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## Diverse Driving Emotions: Exploring Chinese Migrants' Mobilities in a Car-Dependent City

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### Abstract

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## Diverse Driving Emotions

Exploring Chinese Migrants' Mobilities in a Car-Dependent City

Sophie-May Kerr, Natascha Klocker, and Gordon Waitt

### Abstract

In the industrialized West, cars are considered an essential part of everyday life. Their dominance is underpinned by the challenges of managing complex, geographically stretched daily routines. Drivers' emotional and embodied relationships with automobiles also help to explain why car cultures are difficult to disrupt. This article foregrounds ethnic diversity to complicate notions of a "love affair" with the car. We report on the mobilities of fourteen Chinese migrants living in Sydney, Australia—many of whom described embodied dispositions against the car, influenced by their life histories. Their emotional responses to cars and driving, shaped by transport norms and infrastructures in their places of origin, ranged from pragmatism and ambivalence to fear and hostility. The lived experiences of these migrants show that multiple cultures of mobility coexist, even in ostensibly car-dependent societies. Migrants' life histories and contemporary practices provide an opportunity to reflect on fissures in the logic of automobility.

Keywords: automobility, Chinese, embodiment, emotion, life history, migration, transport

He said if we have a family and you're going to be a stay at home mother, you will be in charge of driving the kids to school . . . it was almost one of the conditions before we got married! I fought many times with him, I would be crying, literally crying in the car, so I just refuse[d] to drive and he would drop the bomb and say, "If you don't know how to drive I don't really know if I can marry you!" . . . and he is really serious about it so that's why I keep on trying and so you just see me crying driving . . . If I had a Chinese husband it could be very different again, my Chinese husband probably wouldn't be making me drive. —Chen (aged 23)

Driving cultures are sustained by "feelings."<sup>1</sup> Chen was born in mainland China and moved to Australia at age thirteen. She grew up in a household where public transport, walking, and cycling were part and parcel of everyday life. For her Anglo-Australian husband, driving was an essential and non-negotiable skill for managing family life. But Chen associated car driving with discomfort and fear. Her embodied response to driving presents a stark counterpoint to representations of Australia as a "nation of proud car owners."<sup>2</sup> Chen's words are illustrative of what we address in this article: that driving emotions are diverse. For some people, like the Chinese migrants involved in this study, negative feelings detract from the desire to drive, with implications for patterns of car use. Our participants' narratives made direct links between transport norms and experiences in their country of birth and their postmigration transport choices. In immigrant societies like Australia (alongside

the United States, Canada, and the UK), we argue that diverse driving emotions, underpinned by the life histories of ethnic minority migrants, unsettle pervasive narratives of automobility.

Dominant academic and public discourses that frame an “appropriate citizenship of mobility” or “good life”<sup>3</sup> around automobility sustain a car dependence that is naturalized by market forces, government regulations, road infrastructure investments, transport and urban planning, and social norms.<sup>4</sup> Transport infrastructures and transport cultures are thus mutually constitutive. Car-oriented infrastructures and urban forms underpin car-dependent transport norms, which in turn feed into an ongoing political commitment to (and investment in) road infrastructure, further embedding a cultural predilection for driving. Australian cities are arguably stuck in this loop. In 2014, there were 13.3 million passenger vehicles registered in Australia, amounting to 756 motor vehicles per 1,000 residents (an increase of 12.5 percent from 2009).<sup>5</sup> Hand in hand with high rates of car ownership are high rates of car use. Sydney—the city where the present study was based—is faced with significant transport challenges. In 2012–2013, motor vehicles were used for 69 percent of trips in Greater Sydney on an average weekday.<sup>6</sup> Public transport was used for just 11.4 percent of trips. Walking and other modes of transport (including cycling) accounted for 17.5 percent and 2.2 percent, respectively. As a result of this dependence on private motor vehicles, the transport sector was responsible for 17 percent of Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions in 2014.<sup>7</sup>

Rates of car ownership and use in China diverge markedly from those in Australia. Although car sales in China have increased dramatically over the past decade,<sup>8</sup> in concert with a growing middle-class population, public transport remains dominant and private vehicle ownership rates are still far below Western averages. In 2016, there were 141 vehicles per 1,000 persons in China.<sup>9</sup> There is great diversity in car ownership levels across China—indeed, growth has primarily been concentrated in major cities like Beijing and Shanghai.<sup>10</sup> Beijing, for example, had 252 vehicles per 1,000 persons in 2016.<sup>11</sup> Despite a (geographically uneven) trend toward increasing car ownership, and diversity within the country’s population, Chinese researchers have asserted that public transport systems will remain the main choice for Chinese citizens in the foreseeable future.<sup>12</sup>

