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Study on Chinese Immigrants and Chinese-Americans in United States: A Focus on New York City

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Study on Chinese Immigrants and Chinese-Americans in United States: A Focus on New
York City

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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不忘来时路，方知向何生。

Do not forget the coming path, then you shall know your way.

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Introduction

“If you love him, bring him to New York, for it’s heaven;

If you hate him, bring him to New York, for it’s hell.”

--from theme song of “A Native of Beijing in New York”

The Tv series “A Native of Beijing in New York” is the first abroad shooting tv series in China. It tells the story of a group of Beijingers struggling in New York City. This is how I learned about the word or the city “New York”.

In most Chinese people’s mind, Manhattan equals to everything to New York, which is not the real case. When I tell people that I go to Bard College, which is in New York State, it will take me awhile to explain to them that my school is not in Manhattan, the center of the world. One thing that is most important about any city in the world is about commuting. For New York City, it is famous and infamous for its subway system.

Long before it became an archaic, filthy, profligate symbol of everything wrong with our broken cities, New York’s subway was a marvel — a mad feat of engineering and an audacious gamble on a preposterously ambitious vision. “The effect it is to have on the city of New York is something larger than any mind can realize,” said William Gaynor, the New York mayor who set in motion the primary phase of its construction. A public-works project of this scale had never before been undertaken in the United States, and even now, more than a century later, it is hard to fully appreciate what it did for the city and, really, the nation¹.

¹ Jonathan Mahler, "The Case for the Subway," The New York Times, January 03, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/03/magazine/subway-new-york-city-public-transportation-wealth-inequality.html>.

The subway is the corner of the city. It is a place where every city buries stories. I do not know why, another word that is associated with the "New York Subway" is actually "lonely." Lonely tramps, lonely artists, lonely passengers, everyone has a small world of their own, others have to stand by, but can not bother. Those vagabonds and beggars are either snarky, incomprehensible, or embarrassed or stenchful. It is irritating and indisputable. It also mourns its misfortune. Fortunately, no one had driven it away, and the carriages or platforms were their places of accommodation on a cold winter night.

However, people are not randomly assigned to trains. The far-off subways are full and each station is full of people. When you see the coming train, and there is one carriage which is empty. The passengers are not excited and sigh: "There must be a homeless there." Even if unfortunately got into the wrong car, he would flee to another car at the next stop.

In the morning and evening, everyone who comes and goes seems to be immersed in their own stories. A meter away is the world; within a meter, it is all loneliness that is unknown to others. Whenever the subway arrives, the story is over.

At different places in the city, the language of the subway signs would change base on the language that is being primarily spoken in that community. For example, most signs across the city have English and Spanish on it, the one near Korean Town has Korean on it, and Chinese is the dominant language in lower east-side of Manhattan. Subway connects and commutes people from one place to another, and the Chinese is one of the groups among them.

The reason I choose the topic on Chinese immigrants, Chinese-Americans and Chinatowns is because that I spent a semester in New York City doing internship. I was working at a social-service agencies whose primary target were the low-income immigrants and local citizens. During my lunch time, I would always go to the same Chinese restaurant in Chinatown and order

different kinds of food. There was this one waiter who always serves me who can take orders in five different languages including Mandarin, Cantonese, English, French and Spanish. This really fascinated me, because I would never have imagined a waiter at a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown can speak multiple foreign languages. The anecdote here really draws a big contrast comparing to Flushing in Queens, which is another Chinese main gathering place in NYC. In Flushing, people can live normally without speaking any English. What is more, the life style of the people living in those areas seems very different. Chinese people living in Manhattan seem very assimilated in some ways with the local communities, where as Flushing is more likely to be a province of China being replaced in New York.

In this project, there will be three chapters. The first chapter focuses on two parts: the first part is about the origin of NYC, and why it becomes a popular destination for the immigrants from all over the world; the second part is about the early history of immigration from China. In the second chapter, the discussion will heavily based on my interview with the Chinese immigrants and the Chinese-Americans from different perspectives. The third chapter is the ongoing expansion of the history of the Chinatowns in the city.

Chapter 1: Preface to Origin and Expansion

When trying talk to anyone about the term “New York,” the things that are going to pop out in our mind possibly are Manhattan, the Statue of Liberty, the world capitol, the “Big Apple” and arguably, the largest city around the world. The New York City is located at the mouth of the Hudson River in southeastern New York, and it’s within the North Temperate Zone, close to the Atlantic Ocean, under a mild and humid climate. With an urban area of 780 square kilometers and a population of more than 8 million, it is the most important transportation hub and the busiest port city in the world. The New York City consists five administrative districts: Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island, even though for most of the time the tourists only consider Manhattan as NYC.

After spending a semester in the city, comparing to other cities around the world that I have been to such as Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong or Paris, for me, New York does not have the most comfortable climate, the most pleasant vibe, or the most beautiful scenery. In addition, the safety and security are not in a good shape, and the situation can be also applied to the transportation that the city has one of the dirtiest subways around the world. Regardless of these disadvantages, it is still the most exciting city on earth.

My biggest impression of New York is the feeling of all-encompassing. People came and currently living in New York often forget that they are foreigners. This is not to say that I, as one of the foreigners, feel that I am an American. Rather, I know for sure and I am proud of introducing myself as a Chinese. Comparing to Beijing and Shanghai which are also known as international metropolises, New York as a truly cosmopolitan city, is still quite different from other major cities around the world. Although there are many foreigners in the so called “北上

广” (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou), for most Chinese people, they are less likely to have much contact with foreigners during daily lives. In contrast, when I was in New York City, the director was Israeli, the downstairs mobile phone shop waiter was Nepalese, the restaurant across the street had Chinese, Japanese as well as South Korean cuisine, the person who wanted donation from me was Panamanian, the taxi driver was Indian. You will come across people that are from all corners of this planet. Although I am in the United States, the people that I deal with in a day are not necessarily all Americans. I don't feel different because of my cultural background, because, in fact, the culture of New York does not represent the overall American culture. Rather, New York represents all the cultures from the world.

However, since New York City is such a culture melt pot, as we can easily observe every day, we may raise the question that what makes New York so unique as it to be the capital of the world? In other words, what makes New York achieve its greatness?

