In Pursuit of Escaping Bitterness – Improving the Selves Among Fuzhounese in Manhattan's Chinatown

Julia Leeyan Tse

Submitted to the Board of Anthropology Jason Pine
School of Natural and Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

December 2018

Sponsor: Joseph Russo

Second Reader: Rudolf Gaudio

Contents

Acknowledgment 3

Introduction 4

Chapter 1: Methodology 10

Chapter 2: From China's Human Smuggling Capital to 'Little Fuzhou' 13

Chapter 3: Cantonese Over Fuzhounese – Gateway to Participation and Cosmopolitanism 17

Chapter 4: Multiple and Hybrid Identities – Between Here and There 21

a. Extended Self 25

Chapter 5: Performative Use of Bodies and Spaces 29

Conclusion 36

Bibliography 38

Acknowledgment

Completing my senior project was a deeply enriching experience that allowed me to grow intellectually, as well as personally. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisors Professor Joseph Russo and Professor Rudolf Gaudio for offering their support and constructive guidance. Over the course of my studies, I had the pleasure to collaborate with and learn from several academic mentors who taught me the value of Anthropology with their enormous passion and intellect: Professor Rudolf Gaudio, Professor Jason Pine, and Professor David Kim. They encouraged me to push beyond my limits and reach my full potential.

I would like to extend my thanks to the Purchase Affiliates Committee for their generosity of offering me a Senior Excellence Grant that helped me fund my research project and fieldwork. My senior project would not have been possible without the valuable contributions of my interlocutors. Thanks to the time, trust and commitment of Mr. and Mrs. Fong, and the people in the nonprofit organization, I was able to establish new relationships and friendships. Learning from the wisdom shared by my interlocutors is a humbling and rewarding experience. Special thanks to Hongyu, who assisted me with language and translation from Fuzhounese and Mandarin dialects into English. His fluency in all the languages and dedication is admiring.

Furthermore, I am grateful for my parents for supporting me to pursue my undergraduate studies in the United States and for raising me in a multicultural environment and teaching me three Chinese dialects, as well as my sisters, Lee-Ting and Lee-Shan who have always provided support. A special thanks goes to Lee-Shan, who showed me the world of Anthropology and aspired me to stay curious and acquire a critical lens. Finally, I am thankful for having a supportive and loving partner, Chaitanya, throughout my entire journey abroad.

Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. — Salman Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands

Introduction

This research project is a study of the Fuzhounese diasporic community from rural and urban Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian province in Southeastern China, who reside and work in Manhattan's Chinatown. I seek to identify the various strategies they incorporate into their daily lives in the use of language, labor, and artistic-cultural practices like Min opera, as they pursue to prosper and establish a life worth living as individuals and as a community within the larger Chinese diaspora in New York City, while undergoing hardship, or what they refer in the metaphorical sense of *fu* as bitterness.

The Fuzhounese influx in the United States started in the 1980s (Guest 2011) until reaching an all-time high in the early 1990s mainly through illegal smuggling. Around 1996, another wave arrived due to the family reunification programs. The Fuzhounese continued migrating throughout the 21st century through various methods. They have fueled the economy and revitalization of New York's Chinatown, specifically in the restaurant, garment and intercity bus industries (Chen 2013). What makes the Fuzhounese different is that they came about 100 years after the Cantonese early settlers, who have already become well-established long-term Chinatown residents (Guest 2011). As newcomers in a Cantonese-dominated enclave, they started to build their own linguistic enclave within Chinatown, which was the beginning of East Broadway. Pieke argues that the Fuzhounese are the "most disadvantaged, but simultaneously the most mobile overseas Chinese transnational group." (Pieke n.d.), leading them to settle and adapt to wherever work takes them. Migrants who have traveled extensively to various places, constantly settled and resettled, have a complex identity. In the following chapters, I will discuss the various journeys from arriving, adapting to flourishing in Chinatown, which

contains the high flexibility and adaptability the participants acquire over the course of becoming Chinese Americans.

With my research project, I would like to present an ethnographic account of members of an immigrant community, who are often disappearing within the Chinese overseas community stripped of their particularity. Throughout my studies, New York classmates have expressed their lacking knowledge of anything that constitutes Chinese culture, language, history, and the people in Lower Manhattan. Even in today's academia, there is very little literature on Fuzhounese migrants despite their overwhelmingly large and yet unaware presence of labor scattered around the world and especially in New York's Chinatowns.

My inspiration to learn more about Chinese immigrants residing and working in New York City's Chinatown with the largest overseas Chinese population in the West (explorechinatown.com n.d.), leads back to my personal background. Growing up as a first-generation Chinese-Swiss with ethnic roots in Fuzhou, I endeavored to take on a journey exploring the lived experiences of people from my parents' generation or older, who share the same hometown and a migration story alike.

The project is structured as follows: Chapter 1 includes the various ethnographic research methods and challenges faced. For Chapter 2, I am using the works of Chu and Guest as the foundation for a historical and diasporic context of Fuzhounese immigrants in the United States. Chu's concepts are used throughout the chapters. Chapter 3 linguistically focuses on the use of Chinese dialects, especially Cantonese as a strategy to navigate life in and outside Chinatown. Chapter 4 encompasses the multiplicity and hybridity of identities and self-making. Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on the artistic and performative aspects that incorporate the theories from Van Ziegert and Manansalan on the "intersections of temporalities and places".

My project intends to fuel more interest, knowledge, and encourage future research on this topic and the people and spark conversation not solely in academia, but in everyday conversation open to

everyone. Without scholarly analysis of those of less privileged status and the generosity of the people to share their worldview and philosophy with academics, their experiences and lives would be unknown to the outside world. With that being said, my work seeks to contribute to the fields of migration studies and Anthropology of Transnationalism, Embodiment, and Cities. As an insider, born into a Fuzhounese migrant family, and as an outsider to New York City's Fuzhounese community, my unique position with connection and distance provides a nuanced perspective to the reader.

Field Site

Over the course of two academic semesters between January and May and between September and December 2018, I conducted ethnographic research in Manhattan's Chinatown. The first half was dedicated to familiarizing myself with the various Chinese enclaves with the help of literature and establishing the first contact with community organizations. The second part focused on carrying out my multi-sited fieldwork taking place in public spaces, most commonly in the venues, where the community events were held and, in business owners' own shops and restaurants. During the summer break, I traveled to Hong Kong and Fujian, China and served as a research assistant for a Ph.D. candidate in Social Anthropology that led me to interview a returning overseas Chinese retiree. Revisiting the places after years that my informants once called and to an extent still call home inspired my continuing research upon return to the United States.

Through a volunteering program for a local nonprofit organization that I call TC, I encountered most of my interlocutors as part of community outreach projects. TC focuses on community-building, promoting Chinese heritage and culture and encouraging intergenerational engagement by creating workshops and events free to the public, fusing technology and the arts. They collaborate with local businesses, other organizations, and associations. Given TC's recent establishment, small size, and

limited funds, they rely heavily on governmental grants and volunteers to accomplish their mission. Their projects carried out in Chinatown, count a variety of activities in arts and civic engagement, and community-building, attracting audiences within and outside the Chinatown community.