Distinctive national cultures of automobility make migrants’ transport patterns relevant in their new home countries.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly so for sizeable groups, like Chinese migrants to Australia. In 2011, 3.8 percent of Sydney’s population was born in China and 7.2 percent of Sydneysiders reported having Chinese ancestry.<sup>14</sup> The only two ancestry groups with a larger presence were “Australian” and “English” (19 percent each).

Our aim is to draw on the life histories and subsequent mobility experiences of Chen and thirteen other middle-class Chinese migrants living in Sydney to trouble the dominant academic and public discourse of Australians’ “love affair” with the car. We begin by reviewing literature on the embodied and emotional connections between people and cars, followed by an outline of existing studies on ethnically diverse mobilities. We position this article conceptually in the mobilities paradigm informed by the work of Jack Katz<sup>15</sup> and Mimi Sheller<sup>16</sup> on driving emotions, alongside Gillian Letherby and Gayle Reynolds’s<sup>17</sup> and David Bissell’s<sup>18</sup> understandings of embodied dispositions or habit.

Our empirical evidence is based on interviews with Chinese migrants living in Sydney. These particular Sydneysiders were not enamoured by driving. Instead, they were amused (befuddled, even) by the prospect of a “love affair” with the car.<sup>19</sup> We develop two main arguments to explain their apparent lack of car dependence. First, by paying attention to embodiment and habit, we consider how premigration life experiences influenced the transport practices of our interviewees. Second, we argue that diverse driving emotions shape diverse transport practices. The emotional

responses to driving that were reported by our interviewees ranged from ambivalence to outright hostility. For some, cars were objects of fear and loathing. For others, they did not elicit any emotional response whatsoever. These findings are important because existing research on car driving emphasizes positive bonds between people and cars over “troublesome” and absent ones.

We conclude that multiple relationships to automobility already coexist in Australia, and indeed in other immigrant societies. Attentiveness to migrants and their life histories provides an opportunity to think through different ways of being mobile, even in car-dependent societies. To do so is imperative in the context of a climate-changing world.

### The Mobilities Paradigm

Mobility is about much more than “observable physical movement”; it is about “the meanings that such movements are encoded with, the experience of practising these movements and the potential for undertaking these movements.”<sup>20</sup> Mobility is experienced through bodies; it is practiced and felt.<sup>21</sup> The so-called new mobilities paradigm<sup>22</sup> or “mobility turn”<sup>23</sup> brings together a range of theories to study movement through the body. Mobilities studies do not measure and model movement, but rather interpret the meanings, feelings, and power dynamics of movement.<sup>24</sup> With a focus on bodies and their capacities to do things, mobility scholars bring meanings, feelings, and power to the forefront of research. In this article, we explore the ways in which embodied knowledge and experiences (embedded in premigration social norms and habits) shape Chinese migrants’ transport preferences and practices. Drawing on the work of scholars who explore the ways in which mobilities shape emotions and emotions shape mobilities,<sup>25</sup> we also focus on the interviewees’ feelings toward cars and driving.

Car dependence is explained by mobilities researchers in terms of the practicalities of managing everyday life, as competing demands on time (work, education, family, and caring responsibilities) are often geographically stretched.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Sarah Redshaw<sup>27</sup> argued that car mobility sustains subjectivities, such as mother, father, and commuter. Thus, cars “shape not only the way we live but who we are.”<sup>28</sup> Emotional and embodied responses to car mobility impact individuals’ dispositions toward driving, and their likelihood of doing so. Drivers often associate cars with positive feelings and ideas of embodied comfort, solitude, relaxation, speed, freedom, safety, convenience, reliability, and efficiency. By way of comparison, public modes of transport seem comparatively inflexible, fragmented, slow, inconvenient, uncomfortable, and at times dangerous.<sup>29</sup> Thus, in cities such as Sydney, lives are built around (and in turn come to depend upon) private car use. Below we outline two key concepts that guide our interpretation—embodied transport preferences and automotive emotions.

