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Reframing Johannesburg's Urban Politics through the Lens of the Chinese Camera Club of South Africa. Dr Malcolm Corrigall.

The Chinese Camera Club of South Africa, also known as the Chinese Camera Club Johannesburg, was established in Johannesburg in 1952, four years after the election of the National Party in 1948. Membership of the club, which remained active throughout the 1950s and 1960s, was restricted to Chinese South Africans. Despite their subordinated position in South African society, members of the club quickly rose to acclaim in local and international camera club networks, and were prolific exhibitors at photographic salons across the world. The club and its members also enjoyed popularity amongst local audiences and participated in the civic life of Johannesburg.[1] The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a dramatic growth in the number of camera clubs across South Africa, and photographic salons drew considerable audiences in metropolitan centres.[2] Under the Population Registration Act of 1950, individuals from the Chinese community were classified as 'Coloured,' and in 1951 three additional sub-divisions within the 'Coloured' group were created, namely, 'Chinese,' 'Indian,' and 'Malay' (Harris 1999, 187).[3] Within this context of discrimination, the Chinese Camera Club provided opportunities for photographic education, leisure, craft, competition, consumerism, recognition, and positive self-imaging that were denied to its members elsewhere.

In this article I explore how the club and its members used the spatial tactics of the photographic outing to subvert the racialisation of space within the apartheid city, as well as to produce photographs that expressed dreams and aspirations that were curtailed by the apartheid system. I also consider a photographic exhibition organised by the Chinese Camera Club, The Chinese Salon of Photography, which formed part of the programme for the

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Johannesburg Festival of 1956. By participating in this celebration of civic identity, the Chinese Camera Club made use of a public platform to enhance the visibility and prestige of both themselves and the wider Chinese community in Johannesburg. To borrow Stuart Hall's phrase, the exhibition "contested the relations of difference" that were imposed upon club members by racial classification, and replaced exclusionary notions of their difference with relentlessly positive ones (Hall 1996, 441–9). These honorific conceptions of difference stressed their ongoing connection to essentialist conceptions of Chinese culture and civilisation. In this way, the exhibition reflected the way in which the wider Chinese community pursued a political strategy that was distinct from other anti-apartheid movements. Their response to oppression was not explicitly framed around resistance but instead operated within the separatist logic of apartheid in order to improve the living conditions of those classified as Chinese. In stressing their ongoing connection to an historic civilisation, Chinese community groups utilised and reformulated hegemonic notions of racial difference and superiority in order to distinguish themselves from other oppressed groups. On the basis of this distinction, they lobbied for special consideration and concessions from discriminatory legislation which they believed wrongly equated them with other 'non-Europeans' (Harris 2002).

To understand the significance of the club's activities it is first necessary to outline the precarious position of the Chinese community within the urban geography of Johannesburg and Pretoria. Prior to 1948, Chinese South Africans were already adversely affected by racial segregation and faced a number of restrictions over their ability to own or lease property outside of a small number of racially mixed urban areas (Yap and Man 1996, 330; Harris 1999, 183–4). This discrimination was intensified by the Group Areas Act of 1950. The act provided for the forcible division of the population into separate areas where designated racial groups would live and work. Johannesburg's Chinese community successfully resisted

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the implementation of a Chinese group area. Community representatives argued that the Chinese population, the majority of whom were shopkeepers, was too small and too reliant on the custom of other racial groups for a Chinese group area to be economically viable (Harris 1999, 190–3).

Despite their success, the Group Areas Act remained the law which caused the most pain and anxiety amongst the Chinese community. Not having a group area created its own hardships, as between 1955 and 1975 the Chinese population was in the absurd position of having no legal right, strictly speaking, to live or trade anywhere in Johannesburg (Yap and Man 1996, 347). They lived a precarious existence as 'disqualified persons,' reliant on permits to live and trade in group areas designated for other racial groups (Harris 1999, 196). Furthermore, before the implementation of the Group Areas Act, a substantial proportion of Johannesburg's Chinese population, including a number of members of the Chinese Camera Club, lived in racially mixed areas in the western part of Johannesburg, such as Sophiatown, which were considered 'black spots' by apartheid urban planners and were designated for demolition (Yap and Man 1996, 331; Carol Kow interview 2014; Jenny Chang interview 2014). Indeed, by 1950, Sophiatown was home to the largest concentration of Chinese South Africans in Johannesburg (Harrison, Moyo and Yang 2014, 514). Sophiatown was declared a white group area in 1955 and the state began forcibly resettling landowners and tenants. Chinese South Africans in Sophiatown were served eviction notices from 1956 onwards and, in the absence of a Chinese group area, often had nowhere to go. After further petition an agreement was reached in 1960 whereby permits were granted to rent properties in other parts of Western Johannesburg (Yap and Man 1996, 333–5).