The larger volunteer project I participated in, lasted two consecutive months during my fieldwork period, enabling me to establish a network of community members. It involved reaching out to small businesses of our choices in Chinatown to strengthen their online presence by establishing or updating social media profiles. Then, the participating entity, whether restaurant or shop, together with the products or services would be featured on the TC's interactive website that reflects a collection of all participating businesses with a map, introduction, and photos. Volunteers were responsible for approaching and convincing potential business owners to participate in the free project, gathering necessary material for the website by conducting short interviews and taking photos. The project's mission is to attract more visitors to the neighborhood and to support local "mom and pop shops" to increase visibility and engagement with new customers.

I was involved in another project that was the submission of the grant application to LMCC (Lower Manhattan Cultural Council) on behalf of the 'Eastern American Fuzhou Association'. The association, in short, are mainly run and formed by the 'Fuzhounese Opera Group' members. Fuzhounese opera is also called Min opera, or ***Mìng-kiŏk***. In this paper, the shortened names: the association and opera group are used interchangeably. One day, I received an urgent email request from Lin, the co-founder of TC, who was looking for Fuzhounese-speaking volunteers. I signed up instantly and got teamed up with a fellow volunteer, Hongyu. He grew up in Fuzhou and migrated to the United States as an adult. Due to the tight deadline, we completed the task within only one weekend, which required a physical meeting with the lead artists, Mr. Fong and the president of the association, following up communication through the WeChat App, virtual Zoom meeting with Hongyu, and more hours of independent work. I was responsible for submitting the online application

and supporting material via mail before the deadline. The decision from LMCC is currently still pending.

My field visits comprised the following activities: (1) volunteering at outreach sessions, (2) attending featured events hosted by TC and association, (3) spontaneous and scheduled meetings with key interlocutors including casual conversations and unannounced in-depth interviews.

Throughout my fieldwork, I have gained access to the association mainly through my key interlocutors: Mr. and Mrs. Fong, who were kind to welcome me in the association's private communal space in the heart of East Broadway, where they have social gatherings on an almost daily basis. Chapter 5 will elaborate on the use of the community space. Especially Mrs. Fong took me along, introduced me to others, translated between Fuzhounese and Cantonese, which overall facilitated my relationships with other association members. Other interactions were with predominantly male, senior-aged, Fuzhounese retirees from the association, many of whom are Min opera musicians and performers and their non-performing spouses; and the tea house owners, Mr. Li, aged 54 and Mr. Zhou, in his 40's. The Chinese dialects represented are: Cantonese, Fuzhounese, and Mandarin in the order of frequency. English was only used with TC.

I am using carefully-chosen matching pseudonyms for all participants to disguise their identities and protect their privacy. In other words, English first names remain English, whereas, for Chinese names, I replicated the names according to their distinct ways of either Cantonese (*Jyutping*) or Mandarin Romanized spelling (*Pinyin*). The anthropological discipline comes with an immense responsibility to represent them in the most accurate sense. Hence, my intention is to represent them in the most authentic ways because names are identity-markers and come with cultural significance, shedding light onto the ethnic roots. I would like to highlight that out of all participants, three non-affiliated Fuzhounese individuals have 'Chen' as their real surnames, which is the most common surname in southern China, including Fujian, alongside Guangdong, Zhejiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. 'Chan' is

the Cantonese-romanized equivalent (People's Daily Online 2006). I also refer to the older participants with the title Mr./Mrs. based on their own introduction. The association members called me in return *yi mui* (younger sister). The younger participants encountered through the volunteer program are all known by their first names, hence the contrast. The only exception represented with an authentic name is that of the association.

Linguistic note for the direct quotes of the interlocutors:

Cantonese	*simply italicized*
Fuzhounese	***Italicized and boldfaced***
<u>*Mandarin*</u>	*is italicized and underlined*

Chapter 1: Methodology

My primary research method consisted of participant-observation carried out as part of volunteering and independent work. Since the beginning of my fieldwork, I was conflicted about my linguistic abilities to converse sufficiently in the Fuzhounese dialect. Little did I know that many Fuzhounese are fluent in multiple dialects, including my preferred language Cantonese, as proven a few months later. With my existing Cantonese-skills, along with extensive linguistic preparation that involved acquiring relevant Fuzhounese vocabulary, as well as with Hongyu's language assistance, I was equipped for fieldwork. Although at times, I still had difficulties comprehending conversations in Fuzhounese and Mandarin, especially because older Fuzhounese tend to switch to Mandarin to accommodate younger people. In my case, it did not help because my Mandarin comprehension level is basic and speaking skills are very limited.

Starting as a volunteer, I slowly tapped into the nonprofit world's workings as I engaged in community activities. Once TC introduced me to the representatives of the association, it was crucial to start building a relationship with them. It certainly helped boost the trust when Hongyu and I assisted the opera group with the grant application. However, that also meant that I took a permanent role as a working volunteer, who bridges the linguistic barrier of English. During my time there, Mr. Fong regularly contacted me with concerns and questions regarding their work with TC, rather than approaching Lin directly. His action showed a degree of trust and reveals his perception of me as a representative of TC. Even though volunteers are not involved in the decision-making and event planning processes, I still attempted to assist him as much as possible. Out of respect, I felt responsible for providing him assistance. In these instances, a blurry line between my various positionalities as a

volunteer, as an anthropologist, and as an individual appear. It is tricky to navigate within them, when others had already established a sense of one of them, namely the volunteering role.

The dynamic between Mrs. Fong and I had been different from the beginning. She had been kind and welcoming, always offering me things, assistance and most importantly, she was the one inviting me to their community space. A mutually-felt relationship is based on a balance of giving and taking – offering and receiving. After a few visits, I took the initiative to share more of my personal self, rather than portraying a role with an agenda, whether professionally or academically. After all, you cannot expect others to share their personal stories if you do not provide anything substantial of yourself. Like Ruth Behar, "my debt to those who allowed me to enter into their lives, knowing I would write about them, will never be fully repaid. I cannot, ever, make myself vulnerable enough." (Behar 1997, 8) Behar discusses the imbalance in the relationship between the scholar and the studied. Her writing approach opposes the convention of Anthropology and allows her to be honest and emotional with the reader. "Vulnerability doesn't mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to." (Behar 1997, 19) Her ethical choice and unconventional style inspired me to incorporate a more actively present voice as an ethnographer.
Once getting used to each other's presence, I introduced them to my own project and with that comes the portrayal of the "anthropologist me", which accompanied me during private meetings outside TC. I have multiple identities and being an anthropology student was only one of many. Being conscious of the various positionalities' coexistence, I wondered if the perception and actions of others changed depending on the role I took.

As much as TC invited many opportunities to come in contact with the Chinatown community, it also provided constraints. Being a volunteer is a commitment and comes with expectations. For most events

hosted by TC, Lin sent invitations out to every member on the volunteer email list, asking for on-site assistance. Although it was neither mandatory to attend the events nor expected to accept the work requests, the expectation of contributing was always there. One evening, I spontaneously showed up at one of their featured events, in which the opera group performed live. On that day, Mr. Fong called me to invite me and confirm my attendance. No working requests for volunteers were sent by Lin. To my surprise, the moment Lin greeted me, she assigned me a work responsibility, as she handed me a pile of brochures I needed to distribute as a greeter. My expectation of attending as a guest did not coincide with hers. Just as mentioned above, the various roles I adopted were messy and obscure. From my analysis, it might have played out this way due to my situated position, as a volunteer present at TC's event hosted by them, rather than as a volunteer off-duty accepting Mr. Fong's personal invitation. In response, I compromised on my intention to do fieldwork and redirected my energy to becoming a greeter for some time, until I got the chance to speak with my key informants. This instance exemplifies conflicting interests between an institution and its workforce. Realizing that I will not always be able to do my fieldwork according to my plan, adjusting to the given situation was key. In fact, this obstacle provided important insights on my relationship with TC and led me to treat the volunteer work as valid participant-observation and to approach my interlocutors on my own during my personal time away from TC.