### Embodied, Habitual, and Learned Transport Preferences

To interpret our participants’ embodied transport choices, we turn to the work of Bissell<sup>30</sup> and Tim Schwanen and colleagues<sup>31</sup> on habit and Rachel Weinberger and Frank Goetzke’s<sup>32</sup> discussion of “learned preferences.” Mobility skills are made, and remade, through everyday routines—such as driving a car or catching a bus. Bissell explained how the repetition of a movement over time causes bodily competencies to become more precise and prompt. Eventually, less mental effort is required to perform a task, like driving a car. Repetition gives rise to bodily tendencies that lead to habitual embodied movement and skillful bodily performance.<sup>33</sup> Habitual use of a particular mode of

transport can foster a sense of “comfort of familiarity” or positive emotional connection.<sup>34</sup> Regular car drivers thus often articulate feeling a sensual comfort, as the car becomes an extension of their body.<sup>35</sup> Following Sheller, this process results in embodied dispositions toward certain familiar transport modes.<sup>36</sup> Embodied dispositions are acquired through an individual’s past and present experiences of everyday life and are thus influenced by social and material elements (e.g., caring responsibilities, infrastructure).<sup>37</sup>

In Western societies, car driving is argued to be almost second nature.<sup>38</sup> The reciprocal relationship between people and cars is so deeply embedded that Daniel Miller<sup>39</sup> and Theresa Harada<sup>40</sup> suggested the near impossibility of separating “being human” from car ownership. Weinberger and Goetzke highlighted how previous experiences of auto ownership work against considering other transport modes.<sup>41</sup> This is the case for many Anglo-European Australians, who use cars for most (if not all) trips, including over short distances.<sup>42</sup> Omitted largely from research are the embodied experiences of migrants with minimal previous exposure to cars and driving<sup>43</sup>—and this is the key focus of our research.

### Automotive Emotions

Equally, feelings—or so-called automotive emotions—are integral to interpreting how driving cultures are sustained. Following Sheller, we maintain that “feelings about driving are one way in which emotions are embodied in relationships between humans and vehicles; with implications for driving cultures.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, there is a “sensuous relationality between the means of travel and the traveller,” so different modes of travel provide different “experiences, performances and affordances.”<sup>45</sup> Mobility is more than just a way of getting from A to B; rather, it is sensed through the body. Thus, people continue to drive, even when they are knowledgeable about the environmental and health benefits of active and/or public transport, because of the feelings of comfort associated with car mobility.<sup>46</sup> An extensive body of literature illustrates how car use is not a rational choice, but arises from aesthetic, emotional, and sensory responses.<sup>47</sup> How car driving mobilizes positive embodied sensibilities in car drivers is well documented in the literature. Less well documented are the negative feelings associated with automobility among reluctant car drivers whose lives do not neatly adhere to the automobility script.

### Progress toward Ethnic Diversity in Mobilities Research

Judith Nicholson and Sheller flagged that there is surprisingly little research on intersections of mobility, race, and ethnicity.<sup>48</sup> Yet differential mobility arises from (and reinforces) racial inequalities, as evidenced by research on white privilege and transport choices in the United States,<sup>49</sup> including research on racialized transport inequality and mobility justice in Philadelphia,<sup>50</sup> and on the production of whiteness in LA Gang Tours.<sup>51</sup> Others have explored hierarchies of race in the long-haul trucking industry in Canada,<sup>52</sup> and the racial micropolitics of a South African bus service.<sup>53</sup> A small number of qualitative studies have also included gender in their analyses. For example, Sheller explored how SUVs in the United States are associated with white, middle-class “material cultures of suburbia” and notions of good mothering.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, Miller described how Trinidadian young men customized their cars as expressions of national culture and modernity.<sup>55</sup> In an Australian example, Mandy Thomas and Melissa Butcher explained that young men from Southern and Eastern Europe and the Middle East (living in Sydney) drove particular branded and customized cars in order to achieve social status, symbolic power, self-worth, and peer acceptance.<sup>56</sup>

Other important examples include Diana Young's<sup>57</sup> discussion of how cars mediate emotional relations between Indigenous Australians and "country"; and Paul Gilroy's<sup>58</sup> explanation of how African American young men's "flamboyant" public use of cars can compensate for feelings of status injury and material deprivation through "compensatory prestige." A common thread in these diverse studies is their focus on racialized groups for whom cars are symbolically and socially significant, particularly marginalized young men. By way of contrast, the Chinese migrants involved in our study deemed cars to be relatively unimportant—both symbolically and as a primary transport mode. Our research focus provided an opportunity to document feelings for cars that were either troublesome or ambivalent.