The History of New York and its greatness

On September 8th, 1664, about 354 years ago, the English soldiers took control of New Amsterdam from the Dutch, which is located on Manhattan Island. The British soon renamed it after the Duke of York, who was the brother to King Charles II. In founding New Amsterdam in the 1620s, the Dutch planted the seeds for the city's remarkable flowering. Specifically, the Dutch brought two concepts that became part of New York's foundation: tolerance of religious differences and an entrepreneurial, free-trading culture. "In the 17th century, when it was universally held elsewhere in Europe that a strong society required intolerance as official policy, the Dutch Republic was a melting pot. The Dutch codified the concept of tolerance of religious

differences, built a vast commercial empire and spawned a golden age of science and art in part by turning the ‘problem’ of their mixed society into an advantage. Dutch tolerance was transplanted to Manhattan: They were so welcoming that a reported 18 languages were spoken in New Amsterdam at a time when its population was only about 500.”²

In the meantime, other European countries were still running federal economic model, the Dutch first started the economic system which is based on individual ownership of immovable properties. The reason that this happened was because of most of the land area of Dutch was below water level, since Dutch was being settled on a river delta, the land kept getting threat of being flooded. So the people in these communities came together to build dams, then they cultivated the newly created land. These new lands did not belong to the king either or the church. In contrast, the ones who created this began to sell them in parts. This actually motivated the entire society on building dams, which promoted the development of the empire, which made the Dutch the entrepreneurs, made them the envy of the other Europeans.

This new economic mind-set likewise got transferred to New Amsterdam, where everyone was a trader, an entrepreneur. The port became so efficient that even archival in the English colony of Virginia sent their goods to Europe via what would become the New York harbor. The non aristocratic, egalitarian bent of the Dutch also gave society on Manhattan a uniquely upwardly mobile character. “But England was on the rise. The people who took control of Manhattan realized quickly that a unique society had formed there, and kept its features in place. As part of a newly energized commercial empire that was to span the globe, New York, with its

² Russell Shorto, "The Source of New York's Greatness," *The New York Times*, September 07, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/08/opinion/the-source-of-new-yorks-greatness.html>.

pluralistic, business-savvy and upwardly mobile society, rose to unimagined heights.”³ “The many definitions of the city have only one element in common: namely that the city consists simply of a collection of one or more separate dwellings but is a relatively closed settlement. Economically defined, the city is a settlement the inhabitants of which live primarily off trade and commerce rather than agriculture.”⁴

Economic versatility can be established in at least two ways by the presence of a feudal estate or a market. The economic and political needs of a feudal or princely estate can encourage specialization in trade products in providing a demand for which work is performed and are bartered. The other method of establishing economic versatility is more generally important for the “city”; this is the existence in the place of settlement of a regular rather than an occasional exchange of goods. The market becomes an essential component in the livelihood of the settlers.⁵

For the city, the location is its natural resource and luck, the immigrants shaped the city’s cultural environment. “From the Dutch, the English, and the Scots in the pre-Revolutionary years, Irish and German immigrants in the nineteenth century, Italians and eastern European Jews in the early twentieth, and immigrants from China and the Caribbean in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Immigration to NYC was important in shaping the city’s history and Americans’ perceptions of its immigrants.”⁶

³ Shorto, "The Source of New York's Greatness."

⁴Max Weber, "The Nature of the City," in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Educational Division, 1969), 23.

⁵ Weber, "The Nature of the City," 24.

⁶ Tyler Anbinder, *City of Dreams: The 400-year Epic History of Immigrant New York*, (Boston ; New York: Mariner Books, 2017), XXV.

Reasons to Migrate

When people choose to migrate or become an immigrant, there must be reasons behind that.

1. To escape past or future persecution based on race, religion, nationality, and/or membership in a particular social group or political opinion

This reason is basically how America is first being established, the Puritans in order to avoid political persecution, they left Britain and migrated to the American Continent.

2. To escape conflict or violence

The most often cases that we can see now were the refugees from Syria, these people lost their home because of wars between different regimes.

3. To find refuge after being displaced due to environmental factors

Natural disasters, soil erosion and environmental factors caused by climate change pose a serious threat to human beings living in poverty-stricken areas. We call these people climate refugees, which is a quite relatively new term.

4. To seek superior health care

Imagine being plagued by serious health problems, but living in a country that only offers limited health care services. In order to survive, people would choose to migrate to a place where it has excellent environment and ideal healing conditions.

5. To escape poverty

This is perhaps the most common cause of immigration, where people would migrate from a developing country to a developed country with much more opportunities for wealth and a better life.

6. To offer more opportunities to children

Parents would always want to give their kids best they can offer, migration would be a great opportunity to change the life of the family. Sometimes for the children's education and future employment, parents often make the most difficult decisions to immigrate from their home country to other countries.

7. Family reunification

The most common legal basis for immigration to the United States is the Family Reunion Act, which allocates 74% of the quota to those who receive a family reunion visa for new immigrants. In the United States, there are some people who are only working abroad to get green cards, and they are expected to reunite a young and old in the United States in the shortest possible time.

8. For educational purposes

Some people in this group have better educational opportunities in the developed countries, other people just want to experience the new environment. The trend of migrating for education is becoming popular and the age is getting younger and younger.

9. For jobs and business opportunities

In some cases, people with a high level of education, professional skills, and language proficiency can provide immigrants with more opportunities than their own countries. Examples such as Germany accepts those highly educated and skilled Syrians during the Syrian Civil War.

10. Marriage

In today's globalized world, long-distance dating is becoming possible. But if two people want to continue to develop, it is an obvious choice to get together across the ocean. This method is feasible even between the same sex.⁷

The History of Chinese Immigration

Today, Chinese people traveling abroad will find that in many countries, the probability of encountering local Chinese is getting higher and higher. In China, immigration has increasingly become a topic of concern. According to Hurun Report, 90% of Chinese HNWI (High-net-worth Individuals) considering emigration plan to retire in China and USA is the country of choice for 80% of Chinese HNWI considering immigration.⁸ These HNWI generally refer to individuals with a net asset value of more than 6 million yuan (about 1 million dollars).

⁷ Christina Nuñez, Erica Sanchez, and Janna Sepehr, "Why People Migrate: 11 Surprising Reasons." *Global Citizen*, December 4, 2014, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/why-people-migrate-11-surprising-reasons/>.

⁸ "Hurun Report Releases Immigration and the Chinese HNWI 2018," Hurun Report-Details, last modified June 30th, <http://www.hurun.net/EN/Article/Details?num=670D27DA6723>.

	Country	Score (Change)
1 -	USA	8.7 (-0.3)
2 ↑	UK	8.5 (+0.1)
3 ↑	Ireland	7.9 (+1.6)
4 ↓	Canada	7.8 (-0.9)
5 ↓	Australia	7.5 (-0.3)
6 *	Greece	7.0
7 ↓	Portugal	6.7 (+0.3)
8 -	Spain	6.5 (+0.3)
9 ↓	Malta	6.4 (-0.1)
10 *	Cyprus	6.3

Source: *Immigration and the Chinese HNWI 2018*, by Visas Consulting Group and Hurun Report

- same as last year ↑ up ↓ down *new to top 10

This phenomenon has brought us a question worth pondering: Why are more and more Chinese people choosing to emigrate to settle abroad?⁹ For many Chinese who was born after the 80s, the first impression of "immigration, going abroad" when they were young should be the workers in the movie "Huang Feihong" who were trying to smuggle to Nanyang (Nanyang is the name of Southeast Asia during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It is a concept centered on China) for the gold rush. Today, when we refer to immigration, more is to change the status and settle abroad by means of study abroad, skilled immigration, investment immigration and other means.