Apart from participant-observation, I conducted two interviews with four informants in November 2018. The first interview was with Mr. and Mrs. Fong at the association's community space and secondly with Mr. Li and Mr. Zhou at their co-owned tea house. The advantage of interviewing pairs rather than individuals is the creation of a natural dynamic. In the case of my interviewees, the Fongs are a long-term married couple, while Li and Zhou are working business partners. The setting of the interview enhanced the natural state of comfort and familiarity, as they are both meaningful spaces for each party without crossing a personal boundary.

Chapter 2: From China's Human Smuggling Capital to "Little Fuzhou"

After Mao Zedong's market liberalization in the late 1970s followed a mass emigration from China to the United States and other countries (Chu 2010). Factors like the 1965 Immigration Act in the U.S. and the improved U.S.-China relations in 1979 contributed to the rapid rise of Chinese immigration (Zong and Batalova 2017).

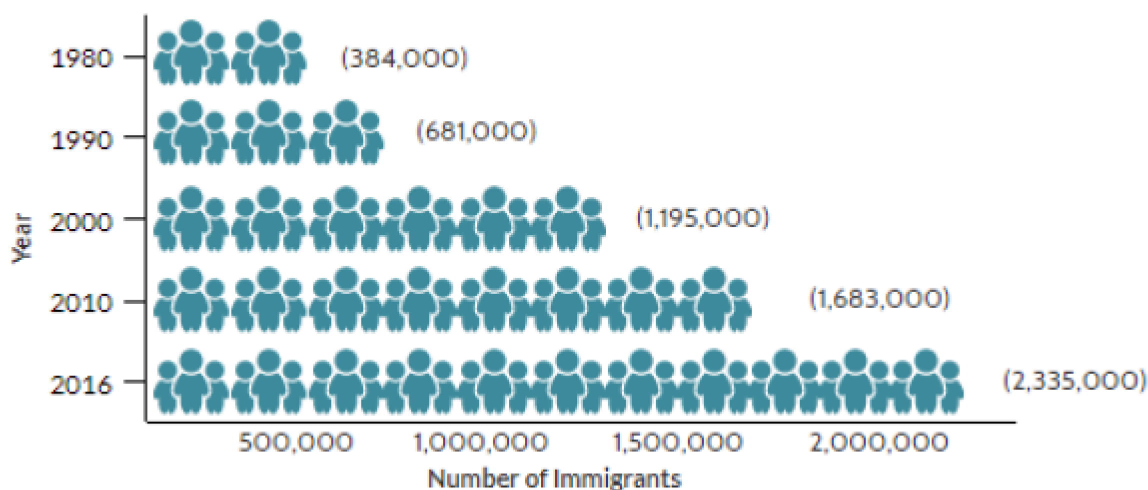

Figure 1: Chinese Immigrant Population in the United States, 1980-2016

Sources: Data from U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2016 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1980, 1990, and 2000 Decennial Census. (Zong and Batalova 2017)

From the early 1980s onwards, tens of thousands of immigrants from the province of Fujian, mainly from Fuzhou and its surroundings started settling into New York City's Chinatown (Guest 2011), accounting for almost 18 percent of Chinese migrants internationally by the 2000s (Liang 2001; Lu, Liang, and Chunyu 2013, 633). Some made use of the family reunification visas to attain a legal status, while others without kin connections relied on human smuggling networks via air or sea routes. On average, the smuggling fee amounted to $18,000 in the mid-1980s (Chin 1999; Guest 2011), rising to a $70,000 by 2010. Mr. Fong has brought up the term *wan bai go/so* (18,000 brother/brother's wife) when he recalled the peak smuggling period between 1988 and 1990. Media took notice of this trend

when a cargo ship called Golden Venture containing 286 illegal Fujianese ran aground in New York with ten people drowned to death. Mr. Li remembers the headlines of that time very clearly: “human trafficking became a big deal when Fuzhounese people started drowning in the ships. There was more media attention. But I did not experience any of that.” He manifests later in the interview that he arrived via airplane with legal documents. Today, the presence of the Fuzhounese in New York City is highly concentrated on the eastern part of Chinatown, along East Broadway that Sachs calls a “grimy corner of Lower Manhattan”.

> *“There is no fixed border between their neighborhood and the more gentrified Chinatown to the west, where the city's Cantonese-speaking population established a base more than a century ago. Yet the Fujianese Chinatown is as self-contained, and confining, as a rural village.” (Sachs 2001).*

Indeed, they made themselves at home in “Little Fuzhou”, creating a linguistic enclave that resembles their hometown in the sense of the dialect spoken and businesses catering to their needs. More and more, the Fuzhounese have expanded their settlements beyond Manhattan due to increasing rent and spread across the boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn, establishing satellite Fuzhounese communities in Sunset Park, 8th Avenue, and Flushing, Main Street (Guest 2011).

Although Chu and Guest provide a rich narrative of Fuzhounese illegal immigrants, I would like to stress that all of my key interlocutors migrated legally and have obtained a legal U.S. status. They are either U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Hence, they belong to the minority within the Fuzhounese overseas community. However, I do not exclude the possibility of some informants having an undocumented status, without their disclosure and thus without my knowledge. It is still important to lay out the smuggling pattern as a foundation of the Fuzhounese history of migration. “When they hear ‘Fuzhou, Fujian’ they immediately think human smuggling” reads a quote from Chu’s informant, Zheng Hui (Chu 2010, 142). Furthermore, as immigrants of the second Chinese emigration wave, after the Cantonese predecessors, they used to be part of a “minority Chinese”, when they first arrived. Over time, their population numbers escalated, and they have outnumbered the Cantonese (Guest 2011).

Mr. Li once expressed: *"Now there are too many Fuzhounese people. It is not like in the '70s when my father first came. Maybe then there were only 300; today, several ten thousand and maybe even more! It's nothing special."*

In 1962, Mr. Fong first arrived in the U.S. as a 20-year-old sailor, when he escaped the ship to work in the kitchen, starting from the bottom ladder of the kitchen as a ***duo mui*** (literally tale of the chef, or chef's assistant), which mainly involved cleaning. Over a few years, eventually, he worked his way up to become a chef and cook at one point for a thousand guests. Reminiscing his early days, he was very happy to earn and save money, until he got deported to Hong Kong in 1970. Later, he returned and worked in Boston, when a friend suggested him to move to New Jersey. That is when he ended up cooking for a Western steakhouse. *"I had to clean dishes and floor at first. Ngo m pa sek fu (I am not afraid to eat bitterness)."* He got the opportunity to work and did not know any English words. So, he acquired what Chu calls "Restaurant English" that is the specific vocabulary catered to aspiring migrants pursuing restaurant careers. Mr. Fong proudly announces with a big smile that his boss liked him a lot – back then many Americans liked to hire Fuzhounese newcomers, as they are hardworking. Mr. Fong's migration journey shows that it does not end with the arrival in New York's Chinatown, but involves relocating to nearby states, wherever work opportunities took him. Mr. Fong and his wife both retired in their 70's now live in the Cantonese-dominated Chinatown. When I asked Mrs. Fong if living in Chinatown was convenient, she shared with me that it is very good now, as safety and sanitation have improved. She continues: *"in the past, it was bad in the park in front of their house or even in the staircase you had to fear someone attacking you with a knife,"* referring to the term <u>pín mín kū</u> for slum housing. *"The staircase used to be dark, but now they updated it, so it is much better. There are more police around, the rent has increased, and they also got their pension now."* Being a long-term resident, Mrs. Fong's statements not only shed light on the gentrification of the neighborhood but also the vulnerability of their living situation over the decades.