Transport research in the United States and the UK that has focused on ethnicity (usually categorized as an identity category attributed at birth) suggests that ethnic minorities in general, and migrants in particular, consistently have rates of car ownership and use significantly below the broader population.<sup>59</sup> Conversely, migrants and ethnic minorities report significantly above-average rates of public transport use; and thus more environmentally sustainable transport behaviors overall. Usually, these patterns are attributed to socioeconomic disadvantage among migrants and ethnic minorities.<sup>60</sup> However, Shaolu Yu argued that none of the Chinese migrants in her study (conducted in New York) mentioned a lack of transport resources or economic barriers as restricting their daily mobility.<sup>61</sup> Instead, they made decisions to live in particular suburbs because of abundant access to public transport. Migrants from regions in which public or shared modes of transport are widely used often report lower rates of private car use postmigration.<sup>62</sup> Of particular relevance for the present study, Gil Tal and Susan Handy reported that East Asian migrants living in the United States traveled fewer vehicle miles per person than other migrant groups and the general population, and were statistically more likely to use public transport than American-born respondents, even after controlling for household size and income.<sup>63</sup> While migrants' transport behaviors often become similar to those of native-born populations over time, migrant groups may sustain higher rates of public transport use over the longer term.<sup>64</sup>

These trends were replicated in our own Australian survey (n = 578), which found that rates of car ownership and use among overseas-born persons, ethnic minorities, and migrants living in Sydney and Wollongong<sup>65</sup> were significantly lower than those of Anglo-Australians and Australian-born persons.<sup>66</sup> Differences were particularly pronounced for respondents of Northeast Asian ancestry (most of whom were Chinese). Almost one-quarter of Northeast Asian respondents lived in households that did not own any cars (compared to 8.3 percent of Anglo-Australian households). Northeast Asians were significantly more likely to rely on public or active transport for the work/study trip and the grocery shopping trip than Anglo-Australians (36.6 percent versus 22.5 percent; and 33.3 percent versus 10.6 percent, respectively). These differences remained significant after controlling for gender, immigrant generation, income, employment status, presence of dependent children, and place of residence (in Sydney or Wollongong). These quantitative findings were the point of departure for the present study, which sought to explore these discrepancies via qualitative research with Chinese migrants living in Sydney.

## Methods

Qualitative methods were used to explore the everyday mobilities of Chinese migrants living in Sydney. The focus on Chinese migrants resulted from our previous survey findings,<sup>67</sup> but was also motivated by the numerical significance of Chinese migration to Australia. Importantly, contemporary Chinese migrants to Australia typically arrive under the skilled migration scheme.

They are by and large not socioeconomically disadvantaged.<sup>68</sup> This is reflected in the spatial distribution of Chinese migrants in Sydney, including in high socioeconomic status neighborhoods.<sup>69</sup> For this reason, the racialized politics of mobility disadvantage that have been reported in other studies (that attribute low rates of car use among migrants to low socioeconomic status)<sup>70</sup> do not apply to this population. By focusing on a group that is not socioeconomically disadvantaged in any uniform sense—but which displays low rates of car ownership and use—the present study is ideally positioned to foreground migrants’ perspectives on the other factors that shape their mobilities.

Table 1 lists the attributes of the fourteen people who consented to participate in this study in 2014. All were in the paid workforce (excepting one stay-at-home mother and two retirees), and most (twelve of fourteen) were tertiary educated. Participants were recruited through targeted, opportunistic, and snowball sampling. First, previous survey respondents were contacted; however, only one chose to participate (likely due to the time lag, as the survey was conducted in 2012). The second strategy involved recruitment through Chinese community organizations and social groups (6), personal networks (5), and snowballing (2). Participants self-selected to partake in the study based on fulfilling the following inclusion criteria: they had to self-identify as being of Chinese ethnicity, live in the Sydney metropolitan area, and speak English (as translation and interpretation costs were beyond the project budget). The term “Chinese” is used in this article to refer to the self-defined ethnicity of the participants. We understand ethnicity as performative, something that is made and remade within particular contexts and over time—not a biologically determined or fixed attribute of birth. The researchers did not have knowledge of participants’ transport behaviors prior to interviews, and hence their preferred mode of transport did not influence the recruitment process.