As a Chinese international student, the experience of studying in a different country would bring a totally different adventure in his or her life. Studying abroad will greatly broaden our horizons, experience multiculturalism, exercise the ability to think independently, cultivate a calm attitude towards victory and failure, and help people understand human nature and society in a more comprehensive way. What is more, it seems like the more people spend time in an alienated place, the more he or she loves more on their hometowns. In my personal case, I don't think I will ever get a chance to learn deeply about the LGBTQ group in China.

⁹ "Hurun Report Releases Immigration and the Chinese HNWIs 2018."

The another to immigrate now is to migrate by skills, usually the skills or language that a certain country is lacked of happened to meet the skills of the potential immigrants, countries like Canada and Australia are usually the popular destination for these kind of immigrants. Investment immigration is the most welcoming way used by the rich people, where these millionaires must be willing to invest funds in the target immigration country to promote the economic development, increase employment opportunities and enrich cultural life of the targeted country. The reward is that the main applicant and the whole family can obtain the status of the investor, thus enjoying the benefits and insurance benefits equivalent to the citizens of the target country. In addition, children of the applicant can enjoy the right to free or preferential education, as well as the convenience of the family to enter and leave the country freely.

Then, when did the Chinese began their large-scale overseas immigration? In 1567, the Ming Dynasty ordered the lifting of the long-term sea ban policy, marking the opening of China's overseas immigration history. In other words, since the Ming Dynasty, a large number of Chinese have chosen to emigrate overseas. At that time, the main destination of Chinese immigrants was in Southeast Asia. Until the end of the 20th century, 70% of Chinese who left their homeland lived in Southeast Asia. About half of the world's 37 million overseas Chinese lived in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia.¹⁰

The reason why Southeast Asia had become a popular area for immigrants in Chinese history was closely related to the lifestyles of ancient Chinese who lived in the coastal areas.

¹⁰ Guotu Zhuang, "Overseas Chinese and Chinese Distribution Status and Development Trends," Overseas Chinese Affairs Research, 2010, <http://qwgzjy.gqb.gov.cn/yjyt/155/1830.shtml>. (Translation are my own)

Most of China's coastal residents “lived on the sea” and if they abandoned fishery and overseas trade, they would not make a living . In the context of the long-term “sea-ban” in ancient times, moving to Southeast Asia was conducive to a better life for Chinese coastal residents.

In the hundreds of years from the Ming Dynasty to the middle and late Qing Dynasty, immigration has been gradually carried out. The first wave of large-scale immigration in the true sense of Chinese history occurred in the centuries of the 19th century.

There are two main factors contributing to the emergence of immigration. On the one hand, since the beginning of 1567 in the country, the Ming Dynasty opened some of the ports for trades, and domestic private overseas trade had developed to a certain extent. People was familiar with overseas, especially Southeast Asia. Before the first Opium War in 1840, the Qing Dynasty’s national strength was weak because of the “Closed Country” policy of Qianlong Emperor who believed that this policy would efficiently stop the trade of opium with the British. At that time, the number of Chinese who had made a living in the “Lower Nanyang” business reached more than 1.5 million. ¹¹On the other hand, the rise of the North American gold rush. In 1848, gold mines were discovered in California, attracting gold diggers from all over the world. “By the end of the 1850s, Chinese immigrants made up one-fifth of the population of the four counties that constituted the Southern Mines.”¹²In 1858, Canada's gold rush began. A few years later, thousands of Chinese moved to British Columbia in Canada. When the first wave of gold rush in Melbourne, Australia, was launched in 1851, it also attracted a large number of Chinese people.

¹¹ Zhuang, "Overseas Chinese and Chinese Distribution Status and Development Trends."

¹² "Chinese Immigrants and the Gold Rush," PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goldrush-chinese-immigrants/>.

The Chinese were the first Asians to immigrate to the United States in large numbers and also the first Asians to seek to be recognized as American citizens. “These immigrants faced an uphill struggle. Since the Chinese first began immigrating to this country, a widely shared assumption had existed in the white community that Chinese could not become naturalized American citizens. The assumption had foundation in the law.”¹³ In Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment, reads: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.” Thus, in Section 2169 of the Revised Statutes of 1875, as the codification was called-now read: "The provisions of this title shall apply to aliens being free white persons and to aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent."¹⁴ The law was mainly to grant citizenship to the liberated blacks after the Civil War and protect their equal rights and interests. In 1882 Congress authoritatively settled the question of Chinese eligibility for naturalization by including in the first Chinese Exclusion Act a provision forbidding any court, whether state or federal, from admitting any Chinese to citizenship.¹⁵ The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first - and, as it turns out, the only - federal law to exclude a whole group of people by nationality.¹⁶ But what really makes this citizen's right recognized by the entire American society and law is a Chinese whose name is Wong Kim Ark.

¹³ Charles J. McClain, "Tortuous Path, Elusive Goal: The Asian Quest for American Citizenship," *Asian American Law Journal* (January 1995), 34-35.

¹⁴ McClain, "Tortuous Path, Elusive Goal: The Asian Quest for American Citizenship," 35.

¹⁵ McClain, 37.

¹⁶ Peter Kwong, *Chinatown, New York: Labor and Politics, 1930-1950*, (New York: New Press, 2001,) 26.

In 1871, Wong was born in San Francisco, USA, and his parents were citizens of the Qing Dynasty. In 1890, Wong's parents returned to settle in Guangdong, China. Four years later, when he returned to China to visit his parents and returned to the United States, he was refused entry by the Immigration Bureau. The immigration officer believed that the parents of Wong Kim Ark were not Americans, even if he was born in the United States, he was not considered as an American, he was subject to the Chinese Exclusion Act. The opinion in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, handed down by Justice Gray, ran to over fifty pages. He and his colleagues in the majority were convinced of the correctness of the argument advanced by Wong Kim Ark that before the Civil War, American jurisprudence had accepted the English common law principle of citizenship by birth and that this view had been adopted by the Framers of Section One of the Fourteenth Amendment. As Justice Gray put it, to reach the result urged by the United States would cast doubt upon the citizenship of "thousands of persons of English, Scotch, Irish, German or other European parentage, who have always been considered and treated as citizens of the United States."¹⁷

However during this period, the Chinese government was in a state of near collapse, too weak to make effective protest against the U.S. government. This, in turn, spurred the anti-Chinese forces on to even more aggressive measures: in 1904 the Exclusion Act was extended indefinitely, and in 1924 foreign-born wives and children of U.S. citizens of Chinese ancestry were also excluded.¹⁸ During this time, not only the living conditions of the Chinese immigrants were being contested, the ongoing criticizing on the "unpatriotic" attitude that Chinese immigrants had towards U.S., under these hostile circumstances, many Chinese in fact hoped to

¹⁷ McClain, 41.

