisciplinary research, it is common for the ICS and Young and Resilient Research Centre to accommodate HDR students who sit between disciplines and schools. This is also the case with Chris and Linda, who navigate multiple terrains for their PhD projects.

In 2017 Chris won the Institute for Australian and Chinese Arts and Culture doctoral degree -scholarship award and began to work under Dr Denis Byrne from the ICS. While Chris's background in architecture plays a vital role in the ways he studies the design and construction materials, his research is also based on his anthropological training that focuses on people's interpretation of the buildings and the concept of 'homeland'. This brings the aspects of cultural and heritage studies into play. Chris admits that he didn't know much about Chinese-Australian history before this project and needed a lot of background reading to prepare himself.

Like Chris, Linda was an outsider to the humanities before coming to the ICS. Having her background in health sciences, she describes her early times at the ICS as going from one end of the science spectrum to the other.

As her research landed Linda somewhere between the health sciences and humanities, she felt like an outsider in both faculties. However, she says that it all changed after transferring to the Young and Resilient Research Centre.

'At ICS and YRRC, I began to feel at home because I am supported.' she says.

'Tony Rossi is fluent in both languages of sociology and health. On top of that, Amanda Third has expertise in digital media and cultural studies. Between the two, it's a perfect overlap of skills as my work sits at the intersection of this and I get the best support that is available' she replies when asked about her supervisors.

'Also, Ben Hanckel and Liam Magee have been invaluable as informal mentors. It's exactly where I need to be.'



Photo by Cristina Zaragoza

pieces, even though most people simplify it and blame the social media platforms. There is far more to it.'

When asked about the future of her research, Linda says that changing people's perceptions of young people's use of social media and how we approach it is the desired impact she wants to make.

For Chris, research is an ongoing process that does not necessarily have a defined end in sight:

"This project is so significant for my identity as it ties up various things in my life and trying to find something that will attract my attention and time after it ends will be difficult."

This piece was written by Deniz Agraz following an interview with Christopher Cheng and Linda Marsden in September 2022

While most people tend to recall the COVID-19 lockdowns with horror, Linda prefers to think of it as a silver lining. For Linda, the lockdown was an opportunity to attend the ICS seminars online, which she describes as 'extremely helpful in terms of catching up.' She also adds that she used this time to read extensively to familiarise herself with the language of sociology.

Born and raised in Queensland by Chinese parents, Chris says that prior to moving overseas, he didn't know much about his family history or their connection to China. 'While growing up in Queensland, I felt more Chinese than Australian', Chris says when talking about the personal dimensions of his PhD research. 'Then, I moved to Hong Kong (a decade before PhD) and started to feel more Australian than Chinese'. Chris was working as a researcher in Hong Kong when he went on a trip around Southern China and noticed the changing landscape of the villages due to immigration to the West. 'Chris says when Chinese left their villages and returned with money years later, they'd build schools or sports facilities. He became interested in how these buildings connected Chinese villages with other parts of the world.

Because his research topic is tightly intertwined with his cultural identities, Chris highlights that since starting his PhD at the ICS, he feels at home since he is finally part of both worlds.

'Now, I belong everywhere, but I don't belong anywhere.'

Like Chris, Linda's research is also heavily based on real life. While researching young people's health identities, Linda is raising three teenagers at home. She comments on carrying on with her research at home as she observes her children's use of social media as a tool and having discussions about it.

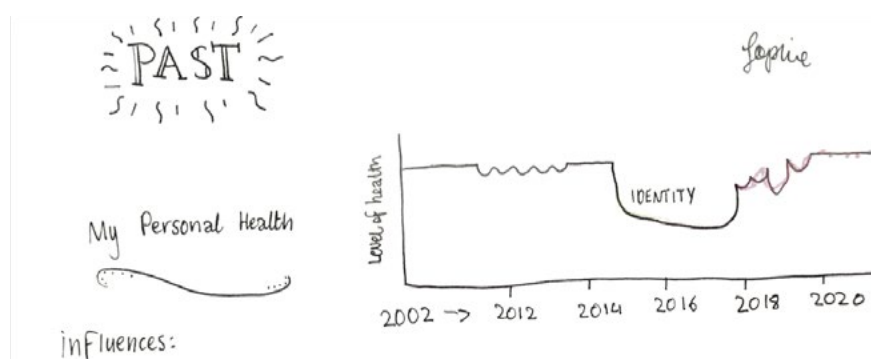
Linda says that research hasn't impacted her use of social media or her views on social media

platforms. However, she is concerned about the alarming narrative surrounding young people's use of social media platforms and the ways it impacts their health and well-being.

'The health and well-being of an individual are like a puzzle with many complexities and



Denis Byrne and Christopher Cheng visits the new Lihe School, with principal, teacher and students (Photo by Lihe School, 2019)



Health and Identity image from Linda Marsden's fieldwork