**Table 1.** Participant Attributes

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Place of birth</b>	<b>Age at time of migration</b>	<b>Drivers license prior to migration</b>	<b>Car ownership prior to migration</b>	<b>Car ownership in Australia</b>
Anne	65	Hong Kong	50	Yes	No	Yes
Chen	23	China	13	No	No	Yes
Xia	Early 40s	China	30	No	No	Yes
Qi	Mid 30s	China	26	Yes	No	Yes
Lei	Mid 30s	China	27	Yes	No	Yes
Nicole	32	China	24	No	No	Yes
Linda	Early 30s	Malaysia (grew up in	19	No	No	Yes



Throughout this study we were alert to the research participants' intersecting identities and to the fluidity of their self-defined ethnicities. While they had a number of intersecting identities (based on age, gender, professional status, family structure, and so on), participants' own narratives underscored the specific and powerful influence of life histories—which they framed around ethnicity and country of birth. Yet they were at pains to explain that Chinese Australians are not a homogenous group. Several participants discussed the diversity within this population, and most described themselves as being part of a younger and more “acculturated” group of Chinese Australians (nonetheless, their mobilities remained distinct from the broader Australian population). They spoke of “other,” usually older, Chinese migrants who live more “traditional” Chinese lifestyles and have even lower rates of car use than their own. Taking this into account, our study does not aim to be representative of all Chinese migrant households in Sydney. All of our participants hailed from middle-class backgrounds, and most (twelve of fourteen) had migrated to Australia in the past fifteen years. Given their socioeconomic status, they belonged to a cohort in China that has been at the forefront of rising rates of car ownership, and may thus have been expected to arrive in Australia with norms of car use already in place. But this was not the case, and our participants explicitly noted an extant distinction in transport norms (between Australia and China).

Semi structured interviews were used to access participants' mobility histories. Interviews explored participants' everyday mobility choices in Australia and in their country of birth. Participants provided insights into their daily routines and commitments and were asked to think about how certain modes of transport were important for helping them fulfill certain roles. In response to these questions, participants reflected on structural factors (such as urban form and transport infrastructure) that either constrained or supported their transport preferences pre- and postmigration. Further questions also explored how specific modes of transport have socially inscribed meanings, alongside participants' bodily experiences of mobility and the feelings associated with different transport modes. The following sections draw on the concepts of embodied dispositions and automotive emotions to interpret how driving and car ownership was integral, or not, to how these participants made sense of their lives.

#### Diverse Transport Contexts: How Premigration Habits Shape Postmigration Mobilities

Our participants' embodied histories of everyday mobility were connected with public transport, walking, and cycling. Car ownership prior to migration was atypical (see Table 1). While there is immense diversity in China, our participants all recounted experiences with premigration transport infrastructures in urban environments that made cars unnecessary for everyday life. By way of contrast, they identified Sydney's transport infrastructure and cultural norms as highly car oriented and car dependent. In keeping with existing research evidence that has positioned Australia as a “car nation,”<sup>71</sup> our interviewees noted that for many Anglo-European Australians the car is a “necessity.” Further, they associated the “Australian way of life” and “being Australian” with an expectation that all Australians drive (although it is worth noting that the participants' own experiences reveal the limits of this assumption—notions of car dependence only reflect the experiences of some Australians). Our participants also observed that Anglo-Australians hold negative attitudes toward using public transport. Chen told a story about her Anglo-Australian stepfather:

So everywhere he goes he has to drive, he will refuse to use public transport, like literally if you ask him to catch a train and tell him it's quicker he will not do it . . . A lot of my other

Aussie friends they are the same, they tell me in ten years I haven't touched a train ticket . . . oh my God, terrible.

Chen understood her stepfather's mobility practices as being reflective of a broader cultural trend whereby "Aussies" prefer the car over public transport. This example highlights how habits of car dependency can become embedded—fueled by dominant perceptions—preventing other options from even being considered.<sup>72</sup> The habituated driving practices that are the norm for many Anglo-European Australians provide a stark contrast to the interviewees' own premigration transport norms.