¹⁸ Kwong, *Chinatown, New York: Labor and Politics, 1930-1950*, 28.

return to their homeland as fast as possible, and lost the interest in the United States, neither they would still invest the money in the local economy, nor they would participate in the political movement.

Chapter 2: Distinction, Connection and Swing

In the last chapter we looked at the history and origin of the immigrants in New York City, and we ended with the struggle of the early immigrants in the late 1800s. In this chapter, I would like to talk about the people who are living in and running this city. I will rely on the interview I did with five participants to expand this chapter.

The reason for me to put the interviews I have done in my sproj is that these interviews offer me more information about the distinct feelings and experiences of the NYC as well as the different perspectives of the Chinese immigrants and the Chinese-Americans. As a Chinese citizen who have been living around the city for four years, I consider myself as someone with decent knowledge of the Chinese community in NYC. In other words, I believe I have much less ideas about the history and the social political environment of the community. However, they reshape my understandings in different ways.

All of the five participants I chose are quite diverse, they are distinct from each other from several aspects, like genders, family backgrounds, age social status. Such variety allows me to develop a more comprehensive analysis of the Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Americans living in NYC. I set two different sets of questions for them, but these questions all include three important aspects: comparison and contrast of culture in terms of geographical locations, interaction with other ethnic groups and self-recognized identity.

For the first aspects, all of the candidates were asked about similarities and differences between the changing environments: Chinese immigrants are being asked to compare the urban life in China and NYC, while the Chinese Americans are being asked about the it in multiple Chinatowns in the city. (Since some of the Chinese American participant visited China, the

situation will be concerned.) Surprisingly, all of the participants expressed that, to them, the NYC is just like any other city in China: “Since they are both cities, they look nearly the same.”¹⁹Such answer makes me recall a moment of my high school, when one of my foreign teachers once raised the point that he could not differentiate any city from others, especially when they are being extracted from afar. In my opinion, there are two main reasons for the cities becoming less distinctive from each other: westernization and economic growth.

It is true that urban lives are very different between the East and the West. However, why are our city becoming less and less distinctive? The first reason would be the spread of westernization. The “West” has always represented modernization that originates in Europe. The core this modernization includes science, democracy and the rule of law. These modern ideas, which are accepted by the vast majority of people today, are closely related to the Western cultural traditions. European and American countries are the first to complete modernization. The process of the worldwide modernization is, in another of speaking, the global expansion of modern civilization in both Europe and the United States. China's recent modernization is a process for drawing closer toward as well as learning from a higher civilization. It seems, in China, like every thing that is labeled “foreign” is good.²⁰ Indeed, from a social point of view, all kinds of western festivals--such as Valentine's Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas-- are sought after by the young Chinese people nowadays, At the same time, businessmen in the society constantly whitewash these festivals to stimulate the purchasing desire of consumers. Chinese traditional festivals, in contrast, are difficult to assimilate with material desire due to their seriousness. The fact that Western festivals are more in line with it leads to the second

¹⁹ Participant 3 (wished to be anonymous) in discussion with the author, February 2019.

²⁰ As “洋气” in Chinese

point: economic power. The whole development of capitalism is a creatively destructive process. If the old does not go, the new would never come. Therefore, in order to fit the new era and the incoming population, every city needs to be, and indeed has been, forced to remake the urban planning, which leads to the massive destroying and rebuilding process. When they are in the process, they will look up to the highest standard, which, to them, is the Western standard. As the result, these have become the reasons that the cities around the world are much look alike.

Two of the participants express the opinion that NYC is far from what they have imagined, “My imagination was that NYC is the most thriving place on this planet, so I thought all the facilities they had should be the best around the world. What is more, they all think that their hometown is better, “...what we have in China, they have it here as well; what we don’t have in China, they are not necessarily to have it here. Delivery services in China is way cheaper and faster than the ones in NYC, and the metro system in China is way cleaner and safer.... Even though the price is high, I am not satisfied by the quality and experience of their services.”²¹

Other participants would compare Beijing and Flushing:

Similarities would be like in Queens, or be more specific, Flushing, you can definitely live there without speaking English, because there are a lot people living there speaking Chinese. So comparing to other Asian Americans, I actually speak a lot of Chinese. And also the food, Flushing is like this ‘mini China’, so the food there is very similar. The difference is that Flushing feels older than China: In Beijing, the development is fast; In Flushing, most buildings are old. I didn’t realize there is a lot less English. In Flushing, even though the signs are in Chinese, there is still English at the bottom. I can speak Chinese, but I can’t read or write. While in Beijing, I can’t read the menu, I can’t read the sign. Sometimes it would only be the Pinyin of it, these didn’t help at all. This was not what I was expecting. When I first got there, I realized everyone was Chinese. Even in Flushing, there are still other ethnic groups there, but in Beijing, Chinese is the only group.²²

²¹ Steven Li, in discussion with the author, January 2019.

²² Sherry, in discussion with the author, February 2019.

Well for another participant, the difference of Chinatown and Flushing for him is the language barrier. “As a Chinese American, I found language barrier when I was working in Flushing. When I tried to order anything, they don’t understand Cantonese or English, so I have to point to the menu to indicate what I want.” What is more, “Flushing is more attractive when you are trying to stay temporarily, most people won’t move to Flushing if they tend to live permanently, since it is so far away from the city. The living space in Manhattan Chinatown after all those years is nearly maxed out, there is no way to get more new people living here.” As it for myself, I found the found that Chinatown in Manhattan is more keened to the “foreigners“.²³ Here, the concept “foreigners” is strange. Both the Chinatown and Flushing are part of NYC which is part of the United States territory, people from other countries should be a foreigner to this place. However, Chinatown is a place that looks familiar to the immigrants but keeping a certain distance away from the locals. Even though they are all American citizens in some ways, these immigrants seems to have more connection.

The second question that sets for the participants is their interactions with different groups of people which can be different in terms of background or simply ethnicity. The first aim of this question is trying to find the relationship between the change in human behavior and the change in the social environment. In addition, the question would also reveal the stereotypes of the those Chinese people living in the U.S. created by the mismatch of the understanding of cultures.