In the following chapters, I will explore the strategies that they developed to establish a life in Chinatown despite their vulnerability and hardship that comes with being easily-ready, hardworking laborers, with a special emphasis on the multi-linguistic aspects.

Chapter 3: Cantonese Over Fuzhounese – Gateway to Participation and Cosmopolitanism

At the first meeting with Mr. Fong, a main senior association member, I assumed that he only knew Fuzhounese and Mandarin. I only found out later in the midst of our conversation that I was wrong when he accidentally switched to Cantonese offering me a choice of water and milk tea (a staple beverage from Hong Kong). Surprised, I responded: *"You know Cantonese?!"* All this time we were communicating in a mix of Fuzhounese and Mandarin. *"I am from Hong Kong"*, he answers with a smile. *"I thought you were Fuzhounese." "Yes, I am Fuzhounese."* he nods. We all started laughing. Hongyu, who does not speak Cantonese understood what had just happened and had a surprised expression on his face. The conversation switched to Mandarin again, as Hongyu led the conversation. Mr. Fong's linguistic talent was not an exclusive case. Throughout my fieldwork, I have encountered Fuzhounese individuals, who spoke consistently the three dialects: Fuzhounese, Cantonese, and Mandarin. What is fascinating is not just that they speak any dialects, but rather that aside from their regional language, and the Chinese national language, they obtain Cantonese mastery. Linguistically seen, all the key interlocutors are insiders of Chinatown, as they are fluent in three most-widely spoken Chinese dialects in New York City's Chinatowns.

Despite Mandarin's powerful position as the "common language" or Putonghua and number one lingua franca, Cantonese has a lingering and significant presence. Firstly, it is still spoken by approximately 70 million people in Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macau and diasporic communities (South China Morning Post 2009). In Manhattan's Chinatown, it has been the dominant language spoken by the early Cantonese settlers. Hence, given the popularity, Cantonese serves as an alternative lingua franca. Secondly, on a global scale, Cantonese is associated with its historical influence of Guangdong as the initial province that did international trade in the 17th and 18th centuries (South China Morning Post

2009), and later on Hong Kong as a British colony and an economic power preceding China's recent rise. These affiliations suggest a highly cosmopolitan and widely-acknowledged and respected status that comes with communication in Cantonese.

First, I argue that for Fuzhounese immigrants, Cantonese opens up possibilities to advance themselves, whether it is for personal or business purposes, like to establish social networks, especially when they first set foot in "Little Hong Kong", the old Chinatown. None of my informants have mentioned a potential conflicting dynamic between themselves and the Cantonese. However, situating the Fuzhounese as newcomers in a predominantly Cantonese environment, I can imagine that they had no choice but to assimilate, including learning the dialect in order to navigate through Chinatown, or they just picked it up by hearing it. Mr. Li shared casually with me that he learned Cantonese through TV shows and by maintaining social ties with his Cantonese friends. Cantonese allows him to extend his social circles and access another subgroup's community. Although they do not share the same home region, at least they share overlapping languages, in the sense that the Fuzhounese adapts to the Cantonese-speaking group. As business owners dealing with non-Chinese customers, it also requires them to know English in addition to the three dialects. They sometimes add English words in their speech, Mr. Zhou more than Mr. Li.

Second, apart from personal convenience, Cantonese also serves as a gateway to claim an elevated, cosmopolitan status, similar to what original Cantonese enjoy. Mr. and Mrs. Fong have raised their now adult-children in Cantonese, rather than their primary dialect, Fuzhounese. These decisions could be based on the cosmopolitan and useful notions of Cantonese. In these cases, within families, Cantonese may become the primary language. However, the preferred language among the Fongs and the business partners remains to be Fuzhounese, so they codeswitch back to Fuzhounese even after speaking Cantonese with me, family or others. The Fong children and grandchildren only know Cantonese, apart from English. This is an interesting pattern, similarly, reflecting my own upbringing.

Back in the early '90s after settling in Switzerland, my parents switched the primary household language from Fuzhounese to Cantonese, as they believed Cantonese to be more useful and thus powerful than Mandarin, not to mention Fuzhounese. In Chu's book, she discusses how Longyan residents face structural disadvantages due to their political status as 'peasants' determined by the governmental household registration system (*hùkǒu*), which creates and maintains a division between rural and urban. Peasants are viewed as backward, superstitious, unproductive, and unruly by the urban outsiders, elites, and political leaders (Chu 2010). I develop further Chu's argument, that beyond the Fuzhounese urban elite, the Fuzhounese dialect might also signalize the rural, backward aspects in the eyes of longer-established Chinatown residents like the Cantonese. As for the Fongs, by socializing their children into Cantonese in the sense of Schieffelin and Ochs' "language socialization", they build new future possibilities for them, as they can linguistically identify with the Cantonese and thus enjoy an elevated status (Ochs 1992). Simultaneously, erasing and replacing Fuzhounese with Cantonese results in distance or detachment from the Fuzhounese heritage due to the early socialization. For example, Mrs. Fong shared with me what her daughter once told her: *"Your Cantonese is getting worse and worse. It is going backward. Your Fuzhounese accent is getting thicker."* Mrs. Fong laughs and states the reason is that she is always around Fuzhounese people. The daughter's critical statement reflects her potentially accent-free Cantonese opposed to her mother's Cantonese with Fuzhounese accent, which indexes an ever-increasing distinction in social status between them.

> *"Linguistic identities are double-edged swords because, while functioning in a positive and productive way to give people a sense of belonging, they do so by defining an "us" in opposition to a "them" that becomes all too easy to demonise." (Joseph 2006)*

The people of Fuzhou, especially from rural surroundings have to face an ongoing stigma even after migrating to a new country. Sometimes the most critical statements are made by their own peers, if not among the larger Chinese community. I do not suggest, however, that every Fuzhounese manages or sees the need to learn Cantonese. In the association, certainly not everyone knows Cantonese and the

use of the regional dialect remains the norm. In the use of Fuzhounese, I could sense level of familiarity and intimacy. In the ethnolinguistic enclaves like East Broadway, along with Sunset Park and parts of Flushing, one can survive with just Fuzhounese.

For the Fongs and tea-house owners, having a multilingual background means flexibility and a form of freedom that other subgroups might not have. From my observation, the Cantonese-identified informants only speak Mandarin apart from Cantonese. The Fuzhounese can use the dialects interchangeably when facing Cantonese and other Chinese groups. The use of dialects is temporal and not fixed, often shown in instances of codeswitching. It is also in their autonomy to disguise their Fuzhounese origin by selecting Cantonese in order to better fit into the Cantonese community. According to Mrs. Fong, the Fuzhounese accent, however, can be detected by fellow Fuzhounese and possibly Cantonese. Yet, having the linguistic abilities allows them to participate in and access various Chinese circles, while also obtaining a cosmopolitan status with Cantonese.