Most of our interviewees had little or no driving experience prior to arriving in Australia. Indeed, half did not even have a drivers' license—and of those who had obtained a license, only one person owned a car (see Table 1). For these migrants, public transport use was a habit developed prior to migration. While walking and cycling were also common in our interviewees' premigration lives, they explained that these modes were not practical in Sydney, and cycling was additionally considered dangerous due to poor infrastructure. As we have discussed elsewhere, these habits did not carry over into their postmigration lives.<sup>73</sup> Their life histories influenced their transport choices postmigration. Returning to our focus on public transport, Allan noted:

I think Chinese . . . because they use public transport more in Asian area so I think that would definitely impact the way they choose which mode of transport they use [in Sydney]. So if they think public transport is much easier and is as convenient as their hometown then basically I think they will choose public transport more than the Australian [people] where they [Australians] get used to yeah driving cars.

While several participants acknowledged the convenience (and at times perceived necessity) of cars in Australia,<sup>74</sup> having previously lived without cars meant they did not view them as necessary for every—or even most—journeys. Many used public transport as their primary way of getting around in Sydney. So much so that Candice commented that her car is "actually useless . . . kind of like a waste."

Participants' ongoing use of public transport in Australia can be described in terms of habit, embedded through past experiences.<sup>75</sup> Adapting Weinberger and Goetzke's discussion of "learned preferences,"<sup>76</sup> our research participants' reflections suggested that previous life experiences and patterns influenced their subsequent choices, despite a substantial change in context.<sup>77</sup> Following Schwanen and colleagues, these findings demonstrate how habits may be linked to norms in particular societies and communities.<sup>78</sup> Modes of transport are perceived differently depending on an individuals' experiences and the built environment around them. In this case, these Chinese migrants arrived in Australia with embodied life histories forged of sets of ideas and experiences that made them receptive to using public transport. This embodied life history included, for instance, a high tolerance for "being with" others on public transport<sup>79</sup> due to past experiences in far more crowded contexts. This was exemplified in Lei's comment: "I probably prefer public transport slightly more than the local [Australian] people . . . Because I'm more tolerant than others to the crowded people maybe, that's one reason . . . I also I used to take a lot of public transportation [in China] and I think it's like a habit."

Participants also associated Chinese public transport with convenience and ease, and continued to understand state bus and rail travel as practical, convenient, and viable transport options postmigration. Candice, for instance, shared positive thoughts about taking the train: "It's punctual, there are no delays and you have a timetable . . . by taking the train it's enjoyable. I can read

something, I can listen to music and search the Internet. I can do a lot of things . . . but if you drive you need to concentrate all the time.” Fred shared similar sentiments, describing the train as fast, quiet, and punctual, further commenting: “I think the train is quite convenient. [There is] no red light in between the different stations so I can make sure I arrive at a certain place at a certain time.”

Fred went on to demonstrate how his transport choices were habituated, explaining that he was “used to” taking public transport in China: “In China it’s very crowded and inconvenient to drive a car. There is traffic jam[s] everywhere so that’s the thing—I already got used to using public transportation so that’s the way I can easily get adapted to that transportation way in Australia.” Anthony also described maintaining habitual travel practices postmigration. He used subways, trains, and light rail in China, thus rail travel became his “first choice” on migrating to Sydney. These preferences led our participants to make deliberate and strategic decisions to orient their lives in Sydney around places that facilitate use of public transport. Thus, the majority lived in close proximity to the railway line or bus routes. This strategy enabled many participants to continue to use public transport over the longer term. It also enabled them to avoid regular car use—a particularly appealing prospect for those who disliked or feared driving.

#### Migration as Rupture: Establishing New Mobilities in a New Country

While our interviewees retained a habituated preference for public transport after moving to Sydney, migration nonetheless constituted a moment of significant disruption, or rupture.<sup>80</sup> Migration to a car-dependent city such as Sydney ultimately “forced” many of these Chinese migrants to become car drivers. Thus, while life histories undoubtedly shaped their transport preferences postmigration, embodied transport habits can only be sustained across different milieus in situations where the built and social environment is sufficiently conducive.<sup>81</sup> While public transport remained our interviewees’ preferred mode of travel for many trip purposes, the spatially and temporally fragmented character of everyday life in Sydney meant that driving eventually became unavoidable.