One of the participants raised the point that people in the new environment would behave in accordance with their reasons of migration:

²³ Sherry, in discussion with the author.

“The Chinese Car Service in NYC would be a great example. Most of the drivers came from Guangdong province. After chatting with them, I found out that the living condition in NYC is generally worse than the condition they had in China, but they all choose to exert all their strength trying to stay in the US. This really confused me and my sense of worth. Their life experience would vary their values, they might think that staying in the US give them a certain, but I am not so sure what this is value is. Another example would be international students like us. In the same time, we all came from different backgrounds. Some of the students whose family is extremely rich, the reason they are here is just trying to get a diploma. Night clubs, pubs, absence for classes and other negative words (considered by the Chinese) are always connected to these people. They came here for fun and experiences, not for the knowledge and opportunities. Others like me, who came here for a brighter future. Since the support from our parents did not come from nowhere, we worked hard, trying to create a path for our goals.”²⁴

Nonetheless, another participant claimed that the changes in behavior and life pattern--whether they are made intentionally or unconsciously as being influenced--that she has had when moving into an unfamiliar living place, are actually trivial and not important. For most immigrants, the only changing thing that is considered crucial, as she believed, is their mind. “We have to understand how things work differently here in order for us to follow their rules and social conventions: Do in Rome as Rome does.”²⁵

I would neither comment on nor judge the responses of these two participants since I totally understand that different people hold different views on one issue. However, for me, personally, I believe that people’s performance will be dominated by the environment they are living in. I have always been familiar with the famous Chinese story called “Mencius’s Mother Moving Three Times” (Meng Mu San Qian): Mencius’s Mother moves their home three times in order to find the best environment for her son to study. It reflects on how a truly good educational

²⁴ Steven, in discussion with the author.

²⁵ Participant 3 (wished to be anonymous) in discussion with the author.

environment would impact on the efficiency and capability of people's behavior in terms of working and studying. Besides, there is another traditional saying in China that "proximity to cinnabar makes you red, to pitch makes you black"²⁶--it suggests the influence that the social condition can put on people. Both of the two things mentioned above show that environment would create significant effect on one's life.

In my opinion, the influence that an environment could have upon a person's life and behavior is related to their ideology, whether it is being completely independent, as well as their values, whether they are being solidly formed. When a person has not yet developed an independent ideology and a relatively mature recognition of values, the environment has a greater impact on them. As one's thinking grows into a certain level, the cognitive perception and views become comprehensive, and the influence of environment consequently become small.

Such idea is also closely related to the natural process of one's growth. When a man is young without much experience about the society, he can be seen as a pure, clean piece of paper, waiting and willing to accept notes and drawings on it. In other words, he is innocent, full of curiosity and imagination about the world. If people laugh at him, he will laugh back at them. He will learn basically everything that he observed from others' behaviors. During this immature period, children get along with their parents the most, and their parents therefore have the greatest influence on him. Their words and deeds have a subtle impact on their children, and this can be summarized as the impact from the original family. So, it is said that the problem of children is the reflection of that of the family. As children grow up, they would encounter another essential element within the society that influence them, the schools. It is a long period

²⁶ “近朱者赤，近墨者黑” in Chinese.

of time for children to learn knowledge from various fields, observe people outside from their comfort zones, and have their own recognition of what is right and wrong. To be more specific, within the school environment, the children get much more influential factors besides the parents, such as teachers, classmates and social friends. As a result, parents will try to let their children get into a good school, where has not only the well quality of teaching but also a proper learning atmosphere. In such atmosphere, children automatically develop a positive character as well as Vice Versa. With this growing process, children would gradually turn into relatively mature and complete individuals, as their values are mostly formed and ideology becomes more independent. Therefore, consequently, the impact of the environment on them would be small and less crucial. Of course, such result has little to do with age, just as some people are older yet their cognitive independence would still be easily influenced by the outside world. Contrastly, people with a better growing process, even though they may be young, are very opinionated and relatively less affected by the external environment.

All of the participants started their childhood or their first experiences in United States with other Chinese or immigrated kids. Indeed, when people enter any kind of new environment, they always tend to find a target who has a similar background with them or simply look alike. There used to be a flyer in the Kline Commons at Bard College during the Black History Month saying “Why are all the black kids sitting together at the same table?” I laughed so hard, thinking that all the Asian kids would be sitting together in the dining hall, too Why is that? There seems to be a sort of natural selection here that is hard to explain--we generally prefer to trust the things we are familiar with. One of the most obvious examples is our taste buds: we all like our home cuisine, even though the it may not be able to compete with other cuisines; your taste would always tell you that the home cuisine is better, since this sense is dominated by your subjective

mind rather than objective fact. Similarly, when we get into a new environment, we always try to understand and judge the coming situations with our past experiences and order things in the old way that we used to do. When we see people with the same race, language or home country, we would be likely assume that these people would have something in common with you, so you would feel more comfortable and relaxed to stay with them.

Now, since the idea of how similarities and differences between people would lead to distinct ways of behavior has discussed, it is necessary to bring out the issue of *stereotypes*. One of the participants shared her story on stereotypes when she was young. “There is one that has taken root in my soul, and I will never forget this. When I was about third grade in elementary school in Queens, there was a book with all the characters having slit eyes. It wasn’t meant to be racist, so all the kids would pull their eyes backwards from the temple to mimic the image. I also joined it because I was a kid. Then there was one kid saying: ‘Why are you doing this? Your eyes are already like that.’ Then I beat kid up. In China, people would consider my eyes as big, but here in America, your eye size have to be small just because you are Asian.”²⁷ Stereotypes can be intentional or unintentional. Whether on purpose or accidentally, stereotypes is the biased idea that people put on certain people or subject; in other words, people choose to put a part for a whole. The misunderstanding of each other and the self-pride would be the absolute cause of these circumstances.

The last question that I raised for my participants is their recognitions of their own identity. However, before getting into the participants’ responses, I shall clarify the definition of “identity” according to my knowledge. Whether measured by the amount of energy individuals

²⁷ Sherry, in discussion with the author.

expend claiming, cultivating, expressing, or bemoaning the lack of it or by the amount of attention devoted to it by institutions that profess to address or are said to reflect popular interests and issues, “it is clear that being, in the sense of belonging—to ethnic, national, religious, racial, indigenous, sexual, or any of a range of otherwise affectively charged, socially recognizable corporate groups—is among the most compelling of contemporary concerns.”²⁸

From my own understanding influenced by neo-confucianism, China is a country that pays certain attention to the issue of identity, and its citizens’ living resources are mainly allocated according to the role each person plays in society in terms of their identity. Ancient Chinese society can be seen a society dominated by the idea of identity, which is mainly embodied in monarchy, paternity and authority of the husband--there exist absolutely personal domination between the monarch and the minister, father and son, husband and wife. In other words, there was no equality between people at all. Just as the saying goes, "If a king wants his minister to die, he has to die; if a father wants his son to die, he has to die." As social and economic development has began to take place in the society, the ancient manners and thoughts become institutionalized, influencing our daily actions and moral beliefs.