However, with or without a permit, tenancy in other parts of the city remained insecure. If neighbours complained about 'Chinese' individuals renting in designated White

areas, authorities had to take action and many were evicted and sometimes prosecuted in such scenarios (Yap and Man 1996, 335). Jack Ho, founding member and president of the Chinese Camera Club, moved seventeen times from one property to another during the 1950s and 1960s, often as a result of complaints (Jack Ho, personal communication, February 18, 2014). Other club members were also subject to the vulnerability and insecurity that came with renting homes and businesses. In the 1950s and 1960s there was an acute shortage of rented accommodation in Johannesburg (Yap and Man 1996, 331–5). Being dependent on the benevolence of landlords and neighbours made Chinese South African tenants vulnerable to exploitation. They often lived in sub-standard housing, renting from landlords who, aware of the difficulties they faced finding accommodation, charged exorbitant rents and had few scruples about evicting tenants at short notice. In order to get around the prohibition on owning property many Chinese South Africans found nominees willing to purchase property on their behalf, or to form a business to purchase a property. This was a risky endeavour as if the nominee decided to claim ownership of the property, as did happen in a number of cases, Chinese South Africans had no right to legal recourse (Yap and Man 1996, 347).

Photographic Outings

Photographic outings were one of the central activities of the Chinese Camera Club, and were very popular with club members (Wing Shung Lau, personal communication, February 26, 2014; Yan Tak, personal communication, November 9, 2016). The club would assemble every Sunday on Commissioner Street in Johannesburg's Chinatown (Thomas and Mabel Lai, personal communication, February 19, 2014; Jack Ho, personal communication, February 4, 2014). These outings had a number of overlapping functions. They enabled the club to find suitable subject matter and to gather raw photographic data which they could experiment with in the darkroom (Wing Shung Lau, personal communications, February 20

and February 26, 2014). Such outings were also a means of leisure and relaxation which provided an opportunity to socialise with friends and family. Many of the club members, such as Bo Lon, ran grocery stores, and as such Sundays were their only day off (Patricia Fink, personal communication, August 4, 2014). Many of these outings were day trips within and around Johannesburg or Pretoria. Some of these outings were to peripheral areas outside the city centre but on other occasions outings were made to iconic locales within the heart of the city. Locations included the Wits University, the Union Buildings in Pretoria, Zoo Lake, the mines and mine dumps within and around Johannesburg, and a variety of newly-built modernist buildings in the central business districts of Johannesburg and Pretoria (Myra Tadyshak, personal communication, November 2, 2015; Wing Shung Lau, personal communication, February 26, 2014; Patricia Fink, personal communication, September 12, 2014; Carol Kow, personal communication, May 6, 2014; Jack Ho and Stanley Ford, personal communication, February 5, 2014; Teddy Lai, personal communication, February 9, 2014).

These outings allowed the club to appropriate urban spaces from which they were tacitly excluded by apartheid discourses of belonging. For example, the club organised outings to the Johannesburg Civic Centre to take photographs of its modern architecture. F. M. Lang's "Stoep Gossip", for example, depicts two models posing in front of the Civic Centre (Fig. 1). The Civic Centre was a new development built on the Braamfontein Ridge between 1962 and 1972 in order to house local government offices and provide an appropriate venue for the civic life of the community. To quote Clive Chipkin (1993, 275 + 277), despite the lofty aims of the project, the complex was and remains a mediocre "stage-set of lifeless buildings and disused spaces which the pedestrian hurries to cross or, if possible, avoids using altogether" and "an overpowering bureaucratic presence […] dissociated, as we would expect, from meaningful democratic life." However, the Chinese