Learning to drive was narrated as a necessity rather than a choice. Car ownership was delayed in Australia until participants felt they “had to” drive. Nonetheless, thirteen of the fourteen participants owned and used a car to some extent at the time of the interview (see Table 1). For some participants, this decision was based on the difficulties of relying solely on public transport for family-related responsibilities. They noted a sense of frustration toward public transport when it came to traveling for social and recreational purposes. Public transport was deemed inconvenient on weekends, where there was a longer waiting time between services and in instances that required them to deviate from key public transport routes—requiring multiple changes to make the journey possible. For others, driving in Australia largely arose from outside pressures to assimilate to Australia’s car driving norms.<sup>82</sup>

As participants had not become habituated to driving prior to migration, their automotive emotions diverged markedly from dominant narratives of an Australian love affair with the car. Many of these Chinese migrants approached cars and driving with a sense of ambivalence and pragmatism. For others, cars were associated with a great deal of fear. The latter described negative emotional responses to driving (as a new or unhabituated practice), which we have interpreted as embodied dispositions against cars.

### Ambivalence and Pragmatism: “I’m Not in Love with My Car”

Previous mobilities research has predominantly documented positive emotions and sensations that car drivers associate with driving.<sup>83</sup> Sheller<sup>84</sup> and Jennifer Kent<sup>85</sup> have referred to this as “feeling the car”—arguing that it is the physical sensations and deeply emotive bonds between bodies of people and bodies of cars that cement car dependence. The emotional automobile ties of those who organize their lives around the car are conveyed as “intimate relationships”<sup>86</sup> and “passionate attachments.”<sup>87</sup> Such positive and intimate feelings about cars did not resonate with the Chinese migrants in this study. Even in ostensibly car-dependent societies like Australia, there are groups (exemplified by our interviewees) who do not organize their lives around car mobility.

Most participants did not express positive emotional attachments to their cars, nor did they view them as symbols of social or cultural significance. They also did not express a desire to spend time in their cars. Instead, participants were much more pragmatic. They talked about the car as a “tool” used for getting from A to B. For example, Nicole commented: “Some people they like driving but I just use it because it can help me not because I like it . . . it’s not something I treasure or am proud of.” Linda shared similar sentiments: “I don’t really care too much about [my] car because I still go to work by train, by public transport.” Nicole and Linda’s postmigration lives are still mobilized by the habit of using public transport.

In exploring the humanity of the car, Sheller and John Urry<sup>88</sup> suggested that cars are anthropomorphized when people name them. In order to prompt participants to think further about their connections with their cars, the researcher mentioned that some people give their cars nicknames. None of the interviewees had done so. This contrasts with Harada’s<sup>89</sup> study, in which almost half of the (Anglo-Australian) respondents had named their cars. Candice laughed when asked this question: “I know some people do that, but I won’t do that. I’m not really in love with my car that much . . . maybe they [people who name their cars] really love driving and they have deeper feelings for their cars than me.” Candice’s connection with her car was not felt or expressed as love—and she was amused by this prospect. These findings present a stark contrast to those of other studies that depict Australians being enamoured with—and having strong, intimate attachments to—their cars.<sup>90</sup>

### Embodied Driving Emotions: The Car as a Source of Fear

For some of our participants the practice of driving was a source of great discomfort. Previous studies have characterized the car as a site of comfort and security for drivers. Yet, this is not a universal experience. Our participants shared feelings of discomfort and fear when grappling with a transport mode to which they were not habituated, and which was adopted largely because Sydney’s transport infrastructure left them with little choice. These feelings and emotions impacted their driving experiences, at times in quite dramatic ways. Chen grew up in a car-less household and explained:

I generally don’t like driving at all, like every time I drive I think I am going to crash . . . I just burst into tears every time I had to drive . . . Public transport is my choice of transportation when it comes to going somewhere because it’s just more convenient for me . . . I don’t have to think about where I am going, am I going to crash.