Chapter 4: Multiple and Hybrid Identities – Between Here and There

> ***"Feet stepping on other people's ground, face directed to other people's sky."***
> ***ka cia benoing dey, meng hueing benoing tian***
>
> \- Mr. Fong

At first, I did not comprehend the saying. Mrs. Fong clarifies that the sky signifies the history and culture of the people. Mr. Fong elaborates the ground is the U.S. soil. They have to put in much more effort than the locals because their feet are on other people's ground. Shortly after, another opera member, who cooks, steps in, overhearing the conversation and adds in a laughing manner: ***"Here is also your home!"*** Mr. Fong ignores the comment and remains silent.

The metaphorical statement exemplifies Gilroy's definition of displacement that "refers to the shared experience of feeling out of 'place' within and across the boundaries of the nation-state." (Chu 2010) Mr. Fong indexes his position as a permanent outsider in American society. Interestingly, just a moment ago, when I asked them if they often visited Fuzhou, Mr. Fong continuously shook his head until he broke the silence with renewed energy and widened eyes: *"lidou hou! (here is good)"* Mrs. Fong simultaneously explains that she does not often visit China and it depends on the children's schedule that does not always match with hers. Her husband goes even less. I was slightly surprised. She communicates the lack of need to visit China because *"everyone is already here"*, referring to her immediate and extended family. Tung (1997) discusses the contradictory relationship of overseas Chinese to "their" homeland:

> *Visits "home" after a long absence usually involve a peculiar combination of feeling, both familiar and strange. For those who traveled back to China, the desire to "go home," meaning their American homes, is a frequent reaction while in China. They miss the familiarity of their daily lives. The disorientation can be difficult to handle. Once "home" in America, part of oneself seemed to have been left in China. And on it goes. (Van Ziegert 2006, 91)*

"For many Chinese Americans, the concept of "home" is invested with multiple, often conflicting, meanings." (Van Ziegert 2006, 91) ***"Is here your home?"*** Mr. Fong answers: ***"yes, I am used to living***

here now." The metaphor, thus, conflicts with his sense of home. Despite the feeling of displacement or the "feeling of being familiar and strange" associated with the U.S., the Fongs still consider New York as their home, rather than Fuzhou for (1) their family is here, (2) they are used to living here (3) they have a U.S. citizenship. All the factors imply that the concept of "home" can be determined by the place where family and next generations reside, the long-term residency in one place, and citizenship. Hence, the couple does not see the need or desire to return to China, not even for temporary leisure purposes.

However, feeling home in New York does not equate to feeling less Chinese or Fuzhounese, as their New York is situated in Chinatown, the hub of overseas Chinese. Their everyday lives and activities within and outside the association involve interactions with fellow Fuzhounese and other Chinese groups. The Fongs often reminisce about the "good old times" in Fuzhou despite the poverty they endured. Mrs. Fong was admired by peers for having the opportunity to study until the third year of middle school, even though she did not have shoes during the winters. She graduated in 1963 during a time when girls were not given education opportunities, but her grandfather supported her. She said it proudly to Hongyu in Mandarin, while he translated it to me. She laughed about her husband, who, in contrast, only attended junior high school the second year, did not graduate, but ran off to Hong Kong. Mrs. Fong's story highlights the privilege of education that is based on gender and that with the support of her grandfather, she beat the system for her own advancement. Just like what Safran suggests, China or Fuzhou "becomes nostalgia and a shared mythical homeland by the immigrant community" that is fixated in the past and only exists in the memories of the diaspora (Chu 2010). I argue "home" is a sense and not necessarily bound to one geographical location. In fact, it can imply multiple places, where memories are formed and invoked: Fuzhou where most of them spent their childhood and teenage years and for the Fongs, additionally Hong Kong where they have lived in

transit for several years before migrating to the U.S. The affiliation with Hong Kong contributes to their cultural and linguistic identity-formation.

Mr. Li shared his first impression of New York with me: *"When I first stepped foot in New York, I was shocked. Huh, this is New York? I did not like it, the dirty streets. But over time, you get used to it."* He continued making a reference to my own assimilation process when I arrived in New York. I have encountered the phrase "getting used to here" frequently, given the fact that all of my informants have spent between 30 and 40 years in the U.S regardless of their varying ages. It makes sense that time is the factor that allows one to acclimatize anywhere, but for them settling in Chinatown probably eases the process of assimilation due to the shared cultural understanding. When one acquires local knowledge, then it becomes comfort and a sense of security. For instance, Mrs. Fong has an extensive spatial orientation including the infrastructures like the public transportation of the neighborhood, as shown in the two instances she showed me Chinatown through her eyes. Mr. Li, in contrast, offered an insight as a returning overseas Chinese: *"Every year I visit Fuzhou, the city changes, roads change. Sometimes I do not know or remember the roads."* His spatial disorientation shows a form of displacement that is expressed in Mr. Fong's metaphor. It is clear, China with its approach to modernization transforms more rapidly and on a greater scale than Chinatown with its gentrification. Nevertheless, Mr. Li considers both New York and Fuzhou as his homes. As Iyer discusses the hybridity of identity that comes with having connections with multiple places:

> *"And nowadays, at least some of us can choose our sense of home, create our sense of community, fashion our sense of self, and in so doing maybe step a little beyond some of the black and white divisions of our grandparents' age." (Iyer 2013, Ted Talk)*

He visits Fuzhou annually because of his tea business. Fuzhou is also the origin of the tea, which he is very proud of. He is an entrepreneur, who has been in New York for over 30 years. His wife's family and his cousins are still in Fuzhou, and relatives live in Hong Kong, but his immediate family is here.

In the 1980s, he moved from Fuzhou city to the U.S. with a visa through his father, who was already here. During an interview, he emphasized that he came via airplane and originates from the city of Fuzhou, distancing himself from the rest, which highlights the "peasant and smuggling stigma" that Chu discusses. He is a Green Card Holder and Chinese national. Although Mr. Li travels annually, it is currently more for business purpose. He enjoys going between the two places (*loeng bing zao*) and might consider retiring in China. *"Fuzhou is very good now."* It seems to infer that it was not the case before. Due to the changes of the cityscape, he may think of Fuzhou as a different place now. Mr. Zhou agrees on that after some time contemplating. He adds that he also likes the idea of planting his own produce in South Carolina in the future, like some of his relatives. As for Mr. Li, he needs to maintain connections on both ends, in China and in the U.S. in order to run a successful business. His work requires him to travel yearly, unlike the Fongs, who are already retired and chose to spend the rest of their lives here.

What surprised me is Mr. Zhou's vision of his future. A good quality of life may take him to the countryside of the U.S., outside and away from the urban Chinatown community. Originally from Changle district, like my grandparents, he migrated to the U.S. as a 17-year-old teenager. He has not studied since he was 14 back in his hometown, even though he could have carried on with his education upon arrival. He decided against it and preferred working. Almost none of his family members are in China. Most of them live in the U.S. and many migrated to Hong Kong like his great aunt. He only visits Fuzhou once in ten years and is a U.S. citizen. From my impression, as the youngest key informant, Mr. Zhou is more acclimatized to New York and the American culture than others. He often adds English words in his speech and communicates in fluent English with customers, whereas the association members face an English language barrier. I once praised Mr. Zhou's English and Cantonese skills, for which he countered smilingly: ***"Many people here speak Cantonese and I only know little English."***

Chapter 4a: Extended Self

"One step, one footprint." or "One footstep at a time."
yī bù yī gè jiǎoyìn.