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Camera Club's photographic outings to the Civic Centre suggest that bureaucratic spaces in an apartheid city could be used and experienced in unintended and subversive ways. Through communal outings the Chinese Camera Club temporarily appropriated the space of the Civic Centre for the purposes of leisure, education and photographic production. Outings also allowed club members to take photographs which, by situating Chinese South Africans within recognisable locales in Johannesburg, heightened the visibility of Johannesburg's Chinese community and announced them as an intrinsic and permanent part of the city's population. Situated as it was within a white group area, the legitimacy of the Chinese Camera Club's presence there was ambiguous. Owing to their 'coloured' classification, they did have the legal freedom to navigate the city without having to obtain a permit or carry a passbook, unlike those classified as 'African'.[4] However, Chinese South Africans were unable to vote in local and national elections throughout apartheid, and therefore were excluded from the civic community which the Civic Centre sought to embody and serve. Drawing on Michel de Certeau's (1984, 91–101) theorisation of walking in the city and his concern with the "anthropological" and "poetic" experience of space, one can understand the urban photographic outing as a means of contesting and transforming spatial organisation and engendering space with counter-hegemonic meanings, memories and values. Photographic outings took place within the structures of apartheid's spatial strategies, but, by deploying various tactics, they paradoxically imbricated, manipulated and filled these spaces with the projected desires of club members (Certeau 1984, 101). Because they are articulated through products and structures that do not belong to them, and because there is no cultural space in which they can be fixed for posterity, the practices of everyday life remain, in most instances, ephemeral and enigmatic (Certeau 1984, xix). However, photography, though staged, afforded club members a means of fixing these experiences as material artefacts and circulating them within local and international networks of photography. Such outings and

photographs subverted the racialisation of urban space in Johannesburg and challenged restrictive notions of civic belonging from which Chinese South Africans were excluded.

The Civic Centre was also a popular location amongst the Chinese community for wedding photographs. For example, at a Chinese South African wedding in 1965 the guests assembled at the Civic Centre to have their photographs taken by Chinese Camera Club members Yen Lai and Wing Shung Lau (Edmund Lang interview 2014).[5] This fact that the Chinese Camera Club appropriated a space that was also popular amongst the Chinese community for wedding rituals, reflects how the photographic activities of the Chinese Camera Club, and in particular photographic outings, both paralleled and intersected with wider social practices (and patterns of urban mobility) amongst the Chinese community of Johannesburg. Photographic outings had many overlapping functions. Crucially, they provided an opportunity for club members to socialise with family and friends, who were often in attendance, and who acted as models for photographic shoots during such outings. Wing Shung Lau recalled that, when club members were joined by their families, outings became as much a social event as a photographic one (Wing Shung Lau, personal communication, February 26, 2014). In this way, photographic outings mirrored and facilitated new patterns of socialisation and mobility not just within the club, but also amongst families and the wider Chinese community. [6]

The destinations of local outings also included grand buildings and architectural spectacles which reflected aspirations shared by many Chinese South Africans. For example, the Chinese Camera Club organised outings to Wits University's campus in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. The buildings populating the campus were constructed in the 1920s in a neo-classical style (Chipkin 1993, 78). Susie Lai, who was married to club member Yen Lai, recalled modelling for photographs on the steps of the University's Great Hall (Susie Lai and

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Malcolm Chang, personal communication, December 7, 2014). During a photographic outing to the university campus Jack Ho took a photograph of one of the club member's children, illuminated by sunlight, sitting on the concrete seats on the open balcony of the South-West Engineering Block (Fig. 2) (Jack Ho, personal communication, February 13, 2014). Jack Ho exhibited this photograph, entitled "Behind the Pillars," at the 1st International Photographic Salon of Lourenco Marques in November 1957 (Organização da Sacção de Arte Fotogrãfica da Associação dos Velhos Colonas 1957). Jack Ho's rendering of the play of light and shade accentuated the giant "Tuscan colonnades" of the building (Chipkin 1993, 78). These pillars connote classical ideals of education and knowledge, and the inclusion of a figure in the photograph can be interpreted as reflecting the educational promise of the next generation of Chinese South Africans. To a cognisant viewer, the fact that this balcony and its concrete seats have been used as a seating area by generations of students amplifies this connotation (Chipkin 1993, 79).

The implementation of apartheid reinforced the Chinese South African community's longstanding commitment to securing a sound education for the younger generation. As the twentieth century developed a university education became increasingly valued as a route into the professions, an opportunity to secure a better standard of living and as a means of weathering the impact of apartheid's discriminatory legislation (Harris 2003, 105–114). By 1970 the Chinese South African population boasted the largest proportion of graduates in comparison to any other racial group in South Africa (Harris 2003, 113). Ironically, this occurred during a period of increasing segregation within universities. Following the Extension of Universities Act in 1959, Chinese students had to obtain permits to attend university, a situation which remained in force until the 1980s (Yap and Man 1996, 309–12; Harris 2003, 112). It is therefore interesting that club members took photographs of their

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families in front of an institution, such as Wits University, to which their access was restricted. (Yap and Man 1996, 312).