Since the issue of identity has always remained its significance and impact within the process of civilization of the country, it is necessary to analysis what the identity means to a Chinese citizen. There are four parts crucially involved in one’s identity:

²⁸ Lauren Leve, “ ‘Identity’ ,” *Current Anthropology* 52, no. 4 (2011): 513-35, doi:10.1086/660999.

1. The meaning of identity itself.

It suggests to who and what kind of individual that the person is. Initially, in the human society, identity refers only to the sign and symbol of identifying individual differences in the interaction of each one within the community. Thus, it gives order and structure to the society. Nowadays, in modern society, identity leads to the recognition and appellation of individual members in the community, which can be divided into two categories: Objectively, it is the general facts that one born with, such as origin, age, generation, gender, race, etc; subjectively, it refers to the internal identity: insiders and outsiders of a group, acquaintances and strangers, gentlemen and villains. In identity society, people regard identity as the main way to obtain privileges. In this way, identity becomes the basic criterion to determine people's status, rights and obligations. The essence of identity is to pay attention to differences, intimacy, dignity and inferiority, so the idea of identity has become the watershed or the root of all differences between people.

2. Declaring the social position.

It represents one's status within a certain environment, whether it is work place, family or even a night pub. In other words, it indicates to what kinds of relationship does a person have with the other party, such as employee-employer relationship, father-son relationship and colleague relationship, etc. Once the identity is determined, such relationships would consequently appear, and it can be roughly divided into two categories: vertical and horizontal. The former one is superior-inferior relationship, such as parent-child relationship, and the latter one is parallel relationship, such as sibling relation, friendship, etc. Even though some people

would argue that the identity hierarchy divides people into various grades and ranks, the fact that stable society is running based on relationships cannot be ignored, since the relationships provide the crucial guideline for people's behavioral pattern when dealing with others. Therefore, declaring the social position is necessary for every community, as it provides people the norms of moral conduct.

Since the relationships determined by one's identity can be splitted into two main parts, however, what is the difference of the so called "guidelines" between the two parts? For the vertical one, the relationship between people is usually quite absolute, which means that they are being limited to their social roles. Under this circumstance, stereotypes are automatically applied, and people would consequently follow the traditions in response to each stereotype. On the other hand, horizontal relationship has much more freedom in it, so the roles played by people are more relaxed and can be adjusted easily.

Ideology of identity system has controlled the order of the Chinese society for many years and formed an important structural part of the Chinese culture. What is more, as the basic content of Chinese socialization, the idea has passed and been strengthened through generation by generation, and thus it seems to have become a natural meaning to the Chinese people. As children grow up and reach independent adulthood, the belief of the identity system would stay deeply in their subconsciousness. When it is applied to control an individual's behavior, such action is mostly unconscious. When the thinking hidden in the subconsciousness is activated into the behavioral orientation by external situations, the corresponding reaction will appear unconsciously. The more these subconscious thoughts are formed and strengthened in the early stage of an individual, the stronger the degree of their associated individual emotions would be. As the result, individuals feel natural and pleasant to adapt this kind of subconscious ideas. On

the other hand, if there are certain behaviors that are inconsistent with their mind under the idea of identity system, people would be in discomfort or rigidly against those contrasting act.

The Chinese people's concept of identity is the crystallization of the cultural transmission of traditional identity system and social development: it is a cultivation of the ongoing process of the Chinese socialization, the forming in the adulthood, and the result of Chinese family education. As the result, the cultivation has become the main orientation of the concept of Chinese identity system. In order to change this “old-fashioned” tradition, there are two potential ways: to change the teaching and learning method-- this is one of the main reasons why many students choose to study abroad--and to have a radical change in the current social and political structure, which may leads to the break down of the country.

From the previous discussion we can draw the conclusion that, from the perspective of Orientals, identity is inherent and influenced by the surrounding environment. For the Chinese immigrants, as I mentioned previously in this chapter, their identities have never been affected by the changing of the living place; the changes, for them, have remained at an “ineffectual level”, as one of the participants expressed: “Even if I got a green card in the future, it is only a way of means for me to enter US, I am still a Chinese.”²⁹ Contrastly, after interviewing the Chinese-American participants, I felt that identity is a characteristic given by the environment and surrounding people. What is more, for the Chinese-Americans, it seems like in the process of growing up, their identity would always alter as the degree of assimilation into the society change.

²⁹ Steven, in discussion with the author.

For some of the Chinese-Americans, it is hard for them to answer the question of recognition on their own identities. Most of them, when confronted the question of how they identify themselves, initially, would consider themselves as Chinese. However, as they get more integrated with the society, most of them would say: "I'm a Chinese-American." However, they know neither what degree of Chinese they are, nor what degree of American they are. People who have no idea about them would judge their identity mirrorly by their appearance, and therefore they got many comments saying they are Korean or Japanese--they are just Asian to those others. If the "Asian-appearance" can speak Chinese, then they become Chinese in others' eyes. Similarly, people in China would consider those Chinese-Americans as Chinese when they saw their appearance, but once they started talking Chinese with weird accents, they became American to the Chinese Citizens. Here, we can see a mismatch between the self-emerged identity and the recognition from other people that a Chinese-American face, and it creates an alienation between people which segregates them. Even though this may not be true in the U.S. West Coast, since the interaction between the Chinese, Japanese and the Filipinos actually gave the rise of the Pan-Asian identity, it is less common here in NYC because the Chinese immigrants and the Chinese-Americans are quite isolated from other groups, "Because you barely see any Asian person, not just any Chinese, above 14th street."³⁰ (in 1975)

It seems like for the Americans, since the Chinese immigrants and the Chinese-Americans look alike, it is hardly to tell any difference between these two groups. However, for the Chinese, the two identities represent totally two different kinds of people, and there are different tensions between the groups. For some of the Chinese immigrants, they consider the Chinese-Americans

³⁰ Steve Yip, in discussion with the author, March 2019.