\- Mr. Fong

In an interview, I asked Mr. and Mrs. Fong how the Fuzhounese are different from other Chinese. Mr. Fong answered: "*Kan ley (hardworking)"*. Mrs. Fong added with a slight grin: *"Fuzhounese people are very intelligent – they can work in all kinds of Chinese cuisine restaurants, not just Fuzhounese cuisine, but also fast food, Japanese, among others."* Interestingly, she points out the multi-faceted use of Fuzhounese labor, or the willingness to work wherever they can, which distinguishes them from other Chinese. Mr. Fong used "One footstep at a time" metaphor in the context of settling. When they first arrived, they lacked the basics, like English skills. It indexes a steady progress by looking ahead and taking things slowly one step at a time until eventually establishing a better life. It resembles the idea of the American Dream, which is the freedom to achieve prosperity through hard work. Mr. Li offered the exact same answer to the question: "*Kan ley. In the past, westerners preferred them, but nowadays,* [waving hand gesture] *san yat doi ngai m dou fu (the new generation cannot bear bitterness), san wuo hou jo (quality of life has improved).* He refers to an idea that once you reach the goal of an improved life, you cannot bear the bitterness, but also there is no need anymore.

"Fuzhounese people can only work in 3 fields: restaurant, textile, and construction." A retired textile worker and long-term opera musician expresses after I acknowledged his settlement in New York for over 30 years. I was surprised to find out that his son works in a restaurant in Washington D.C., as I assumed that the next generation hopefully leads a better life, away from the three industries listed above. During one of my volunteer outreach projects, I met Mr. Wang, who is a Cantonese restaurant owner. He made a similar statement, referring to Chinese immigrants in third person plural: *"The only jobs they can do is labor jobs with hands, not brain that does not require language."* He went on: *"There are only a few industries to select from. Textile* [laughing], *is nothing*

for me. The restaurant business is the easiest, where I could see myself working, so I have always worked in a restaurant." Mr. Wang's laughter I interpreted has a gendered notion, as the textile industry has a predominantly female presence, whereas the restaurant, especially in the kitchen it is male-dominated. Both examples by Mr. Wang and the senior opera musician show the third person singular or plural approach when speaking of the subjects, themselves, which indexes detachment and distance.

My argument is that their occupation as former laborers in the U.S. has permanently shaped their lives given the excessive amount of time spent at work, over decades. All informants, including those who are already retired, have shared a "bitterness narrative" connected with their occupation that comes with the inevitable restrictions of establishing a fulfilling life. Mrs. Fong would point out other association members' professions when introducing them to me. Hence, I propose that their physical-demanding labor, whether in the past or present, equates with *fu*, bitterness, and forms their 'extended self', in the sense how they identify and represent themselves. Mr. Fong shared a horrendous story that entailed an accident in the kitchen that caused the tip of his finger and nail to come off. It was when he first started working in the kitchen and did not know how to operate a knife. The blood just splashed, and he was immediately delivered to the hospital [pointing to his finger]. It left Hongyu and me in disbelief and shock. For Mrs. Fong, one of the hardest things to get used to after settling in New York was to work as a tailor from 9 am to 9 pm, especially because in Hong Kong, she only had to work from 9 am to 6 pm. Here she had to work much harder and longer for little compensation. When her children returned from school, they would go to the tailor workshop to help out. Her son would be responsible to take his younger sister with him after school. By sharing their bitter labor experiences, they are also showing the vulnerable reality they lived in and to some extent still live in. Although they are retired seniors now, these experiences are still a significant part of their identity and lives overseas. When Mr. Wang first came here, he lacked education, knowledge of the law, and English abilities. He

said: *"No matter how skilled they are, they have limited options."* This comment resonated deeply with me, as it is bitterly honest and truthful for him and migrants alike. Hearing all the accounts on their personal struggles was a very humbling experience for me.

Furthermore, my ethnographic materials showcase entrepreneurship to be the solution out of bitterness. Mr. Li and Zhou have been running the tea house business for ten years, which serves customers tea ceremonies and a large variety of tea from Fujian. The shop is small and has two tables resembling a Zen garden. Mr. Zhou alongside established a fish pet store as a side business, which he has been managing independently for six years. I would like to emphasize that their service and products offered are higher-class and catered to a clientele, mostly Western and non-Chinese tourists, who appreciate tea and are in for the value-gaining experience. In the same way, Chinese entities in Tilburg offer activities that of "commodifying Chinese culture for consumption by non-Chinese audiences." (Van Ziegert 2006, 139) The tea house owners successfully upgraded from offering cheap labor to delivering high-quality services and products.

Mr. Li: *"Not everyone knows how to appreciate tea. Chinese people here are too busy to drink tea. It is the same for you in Switzerland, just different environment. Think about your parents – did your parents have time to drink tea?"*
Me: shaking my head
Mr. Li: *"You see? Same here."*

From my understanding, it is not necessarily that the owners chose to cater to a non-Chinese clientele, but rather that the working-class Chinese, that they themselves once were, do not have the resources, whether time, financial means or the interest to "enjoy tea". Their focus is to move upward that eventually would allow them to have an elevated lifestyle that gives them the resources to drink tea regularly.

Mr. Li is an expert in tea and knows how to cater to customers with different tastes. The topics he and his business partner raise range from traveling and hiking, philosophy of life, to varieties of tea flavors.

These are very contrasting themes from what association members would talk about. The philosophy Mr. Li follows is "*yan san you yao zi yao*" or human heart needs to have independence. For him, success is hard to define. Is it reaching the set goal of earning x amount of money? He does not have such an expectation. As long as he can eat, it is all fine. Hence, I conclude that entrepreneurship directly translates into obtaining a cosmopolitan status.

Chapter 5: Performative Use of Bodies and Spaces

I previously showed how Fuzhounese people are pragmatic in learning different language skills and professional skills to become easily employable and highly adaptable. However, in this final section, I would like to highlight that they also pursue personal interests, besides the hard and often exploitative, underpaid work. I show this by illustrating examples from the opera members' lives. My final chapter is dedicated to the idea of using bodies and spaces to exercise their full agency to perform an art and to celebrate the Fuzhounese heritage and traditions.

During my fieldwork, I got the chance to view two live performances by the opera group.

(1) The celebration of the inauguration of the association's new president was held at the Golden Unicorn Restaurant that is known for Dim Sum. That evening, they served a pre-fixed banquet dinner for each table. It was a private and professionally-organized event with approximately two hundred Chinese guests, the vast majority presumably Fuzhounese, who is affiliated with the association and opera group. Mr. Fong personally invited Hongyu, Lin and me to this dinner party following the volunteer work we provided. To my surprise, we were seated with the association's new president, honorary chairperson, and the chairman of Fujian Association of New York. It was my first time experiencing Chinese opera. The opera performances consisted of the main opera play by a middle-aged male and younger female in traditional costumes and make-up, two solo singing performances by a lady and by the president herself, both dressed in elegant Western dresses.