For Chen, driving was not yet an embodied habitual skill—she was cognitively aware of each movement, anticipating that something could go wrong. Chen felt overwhelmed with fear when

driving. This strong embodied disposition influenced her preference for public transport. Chen was not the only participant to express such driving emotions. Lily described feeling anxious when in traffic: "Driving is terrible . . . it's scary . . . people jump from one lane to the third lane, go go go like this. I could never go like this." Candice revealed that she preferred to stay behind a slow car on the freeway rather than attempt to overtake it, due to fears of changing lanes at high speed. Safety concerns influenced participants' transport choices and even deterred Fred from learning to drive in Australia at all: "I'm not that good at driving so maybe that's more safe to others if I am not driving . . . I don't want to make dangerous situations so [I] just catch the train." Due to a lack of experience, Fred associated driving with fear and anxiety. His decision not to drive could be sustained as he chose to live in the inner city where his needs could be met by walking and public transport. For others who felt they had to drive for certain trips, strategies to reduce driving anxiety included sticking to familiar routes and combining multiple tasks into one journey to minimize the number of times they had to take the car out. At the more extreme end, one participant told a story of a Chinese mother who sat in her car all day outside the childcare center waiting for her child, to avoid having to make a return trip. Having had little or no driving experience in their country of birth, our participants were apprehensive about driving in Australia—describing it as "very very scary," "dangerous," "a hassle," "not pleasant," and overall unenjoyable.

Although many of our participants expressed feelings of fear (rather than love) toward cars, all except Fred owned a car at the time of the interviews. This is not to say that their emotions of fear, discomfort, and/or ambivalence had disappeared. Rather, participants explained that the car was necessary in Australia, to fulfill certain aspects of their lives and associated responsibilities. While most continued to travel to work by public transport, as discussed previously, they found it impractical to make other journeys by public or active transport, especially when accompanied by their children. Their comments indicated that the spatially and temporally fragmented character of everyday life in Sydney can, over time, push even the most reluctant car users to drive. These findings signal the deep failings of the city's public transport system, when even the most committed public transport users (and reluctant car drivers) feel compelled to purchase and use cars.

### Concluding Remarks

The mobility experiences of this group of relatively socioeconomically advantaged Chinese migrants bring to the fore the presence of diverse driving emotions that diverge from the dominant narrative of Australia as a car-dependent nation. When commenting on cars and driving, our interviewees emphasized the significance of their premigration transport habits. They demonstrated that driving cultures and attachments to private motor vehicles are diverse, and are influenced by transport infrastructures, mobility experiences, and cultural norms in countries of origin. Our findings highlight the importance of exploring the diverse transport patterns that may arise from migrants' life histories.

The mobility experiences of these Chinese migrants (for whom cars invoked pragmatism, ambivalence, and fear) adds an overlooked perspective in mobilities scholarship. Our participants' embodied dispositions and driving emotions point toward "contestations, contradictions and multiplicities" in Australian car cultures.<sup>91</sup> Their mobility choices in Sydney were informed by public transport-oriented habits, forged in premigration contexts in which automobility is on the rise, but in which private cars were not considered necessary for everyday life. Our interviewees' driving emotions run counter to the tendency in Western policy and research to identify the car as a highly valued mode of transport and an object of desire, and trouble the ubiquitous notion of Australia as a

“car nation.” Evidence showing that at least some Australians are not as car dependent as previously thought helps to undermine the normative status of this idea, and to chip away at the logic that driving is part and parcel of being and becoming an Australian. When notions of car dependence are dominant, they run the risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Given the profound environmental implications of car use, it may be advantageous to focus greater research efforts on better understanding and heralding the practices of groups who are least “attached” to the notion of automobility—even when their reasons for using public transport are not informed by an environmental ethic. The Chinese migrants involved in this study did not avoid driving in order to be “green.” Our findings thus need to be interpreted through the lens of a growing body of cultural environmental research focused on “inadvertent sustainabilities”—that is, “practices not conceived with sustainability in mind,” but which nonetheless have the capacity to contribute to environmentally beneficial outcomes.<sup>92</sup> Despite a tendency to adopt some Anglo-European Australian transport norms over time, the more environmentally sustainable transport practices of the Chinese migrants involved in this study remained surprisingly persistent. Cars were only driven when absolutely necessary, and were not used for the everyday commute. These Chinese migrants did not quickly, readily, or happily acculturate to patterns of car dependence. Exploring the life histories of ethnically diverse groups in transport policy and research may help to ensure that resources are directed toward supporting and sustaining these practices over the longer term. Instead of focusing research and policy efforts on the most car-dependent segments of society, there is potential to learn from diverse groups who already organize their everyday lives in other ways—and to extend these findings to the broader population.

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## Notes

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