as truly Chinese: “Even though these people are the generations of the immigrants, fundamentally speaking, you are still Chinese.”³¹ For them, what sometimes annoyed them is that many of the Chinese-Americans would choose to speak English with the immigrants even if they could speak proper Chinese. “They consider themselves with priority and advantage, they like to show-off their language skills. They are traitors.” On the other hand, other immigrants would suggest that “even they have the appearance of Chinese, they are Americans in their blood and heart.”³² Most of the Chinese-American would celebrate traditional festivals such as the Chinese New Year, but they are either losing or not caring at all about the inner core, or the meaning of those rituals.. As one of the participants shared her experience: “I have two cousins who are Chinese-American. When we are having dinner together, the way they behave is quite different from typical Chinese. They are Americans to me.”³³

Here, I would like to introduce a slur, it is called “Banana”-- those people born in China yet growing in the United States or the ABCs (American-Born Chinese). Although they are also with black hair and yellow skin, they do not know Chinese and speak authentic American English. Since childhood, they have been influenced by the American culture and education. Their way of thinking and values are totally Americanized and thus become totally different from those of their immigrants. Now, the concept of “Banana” is no longer confined to the United States but extends to the whole overseas, referring to children of the second and third generations overseas Chinese immigrants. As I discussed previously in the chapter, there is a mismatch between the

³¹ Steven, in discussion with the author.

³² Steven.

³³ Participant 3, in discussion with the author.

so-called “identity” and “culture”. On the one hand, "Bananas" are educated completely in the West. Their way of thinking can be said to be the same as that of Western people. The values and outlook of the Western world are the ground of their behavior, which is obviously unacceptable to their parents, the first generation of immigrants with traditional Chinese way of thinking. "Bananas" are not accustomed to the conservative behavior of their parents, whereas the parents do not understand their children's value as it leads to a certain open behavior such as directly showing their characteristic. On the other hand, “Bananas” and their parents usually have serious debate on the recognition of Chinese culture. As parents who have received traditional Chinese education, of course, they want their children to be both Chinese and Western. However, it is not easy for the children to grow up in the English speaking environment with the senses of American humor and passion well, at the same time, understanding the culture of their ancestral country. Therefore, within a family of Chinese immigrants that involves two generations, which means two ways of thinking, contradictions are inevitable. With black hair and yellow skin, they can speak fluent English, but can not understand rarely any Chinese characters. The real Chinese would ask them: “Are you Chinese? Why don't you speak our language?” Interestingly, the non-Chinese would ask them: “Are you Chinese? How can you speak English so well?” Perhaps the best description of their embarrassment is the "people in the crack".

Such treatment that the Chinese-American get in the United States has already made those people questioning their belonging, yet, what is worse, even in China, there is a sense of national intention that goes against these Chinese-Americans. As I schemed through the internet, the word “Banana” has a sense of derogatory in it. On top of that, the stereotype of “every Chinese-American is anti-Chinese” is being created by the mass. Some of these comments even compared

the Chinese-Americans with the traitor to Chinese during the World War II; in other words, these netizens never accepts the Chinese-Americans as a part of their group.

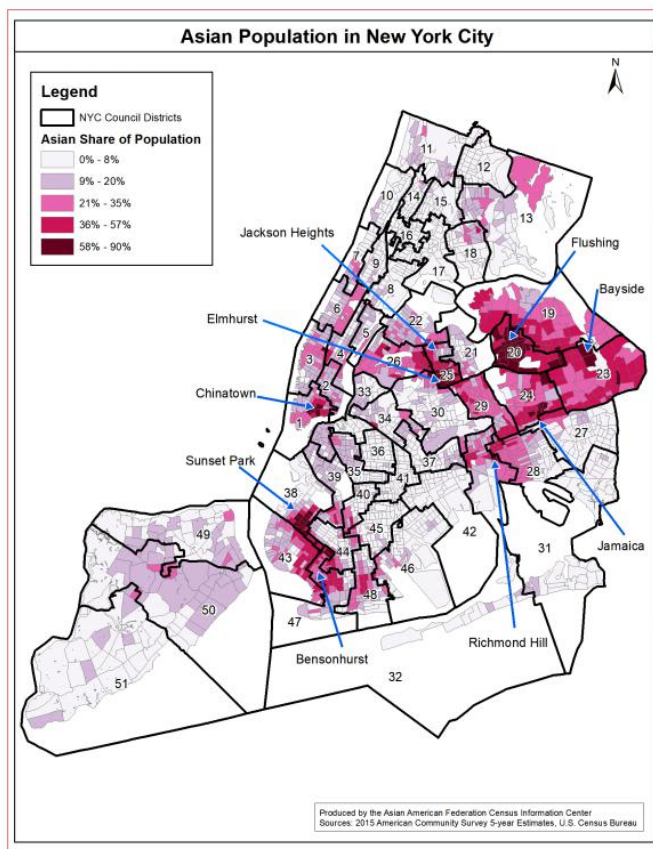
Similarly, the Chinese-Americans have created the same kind of slur for the Chinese immigrants--“the phrases ‘fresh off the boat’ (*FOB*), ‘off the boat’ (*OTB*), ‘banana boat’ (*BB*), or simply ‘boat’ are terms used to describe immigrants who have arrived from a foreign nation and have yet to assimilate into the host nation's culture, language, and behaviour, but still continue with their ethnic ideas and practices.”³⁴ For these “FOBs”, the first thing that they face when arriving at another country is the alienation of the new environment, and the biggest problem among all these alienations is the language barrier:

We used to live in lower Manhattan, Chinatown. Despite the strangeness of arriving at a new environment, I still felt kind of alienated. When I first arrived, I spent about one or two weeks staying in dorm, not going anywhere. The only case that I was forced to go out was because my mom needs communication in English with other people. My parents does not speak English, but I can. They thought I had the ability to start a basic conversation with native speakers.³⁵

These barriers, to a large extent, limit the process of assimilation, and thus it is understandable that most Chinese immigrants have chosen to stay in Chinatowns rather than other local neighborhoods. There are about 47000 Chinese people living in District 1 in Lower

³⁴ Daniel Goleman, *Social intelligence: the new science of human relationships*, (London; Arrow Books, 2013,) 305.

³⁵ Steven, in discussion with the author.



³⁶Manhattan and about 73000 Chinese in District 20 in Flushing.³⁷ With this large base of numbers, these immigrants, who cannot speak Chinese, can find comfortable infrastructures such as banks, grocery stores, or restaurants that provide Chinese-speaking services. Even though it is great that the community is big enough to support the new comers, the immigrants

soon realize that if they do not try to assimilate, their life would be harder and cannot be benefitted from other resources outside Chinatown. Nearly 75% of them work in restaurants³⁸-- the first and easiest working place for a new immigrant with little skills. They might had been doing other occupations back in China, but without the English skills, they need to start working hard from the bottom.