(2) A community concert was hosted by TC presented by the opera group in collaboration with another nonprofit organization. It was held open-air at the cactus store off the East Broadway subway station. The opera group performed at the beginning of the event in four singing solo bits alternating between the same male as mentioned above and the newly inaugurated president: at first, he appeared with casual clothing, then he changed to the traditional look. The president performed twice in the same

casual outfit. The audience was ethnically diverse, including the staff from TCs, venue, and media, who were mostly white Americans and some Chinese Americans. The very few Chinese bystanders often hesitated to step beyond the gate, so they just watched from afar despite Lin's and my attempt to invite them in. Some questioned if it was free and even after confirming admission and food free of charge, they remained skeptical, watched for a bit and left. After completion, the opera instantly took off and another musical ensemble of white Americans performed classical pieces.

The contrast of the two events is based on the chosen *location*, *time,* and *who the host is*. Firstly, although both venues are located in and near East Broadway, they vary drastically. Golden Unicorn and banquet restaurants alike are popular establishments to hold private Chinese celebrations like weddings, as they serve authentic Chinese cuisine and have the capacity to accommodate hundreds of guests. Also, it was private and closed off from the public, including communities outside the Chinese ethnicity. The outdoor cactus store, located in the Lower East is, from my observation, run by white Americans. The event was open to the public and attracted a more diverse crowd.

Secondly, they were both held on a weekday evening, Thursday and Monday, however, the inauguration party took place after the mid-autumn festival and before China's national day, while the other one was created as part of series of arts events in late October.

Finally, the opera in the name of the association organized the inauguration party, whereas, they were guests at the community concert. This factor determined the level of effort from the opera group's end. They were much more invested in the event they organized in front of a familiar audience than in the second space facing a foreign audience. Their effort is evident in the extensive preparation of the opera play and the event itself, unlike in the cactus store where they only sang but did not perform a play. Their instant disappearance also marks a lacking involvement with other non-Chinese organization members. However, I believe that the language barrier is the main reason behind their action. After the performance, Mrs. Fong invited me to their community space, which I happily accepted. As they

wrapped up, I offered to help carry one musical equipment. Later, they discovered that one bag was missing, so a few members returned to the venue, who then got caught up by the classical performance. They ended up staying until the end and sent videos in real-time to the other members at the community space. Hence, I conclude that some of the members did show interest in the other ensemble's work, but communication would be impossible without a translator.

Upon return from the cactus store performance, Mrs. Fong's face read dissatisfaction. *"The place was too small. The second half was better when most people were there."* Praising the outcome: *"But it was still successful, no?"* Sighing: *"Yes, performing here would have been better!"* She chuckles. Indeed, the opera group made of 11 musicians and 2 singers were squished towards the wall placing them at an unappealing angle. It was outdoors, windy and cold. Apparently, a successful performance entails a large audience and a stage of a large size. The goal of the community concert was to reach the public by convincing people to vote for the upcoming midterm elections, which did not seem to be of interest to the association. The Fongs have mentioned prior to having performed successfully in their own space for a smaller audience. Even though the opera/association and affiliates (spouses) owns a community space, it does not provide a professional space as a concert hall would. At times, they find themselves in similar circumstances like the Chinese diaspora communities as described in Van Ziegert's piece despite the opera's access to a Chinatown.

> *"Events such as Chinese school, Chinese church, and the three major Chinese festivals per year take place on the weekends in buildings which are normally devoted to other activities. This mapping of diasporic identity onto a temporal dimension shows that the performance of Chinese identity can take place even in cities without a Chinatown. Members of Chinese communities establish a time of Chineseness, an alternate diasporic public sphere, in order to celebrate and perpetuate their cultural traditions." (Van Ziegert 2006, 134)*

The opera also temporally makes use of a public building that is a school's facility, or in the case of the inauguration party, a banquet restaurant. Their annual to semi-annual public performances are usually

held at the nearby 'Dr. Sun Yat Sen Intermediate School', always free of charge for the audience. They prepare well in advance and the next performance should be coming beginning next year. The difference is that these public spheres are still located in Chinatown and cater to the local Chinese diaspora, unlike Van Ziegert's events that temporally claim a non-Chinese space to make it theirs. Manalansan also discusses the intersections of temporalities and places, in the way that a beauty pageant performed by queer Filipinos was incorporated into a Filipino restaurant's karaoke night. Meaning, the queer space "is somewhat integrated into the geographic layout of diasporic life." (Manalansan 2007) Spaces become multi-functional depending on the time and the people occupying them. In the same way that the Filipino restaurant located in a Filipino-dominated immigrant neighborhood temporally transformed into a stage for entertainment, the Chinese-dominated school and Dim Sum restaurant occasionally step away from their usual function and transmute to a space to celebrate Chineseness through Min opera. The ethnic identity, in both scenarios, is shared by the people in the public spheres.

Furthermore, the use of their own community space is multi-functional and unfixed. It serves as a social gathering space for association and opera members, and their affiliated spouses (mostly wives of the male musicians). It can also be viewed as an alternate senior center. As far as I know, the association members consist of the same musicians in the opera group, except for the spouses that do not participate in the performances, but for the major performances are present as guests. The daily social gatherings involve music rehearsal, mahjong sessions, and meals, along with occasional small performances. At busy times, like on Sunday noon, up to 20 people mingle there, most of them playing mahjong while smoking and eating. It is equipped with about 5-6 electronic mahjong tables spread across with chairs, a bathroom, kitchen and storage room. Along the wall, it is plastered with framed photos of the association and opera performances, including one with Xi Jinping before his ascent to the presidency, which they are very proud of, and a huge, pink hand-written table with names and

dollar amounts. In the interview, Mr. Fong discloses what seemed to be a mystery to me, pointing to his own name on the table: *"I have also contributed to the funding with a donation of $500. In total $1,000 with my wife."* Alongside this wall, a wooden bench is used as extra storage space for costumes and gears. One time, Mrs. Fong proudly showed me traditional boots that were hand-stitched and imported from China. On another wall, more equipment like instruments is stacked on each other next to an altar. The community space is located on the third floor in an old walk-up building in East Broadway. They assigned an opera member to do the cooking. Mrs. Fong explains the rent for this space is $2,000, which they collectively pay from their own pocket. They did not use to have any income or earnings, but nowadays there is some income. She pointed to the photos on the wall while talking about the founder of the association and early members, including her husband. *"Min opera is better than Cantonese opera."* I asked her if only Fuzhounese attend their public performances or also other Chinese groups. She responds that others attend too. They have a big screen to show the Chinese characters of the lyrics so that everyone can read along since it is sung in the regional dialect. Her statement resonated with me, as not everyone can read Chinese characters or comprehend it. However, it also means that their target audience consists of those who possess these linguistic abilities, and it might imply that their focus is not necessarily to entertain outsiders.

Van Ziegert uses the term "fragmentation" to discuss that performances for self, increase the differences within Chinese subgroups, whereas performances for others come with commodification and decrease the differences within "Chineseness" (Van Ziegert 2006). I once asked the Fongs why they think performing Min opera is important.

> *"For entertainment and education. There are so many Fuzhounese people here. 500 to 600 audience members attend our performances. Alone 500,000 are in New York state, a few dozen thousand are registered at Fuzhounese associations across Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Boston, and New York that is one of the largest."*
>
> *– Mr. Fong*

Mr. Fong estimates off the top of his head. I interpret the opera's performances with the purpose to entertain the self, primarily the Fuzhounese in the vicinity of the Northeast based on a shared artistic appreciation embedded in the Fuzhounese tradition and language. Once to twice a year, the association organizes and pays for the relocation of the peers from surrounding cities, many of whom are musicians who are performing with the New York's opera group. As proven, the Fuzhounese bond and solidarity exist even across state borders.