Of course, the photographs taken on outings in the city did not operate only, or even predominantly, on a symbolic level; they were also an exploration of aesthetics and form and a rendering of sensory experience. Susan Sontag (1961, 3–14) likened interpretation to a kind of vandalism that privileges symbolic content over form and, in so doing, diminishes the sensory power of art. Photographs are not merely cultural objects to be 'read' like a text, but they also operate on an affective register which exceeds language and representation (O'Sullivan 2001, 125–35). These observations about the sensory, affective and aesthetic quality of photographs apply not only to their interpretation, but also, crucially, to their production. In other words, it is likely that, during outings, club members would not have always been overly preoccupied by the signifying connotations of what they were photographing. Instead, they were also attempting to capture and convey the sensory and embodied experience of navigating an urban environment whilst making aesthetic and formal choices about what to photograph. Tony Yau's 'Young Companion', for example, juxtaposes the rectangular pattern of a building's brickwork with the circular hats adorned by figures at the bottom of the photograph (Fig. 3), creating a captivating study of form and pattern. When printing the photograph, Yau appears to have cropped the negative to create a narrow vertical format, which, along with the upward glances of the children, helped emphasise the scale and monumentality of the architecture, and in so doing conveys something of the experience of feeling dwarfed by Johannesburg's high rise buildings.

The 1956 Johannesburg Festival and The Chinese Salon of Photography

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It was not only the taking of photographs that allowed the Chinese Camera Club to challenge their marginalisation, but also their exhibition. The first Chinese Salon of Photography, organised by the Chinese Camera Club, was exhibited at Duncan Hall in Central Johannesburg between September 17 and September 29, 1956 ("Chinese Make History with Rand Display" 1956). This exhibition emulated the standard format of an international photographic salon in that it was open to photographers from any nation, but, crucially, it restricted eligibility to those who identified as Chinese. The exhibition included 160 prints by 60 photographers from Portuguese East Africa, Singapore, Hong Kong, the U.S.A., South Africa and Penang, Malaya ("Chinese Make History with Rand Display" 1956; Chinese Camera Club Johannesburg 1956). Club president Jack Ho (1956) claimed that it was the first international salon in "photographic history" that consisted entirely of "Chinese prints." In having convened and embedded themselves within a transnational group of overseas Chinese photographers, which found its expression in a Johannesburg exhibition, the Chinese Camera Club created an associational community that served as a locus of positive difference and pride.

The Salon's goal of representing a transnational community of overseas Chinese photographers was further legitimated by having Samuel Wang, the Taiwanese Consul General to South Africa, officially open the exhibition (Chinese Camera Club Johannesburg 1956). During this period, the Chinese Nationalist Government, who had been exiled to Taiwan following the declaration of the PRC, sought to retain the loyalty of overseas Chinese communities, as well as to promote Chinese nationalism. They sought to do so by, in part, sponsoring cultural events amongst overseas Chinese communities (Park 2008, 63). At the same time, the Salon addressed white South African audiences. For example, the Salon catalogue carried a foreword in Chinese that was also translated into English and Afrikaans.

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The Chinese Salon of Photography took place at the prestigious Duncan Hall, which was part of the City Hall in central Johannesburg. This was a dramatic departure from the Chinese Camera Club's annual exhibitions, which usually took place at the Johannesburg Chinese School on the edge of the city centre; a much less visible and well-known venue (Jack Ho, personal communication, February 4, 2014). The Chinese Salon of Photography of 1956 ran concurrently in the Duncan Hall alongside the South African Universities and International Youth Salon of Photography, which was organised by Wits University Photographic Society ("Chinese Make History with Rand Display" 1956). The timing of the Chinese Salon proved fortuitous, as from 1957 onwards, multiracial events at civic halls with mixed audiences required permits, and these were only granted if segregated entrances, restrooms and refreshments were guaranteed (Yap and Man 1996, 360).

Even more remarkably, the Chinese Salon was staged as part of the Johannesburg Festival of 1956. The festival was held to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Johannesburg's founding in 1886. Its programme included a large and diverse range of cultural events, sports and festivities. Loren Kruger (2013, 58–9) has placed the festival within a wider historical and political context of increased state violence, forced removals, the consolidation of racial segregation and increased restrictions on political opposition. The 1950s were bookended by the enactment of key apartheid legislation in 1950 and the Sharpeville massacre and banning of opposition parties in 1960, and witnessed many acts of repression and defiance in between. Kruger (2013, 58–9) argues that the attention that the treason trial and other acts of defiance have received has elided other events of cultural, rather than explicitly political, resistance in 1950s Johannesburg.

More research is needed into the history of the festival and its reception, particularly amongst black South African audiences. Letters appearing in newspapers in the run up to the

festival show that it was a topic of considerable contention and anger among opposition parties and individual black South Africans. On September 23, 1956, a letter from the Society of Young Africa, an African nationalist organisation, was published in the Golden City Post. The letter, which called for a boycott of the festival, pointed out that black South Africans had little to celebrate:

> "The Europeans are celebrating Johannesburg's 70th Birthday. We, the Non-Europeans of the city, cannot celebrate the 70th anniversary of forced removals, passes for women, police raids and site-and-service schemes. They can celebrate for they have built the city on our sweat." (Society of Young Africa 1956)

The Society of Young Africa's call for a boycott seemed to have considerable purchase amongst the black readership of the Golden City Post. During the next few weeks, the newspaper's "postbag" section was dominated by letters supporting a boycott. For example, "A.M.N." (1956) from Johannesburg wrote that:

> The argument against Non-Europeans attending any of the festival performances which have been condescendingly offered to us is simple. The organisers are trying to fool the people – to wipe out 70 years of humiliation and frustration with some free tickets to a handful of concerts. The people mustn't fall for this kind of thing and those who feel strongly about this will stick to their principles and set an example by making this small sacrifice.

Despite widespread calls for a boycott, it is clear that many black South Africans did attend the festival. The experience of the festival was recorded in an article written by *Drum* Journalist Todd Matshikiza, with photographs by Peter Magubane. Matshikiza (1956) described the segregated nature of the majority of the festival's events and the inferior standard of the performances put on for black audiences; in some instances 'non-Europeans' were only allowed to attend rehearsals, and many events were outdoor due to the absence of theatrical facilities for black audiences. Matshikiza's article also captured how the many black South Africans who did attend the festival's events were left feeling alienated, patronised and ever more conscious of their oppression. Matshikiza ends with an allegorical

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and caustic anecdote that captures the sense of frustration and bitterness that many black audience members would have been left with following the festival:

> I took my daughter to the Festival Fireworks. She picked up a burnt cracker and burnt her fingers. Las' night she says: "Daddy, does a festival always burn one's fingers? (Matshikiza 1956, 24–25)

However, as Kruger (2013, 60) has detailed, Matshikiza was himself also responsible for composing and staging a musical event that took place as part of the Johannesburg Festival. Matshikiza's *Uxolo*, a seven piece cantata, was performed by two hundred singers and an orchestra of seventy in front of racially mixed audiences at Johannesburg's City Hall. What is remarkable is that it took place in front of an integrated audience in a municipal building in the centre of Johannesburg, whereas similar events could normally only be staged in Sophiatown or the then unsegregated venue of Wits University (Kruger 2013, 60). It also reflected a cosmopolitan urban culture exemplified by the output of artists, writers and musicians from the multiracial Sophiatown area and "highlighted aspirations for integrated coexistence" which were at odds with hegemonic discourses of separate development (Kruger 2013, 59–61). This event subverted the apartheid discourses that underpinned the majority of the festival programme and by all accounts was a successful show. W. "Bloke" Modisane (1956, 65) wrote in *Drum* that *Uxolo* "was massive in structure and vast in scope. Its sheer magnificence was overpowering: it cast a bewitching spell that was impossible to resist." Modisane (1956, 65) was also quick to point out the political import and significance of the performance, stating that: "[*Uxolo*] is a plea for peace and racial harmony, and its story is told in seven fragments from the discovery of gold to the birth of a city riddled through and through with racial disharmony, and ends with a prayer for peace. Its message is vital and urgent, one that cannot be ignored."