Outsiders may still appreciate the art while facing a language barrier, but from my understanding, it does not fulfill the opera group's intention. I propose the argument that the screening of the written lyrics proves to be an effort to unify various Chinese groups, and yet, causes some sort of fragmentation due to the nature of the art, that is regionally situated in the Fuzhounese dialect and traditions. In contrast, the performance held in the cactus store showcases the implication of commodification due to the presence of the predominantly non-Chinese or western audience and media coverage. So, depending on the audience, the space, and who is the host, the performances can move within the arbitrary realm of fragmentation and commodification.

In the use of the community space, one can see the organization of a tightly-knitted network that is based on a shared hometown, dialect and common passion for Min opera. For the members, the art of opera is more than just a hobby; it is a personal investment with all their resources: body, time, effort, and money to acquire musical training, to maintain a social network and a shared space. The members also alternate to contributing to the communal funds. All of this shows a deep sense of community and solidarity. Surprisingly, the opera has only started reaching out to local non-Chinese governmental funding sources this year, given that the association was established in 2008. Mr. Fong has repeatedly emphasized: *"We do not charge fees to the audience. It is always free."* The goal of the association is to entertain people and not to make a profit. The potential funding for which they are applying would

be spent on the expenses of organizing performances and maintaining the space. In 2005, Mr. Fong and fellow early members started gathering under a stairway of a tailor workshop with the permission of the owner to play music together. This year, they have moved to the current space. They held their first live performance in 2009.

Essentially, the art of opera provides a platform for self-expression in an artistic, embodied manner. Overseas Chinese have the status of invisible minorities (Van Ziegert 2006). As working-class immigrants, the opera group uses their bodies and space for continuous cultural production and preservation. With their artistic performance, they manage to retaliate language barriers and status as a cheap, exploitative labor force. On the stage, they can actively participate in the society as New York residents and be visible to the public, beyond Chinatown residents, as passionate artists, who are proud of their heritage and traditions. I argue Min opera becomes a tool for value-making, to make their lives more purposeful and thus bearable. It is also a reason to be socially active with peers from a shared hometown and an activity for time-passing, as many of them are retirees. Min opera serves as a way out of bitterness.

Conclusion

Over the past nearly 40 years, New York City has seen a huge influx of Fuzhounese immigrants that changed the cityscape of the neighborhoods: starting with East Broadway in the original Chinatown, and across other boroughs like Sunset Park in Brooklyn and Flushing in Queens. They have created their own ethnolinguistic enclaves based on shared home region and language. While spending the majority of their lives here, they have formed hybrid and multiple layers of identities.

My ethnographic material showed that beyond being just 'Chinese', different subgroups within the Chinese diasporic communities have their own distinctive experiences in New York. The Fuzhounese have contributed to the economy as cheap and readily-available labor in mainly the restaurant and textile industries, while also being the most disadvantaged and mobile diasporic subjects, according to Pieke. Without the cultural capital, including English knowledge, they have very limited career options. Despite the restrictions, I have shown that Fuzhounese people are highly flexible and adaptable to new spaces and additional languages. For instance, people like Mr. Fong have relocated to several nearby Northeastern states to work in restaurant kitchens, in a similar way, as opera musicians are being transported across states to perform with the Eastern American Fuzhou Association's opera group in New York City. All my key informants have shown perfect command of Cantonese despite the remaining accent. The personal accounts of various association members and business owners reveal the vulnerable realities they live in. In their narratives, the metaphorical use of *fu* as *sek fu*, eating bitterness or *ngai fu*, bearing bitterness is frequently discussed in the way they experienced life in the U.S. as working-class members. They narrate a story of how they have moved forward or upward with the one-step-at-a-time motto until eventually overcoming the bitterness. In that sense, bitterness is at the core of their lives as migrants in Chinatown - something they feel attached to, worth

mentioning, and essentially value as a human experience, albeit its bitterness. *Sek fu* makes and shapes the many different selves they have become and will become in the future.

For future research, I would like to explore more of what their future hopes consist of, and what a good quality of life means to each of the participants, as some have not reached the retirement age yet, while others are already enjoying the freedom. Also, I would like to explore the concepts of home and belongings for those, who are in constant motion. what they are hoping for their children to become, beyond acquiring education.

Bibliography

Behar, Ruth. 1997. “The vulnerable observer: anthropology that breaks your heart.” Boston: Beacon Press. Chapter 1

Chinadaily. 2013. “Culture”. August 12. Accessed November 20, 2018. http://fujian.chinadaily.com.cn/2013-08/12/content_16888361.htm.

Chen, Fan. 2013. “Fujianese Immigrants Fuel Growth, Changes.” June 2013. Accessed May 16, 2018. https://voicesofny.org/2013/06/fuzhou-immigrants-fuel-growth-changes-in-chinese-community/.

Chu, Julie Y. 2010. “Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China.” Durham, NC: *Duke University Press* 31-164.

Explorechinatown.com. n.d. "Chinatown New York City Fact Sheet." explorechinatown.com. Accessed April 23, 2018. http://www.explorechinatown.com/PDF/FactSheet.pdf.

Guest, Kenneth J. 2011. "From Mott Street to East Broadway: Fuzhounese Immigrants and the Revitalization of New York’s Chinatown." *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 24-44.

Iyer, Pico. “Where Is Home?" *Ted*, Ted, June 2013. www.ted.com/talks/pico_iyer_where_is_home/transcript?referrer=playlist-what_is_home#t-257352.

Joseph, John E. 2006. "Linguistic identities: Double-edged swords". *Language Problems & Language Planning*. 30 (3): 261-267.

Kleinman, Julie. 2014. "Adventures in Infrastructure: Making an African Hub in Paris: Winner of the SUNTA 2013 Best Graduate Student Paper Prize". *City & Society* 26 (3): 286-307.

Lu, Yao, Zai Liang, and Miao David Chunyu. 2013. "Emigration from China in Comparative Perspective". *Social Forces.* 92 (2): 631-658.

Manalansan, Martin F. 2007. “Global divas: Filipino gay men in the diaspora”. Durham, N.C.: *Duke University Press* 1-20, 62-88.

Ochs, Elinor. 1992. “Indexing Gender.” In *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, edited by Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, 336-358. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

People's Daily Online. 2006. "Chinese surname history: Chen." January 24. Accessed November 3, 2018. http://en.people.cn/200601/23/eng20060123_237614.html.

Pieke, Frank. n.d. "Transnational Communities Programme - At the margins of the Chinese world system: The Fuzhou diaspora in Europe." Accessed March 12, 2018. http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/wwwroot/pieke.htm.

Sachs, Susan. 2001. "FUJIAN, U.S.A.: A special report; Within Chinatown, a Slice of Another China." July 22. Accessed September 24, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/22/nyregion/fujian-usa-a-special-report-within-chinatown-a-slice-of-another-china.html.

Van Ziegert, S. 2006. "Global spaces of Chinese culture: diasporic Chinese communities in the United States and Germany." New York, NY, Routledge. 91, 129-167.

Zong, Jie, and Jeanne Batalova. 2017. "Chinese Immigrants in the United States." September 29. Accessed November 28, 2018. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/chinese-immigrants-united-states.