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This highlights that individual artists had different reasons for participating in the Johannesburg festival. Some, like Bloke Modisane, rejected the underlying logic of apartheid and urban segregation by promoting the ideals of non-racialism. In contrast, the Chinese Camera Club's participation in the festival was also a political response to apartheid but, unlike Modisane's, did not reject racialism but instead reformulated and reaffirmed notions of racial difference. Park (2006, 47) has argued that the Chinese South African community adopted a political strategy that was largely independent of other anti-apartheid struggles. This low-key strategy involved winning concessions and exemptions from apartheid legislation by, in part, invoking an essentialist community identity based on their on-going links to Chinese civilisation, which also served as a source of pride (Park 2008, 47). Karen Harris (2002) has charted the Chinese South African community's repeated invocation of 'Chinese' cultural identities in various political campaigns from the late nineteenth century onwards. She argues that Chinese community organisations have used notions of Chinese superiority as a means of distinguishing themselves from other 'non-Europeans' (Harris 2002).[7] In other words, they framed their opposition to their discriminatory treatment partly on the grounds that such measures unjustly equated them with other subordinated racial groups, to whom they considered themselves superior.[8] This strategy was effective due to the very fact that it corresponded with the separatist logic of the apartheid state, who were rigidly trying to maintain a hierarchy of distinct racial groups against the threat of united 'black' solidarity and opposition. The Chinese Salon of Photography of 1956 allowed the Chinese Camera Club to pursue this political agenda by displaying their cultural and artistic affinity with accomplished Chinese photographers across the international diaspora, distinguishing the Chinese community from other 'non-Europeans' and in doing so raising their standing in the eyes of white-dominated camera clubs and wider white publics.

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The Chinese Salon of Photography of 1956 included prints taken by a number of photographers from Hong Kong. In the 1950s and 1960s photographers from Hong Kong were widely acknowledged as the world's preeminent pictorialist photographers (Corrigall 2015, 53). One of the Hong Kong photographers featured in the Salon was Dr. K .H. Wu. Wu lived in Hong Kong and became active in salon photography around 1940. In 1956, the year of the Chinese Salon, he was one of the most widely exhibited pictorial photographers in the world ("Dr. K. H. Wu" 1964). His photo, "April Mist" was exhibited at the Chinese Salon of Photography in Johannesburg and was reproduced as a half-tone reproduction in the exhibition catalogue. Wu employed a use of calligraphy as a compositional device, gentle tones, receding planes of water, mist and mountain, and included a branch to frame the composition, all of which call to mind classical Chinese painting. "Pagoda," by the Hong Kong based photographer Yet-Pore Pun was another example of an exhibition print from a Hong Kong photographer that signified the achievements of Chinese civilisation and culture. A pagoda was photographed from a low angle and composed at the centre of the frame, which served to heighten its monumentality. In so doing, Pun concentrated the viewers' attention on a stereotypical embodiment of Chinese architecture. The pagoda had long featured within European Chinoiserie and here provided a vicarious experience of an imaginary China for a South African audience (Jacobson 1993, 183).

Some of the prints exhibited by members of the Chinese Camera Club also traded in symbols and rebuses commonly used in Chinese art. In 1955 Victor Chang produced a still life entitled "Vase and Pomegranate" (Stacy Zhang, personal communication, February 1, 2015) (fig. 4). Chang bought the vase at a local "superstore" and took the photograph indoors using available light, with the vase and pomegranate arranged against a white background. After printing the photograph, Chang asked a language teacher at the Johannesburg Chinese School, who had been brought over from China to teach Chinese, to apply the calligraphy

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(Victor Chang, personal communication, February 5, 2014). The Chinese words for vase and peace share the same sound, and as such the vase has been commonly used as a symbol and rebus of peace and harmony in Chinese art (Pei 2004, 187; Williams 1976, 416). Pomegranates were commonly depicted in artworks during the Ming and Qing Dynasties and were used to symbolise posterity and a wish for many children (Pei 2004, 154; Williams 1976, 322–3). By appropriating these signifiers, Victor Chang asserted a supposedly unbroken connection to Chinese culture and civilisation. The significances of such imagery, and the meaning of the Chinese characters, would be lost on a white South African audience. Such a dynamic would have made it hard for local white photographers to co-opt this approach to photography and re-affirmed the Chinese Camera Club's proprietorial claim over so-called 'Chinese' approaches to photography.[9]

However, a large number of the photographs exhibited by members of the Chinese Camera Club actually had more in common with local photographic approaches in South Africa, especially in their choice of subject matter. Jack Ho's photograph entitled "Rhythmic" is a case in point (Fig. 5). Its composition grants a large amount of space to the sky. The atmospheric conditions in and around Johannesburg during the summer months are characterised by dramatic cloud formations, which became popular subject matter for camera club photographers in the Transvaal province.[10] Will Till, an accomplished photographer and longstanding member of the Camera Club of Johannesburg, was particularly associated with this approach. In an article in *South African Photographer*, Till explained that:

> during the long summer months, you have glorious cloud formations. I myself try to make the clouds part of my composition. […] [M]any of my photographic colleagues make use of clouds in their pictures because clouds suggest mood. Sometimes you have the dull, stormy clouds and heavy shadows. At other times the lighter themes that suggest a light theme for your picture. (Till 1948, 25)

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This approach was distinctive to this region of South Africa, and seldom seen in the work of Capetonian pictorialists. As Robert Bell (1955, 16) observed “the striking dramatic skies, as so often seen in a Transvaal picture, are seldom obtained down South.”

Furthermore, the image also followed the local vogue of photographing the iconography of the industrial infrastructure of the Rand (Corrigall 2015, 55). The photograph was taken on the grounds of a mine in Johannesburg, and captures the rhythmic repetitions of the two pipes which cut diagonally across the sky (Jack Ho, personal communication, February 4, 2014). By exploiting two key signifiers of regional identity, dramatic summer skies and the mining industry, Jack Ho demonstrated his fluency in local photographic trends. Furthermore, by silhouetting the figure of a Chinese Camera Club member, Ho embedded the Chinese Camera Club in the industrial landscape and, by extension, heightened the visibility and belonging of the Chinese South African community within South Africa. Photographs such as this remind us that, as well as being keen to express their ongoing connection to China, club members used such photographs to announce a simultaneous sense of belonging and contribution to Johannesburg (Corrigall 2015, 55).

It should be noted that white South African photographers were not unfamiliar with the work of Hong Kong photographers prior to the Chinese Salon of Photography, although this was undoubtedly the first time such a large number and concentration of prints by photographers from the Chinese diaspora had been exhibited in South Africa. Hong Kong photographers had been regular exhibitors in South African salons since the late 1940s, were frequently praised in the pages of South African photographic journals (Sprenger 1955, 12; Sprenger 1956: 245). In 1955 the white-dominated Photographic Society of South Africa arranged a loan of twenty five prints by the Hong Kong pictorialist Francis Wu. This travelling portfolio was exhibited by a range of white-dominated camera clubs and

photographic societies across South Africa and Northern and Southern Rhodesia during 1955, and stimulated a lot of interest and praise. Around 100 people attended a presentation of Wu's prints staged by the Camera Pictorialists of Johannesburg, where the prints were debated from 8pm to midnight (Eccles 1955, 55–56). Wu's one man show was also a hit with the general public. For example, in East London, Wu's prints were exhibited for three days and received hundreds of visitors (Denfield 1955, 7–8). Wu's photos, although admired, were also seen as essentially and innately different from the work of South African photographers. It was often remarked upon how Wu's pictures broke the established rules of so-called 'western' pictorialism. Such discourse often traded in orientalised stereotypes of the other and saw photography as innately tied to ethnicity. For example, summarising a discussion of Wu's prints amongst photographers in the Transvaal, E. K. Jones (1955, 9–10) observed that:

> Francis Wu had, judged by our western standards, broken every known law in composition, yet had succeeded in expressing in his photos the philosophic calm of his race against the background of the abacus.

Conclusion

Given that many white South African photographers were already familiar with Hong Kong pictorialists, it is apparent that the Chinese Camera Club were less concerned with introducing South African audiences to the work of overseas Chinese photographers than they were with establishing a public association with them. By claiming proprietorial relationship with overseas Chinese photographers, they sought to capitalise on the esteem in which Hong Kong photography was held, as well as stressing their ongoing connection to ahistorical notions of Chinese culture and civilisation. Much like external commentators, the Chinese Camera Club themselves presented 'Chinese' photography as being intrinsically different to "Western" photography. For example, in publicising the 1956 Chinese Salon of

Photography, Jack Ho was quoted as saying "Chinese photos differ from Western photos, […] [t]hey differ in style and subject and in the way they are taken" (Chinese Make History with Rand Display" 1956). However, by virtue of the high status that 'Chinese' photography enjoyed internationally, the exhibitions staged by the Chinese Camera Club replaced exclusionary notions of their difference with relentlessly positive ones.

In so doing, the Chinese Salon of Photography of 1956 ultimately operated within the logic of apartheid's classificatory regimes. In order to replace Sinophobic notions of racial difference with a positive group image, they nevertheless asserted the existence of an essentialist Chinese cultural identity that was intrinsically linked to race. In other words, although they were able to challenge and improve their position in South African Society, they were inclined, due to political circumstances, to accept the hierarchical ordering of society based along racial lines. By contesting the relations of difference in this particular way, they constructed a group identity predicated on the notion that they were distinct from and superior to other 'non-European' groups, and therefore were entitled to special consideration and access to some of the privileges enjoyed by white citizens under the law.

The activities of the Chinese Camera Club allowed its members to navigate and contest the urban politics of an apartheid city. Photographic outings created temporary zones of autonomy in which photographers could capture subversive and otherwise ephemeral experiences of space. Photographic outings also complemented and overlapped with wider social practices and patterns of mobility amongst the Chinese community of Johannesburg. As an expression of both adaptation and resistance to the spatial strategies of apartheid, it is notable that these photographs and their appropriation practices did not seek to portray urban spaces as sites of conflict or agony; rather, by locating Chinese South African figures within aspirational urban locales they instead imbued their representations of the urban landscape

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(and their relationship to it) with a subversive sense of pride, glamour, and belonging.

Throughout apartheid, Chinese South Africans were treated as foreigners, and were seen as exotic and 'other'. Both the Chinese Salon of Photography and the photographs produced on urban outings provided a means of heightening the visibility of the Chinese Community and asserting a simultaneous sense of their belonging to Johannesburg in spite of their precarious right to reside within it.

[1] For more information on the history of the Chinese Camera Club and its individual members see Corrigall 2015, Corrigall 2016 and Corrigall 2018.
[2] Between 1950 and 1962 the number of photographic clubs and societies in South Africa mushroomed from a mere sixteen to at least one hundred and nine (Corrigall 2016, 35)
[3] Further government proclamations and amendments passed in 1951, 1959 and 1961 introduced a number of sub-divisions within the 'coloured' category. Prior to 1950 individuals from the Chinese community had been classified in the broad category of 'Asiatic,' a grouping which was also used to facilitate discrimination, segregation and economic subjugation.
[4] I am grateful to Candice Jansen for this comment.
[5] Both Yen Lai and Wing Shung Lau undertook professional photographic work, including wedding photography, alongside the photographs they produced for circulation in camera club networks (Myra Tadyshak, personal communication November 3, 2015; Susie Lai and Malcolm Chang, personal communication, November 13, 2014). This reflects how camera club networks often overlapped with commercial photographic practices, and how camera clubs often provided, through their provision of photographic education, a means of professionalization.
[6] Elizabeth Edwards (2013) has argued that the photographic outings of British camera clubs in the late-nineteenth century enabled club members to form social bonds of association and friendship with one another as well as to enact new patterns of mobility and produce geographic knowledge, amongst other things.
[7] See also Park 2008, 75.
[8] Members of the Chinese Camera Club had regular relations with the wider black community. Many owned shops in black neighbourhoods and townships and catered to a wide-ranging clientele. Some club members also enjoyed friendships with black photographers. For example, club member Wing Shung Lau, who owned a store called Photoden on Commissioner Street, enjoyed friendly relations with a number of black photographers, including Ralph Ndawo (1932–1980), with whom he would discuss photography at great length (Wing Shung Lau, personal communication, March 6, 2014). Obviously, individual members of the Chinese Camera Club would have held a variety of opinions about the political situation in South Africa, and some may have even felt a sense of political solidarity with the wider black populace. However, at an organisational level, it is clear that the Chinese Camera Club pursued a collective strategy which foregrounded a essentialist Chinese cultural identity and which sought, through its exhibitions and engagements in both civic life and camera club networks, to distinguish the Chinese South African community from other subordinated racial groups.
[9] See Carli Coetzee's (2013, 61–77) notion of the "accented" artwork.
[10] This also corresponds to trends in wider South African visual culture at the time, and in particular visual articulations of Afrikaner nationalism. For Example, J. H. Pierneef often used dramatic cloud formations and expansive skies as compositional, decorative and symbolic features in his landscape paintings. Such representations were in fact incorporated into the built environment of Johannesburg itself, when, in 1929, Pierneef was commissioned to produce 32 panels for the Johannesburg Railway Station depicting idealised landscapes in the Transvaal and elsewhere in South Africa (Peffer 2009, 224–6). Such a comparison invites reflection on the club's accommodation to apartheid's separatist logic as well as its corresponding visual culture.

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