In my interview, all of the Chinese-American participants were asked about their attitudes toward the Chinese immigrants, and the result can be generalized into one word: opportunity. As one of the participants explained it: "They came here for a better life, we should give them an opportunity to achieve it."³⁹ There are a lot of people who came to this continent in order to

³⁶ Asian American Federation, "New York City Council Districts and Asian Communities (2018)," 2.

³⁷ Asian American Federation, 2.

³⁸ Asian American Federation, 1.

³⁹ Michael Ng, in discussion with the author, March 2019.

escape from the government or poverty. In such condition, because of the “American Dream”, many people believed they are going to have a better life here. The United States has always painted itself as a perfect country that people migrate to in order for a better life, yet it varies degrees of truthness. Many people in China believe in the “American Dream” due to certain news or the way the idea is presented in the media. “People in China always ask me: ‘America has better food, right?’ ‘America has better air, right?’ or ‘They earn more than us, right?’ There is even people ask me: ‘In America, do you go to school? Is it the same kind of school?’”⁴⁰ There is a mythological America that the Chinese people made up in their mind, and it becomes part of the reason that they choose to come here.

Similar to the looking down attitude from the Chinese-Americans to the newly arrivals mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the attitude towards the immigrants still exists; in fact, it does not change at all. Maybe not being as antagonistic as before, it is very clear that there is a cultural difference between the two groups, and that conception is based on the way they are being brought up by the country as well as their opinion and attitude toward the society, racism and everything else.

⁴⁰ Sherry, in discussion with the author.

Chapter 3: The Rise and Fall of Chinatowns

In the last chapter, I discussed the answers given by the participants focusing on the Chinatowns and social identities. In this chapter, I would like to expand the discussion on Chinatowns based on my own understanding.

The New York City Metropolitan Area contains the largest ethnic Chinese population outside Asia, enumerating an estimated 735,019 individuals as of 2012⁴¹, “including at least 9 Chinatowns, comprising the original Manhattan Chinatown, one in Queens (the Flushing Chinatown), three in Brooklyn (the Sunset Park Chinatown, the Avenue U Chinatown, and the Bensonhurst Chinatown), and one each in Edison, New Jersey and Nassau County, Long Island, not to mention fledgling ethnic Chinese enclaves throughout the New York City Metropolitan area.”⁴²

It is said that the first Chinese permanent resident in New York was a Cantonese named Ah Ken. He arrived in New York City in 1858, initially hawking cigars on the street and earning some money. Later, he opened a small boarding apartment and rented beds for the newly arrived Chinese. As a landlord, he earned about 100 dollars a month. Ah Ken also opened a shop selling Oriental groceries, dried fruits and vegetables. But it is said that most of Ah Ken’s profits came from gambling stalls and opium shops hidden upstairs in the grocery store.

⁴¹ “ACS DEMOGRAPHIC AND HOUSING ESTIMATES 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates New York-Newark-Bridgeport, NY-NJ-CT-PA CSA,” U.S. Census Bureau, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_12_1YR_DP05&prodType=table.

⁴² Sarah Waxman, “The History of New York’s Chinatown,” <https://www.ny.com/articles/chinatown.html>.

The rise of Chinatown in Manhattan

The rapid growth of the Chinese population in New York is mainly due to the exclusion and bullying of Chinese gold-hunters in San Francisco, California. At the same time, railways across the continental United States were completed, and a large number of Chinese migrated from the West Coast to the East Coast. They mainly went to big cities where job hunting was easier, such as Chicago, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston and New York.

What is more, because of the Chinese Exclusion act, many individuals adjustments were also required of the Chinese in the United States. In their first adjustment, which was occupational, they were forced out of the regular labor force and had to look for new kinds of jobs.⁴³ Before coming to the United States, these immigrants were either uneducated peasants or common labors. On top of that, they worked hard in order to pay the debt of traveling from China to the United States, plus the money they mailed back to China in order to feed their families. With little money left in their pockets, it was hard for them to start any business. So the consequence that fit these requirement was service jobs, such as laundrymen or restaurant servants. Laundries could be open with little capitals and yet did not need much contact with other communities. What is more, once the first Chinese started to work in this industry, others would follow, and the Laundry industry in NYC became a “Chinese” trade. Thus by 1930, 84 percent of the Chinese gainfully employed in New York were in either restaurant or laundry work.⁴⁴ Even till now, laundry industries in the city is still mostly operated by the Chinese. The second adjustment that the Chinese made was geographical change. As we know from the paragraph above, in order to be a less visible target as well as to avoid competition with other

⁴³ Kwong, 37.

⁴⁴ Kwong, 38.

Chinese, the Chinese dispersed throughout the country. ⁴⁵It was during this period that Chinatown began to appear everywhere in the United States, from the West Coast to the East Coast. Among them, New York has become the second largest gathering place for Chinese besides San Francisco.

At first, the Chinese lived in Mott Street, which is considered the main street of Manhattan Chinatown. Later, they gradually expanded to several nearby streets. However, this expansion was initially resisted by the Whites who were reluctant to rent a house to Chinese. Even if they had two or three times the price, they would not rent, preferring to let the house empty. As a small number of Chinese have accumulated money in business, they wanted to buy buildings on the street, but white people wished not to sell them. Apart from discriminating against Chinese, landlords believe that the opening of opium houses by Chinese had reduced the market price of houses.

However, that situation soon changed. In 1880, New York was already reported to have a Chinatown with a population of 800 centered around Mott, Pell, and Bayard streets.⁴⁶By the turn of the century, Chinatown had become a famous Chinatown in New York. Rich Chinese, such as gangsters, had accumulated hundreds of thousands of dollars after years of managing. They spent most of their money purchasing buildings one after another in Mott Street, in order to crowd out other ethnic groups who used to live there. Chinese signs began to hang in front of stores. A Chinese community with totally different language, clothing and customs from other neighborhoods were being created at a glance.

⁴⁵ Kwong, 38.

⁴⁶ Kwong, 38.

Table A.3. Major Occupational Groups of the Chinese in the United States by Decade and Percent, 1940-1970

Major Occupation Groups	1940	1950	1960	1970
Total Employed	36,454	48,409	98,784	181,190
Professional/Technical	2.8%	7.1%	17.9%	26.5%
Managers	20.6%	19.8%	12.7%	8.9%
Sales Workers	11.4%	15.9%	6.6%	4.3%
Clerical Workers	11.4%	15.9%	13.8%	16.8%
Craftsmen	1.2%	2.9%	5.2%	5.4%
Operators	22.6%	17.1%	15.0%	14.8%
Laborers, except farmers	0.7%	1.7%	1.3%	2.3%
Farmers	3.8%	2.6%	1.0%	0.6%
Service Workers	30.4%	28.8%	18.8%	19.6%
Private Household Workers	6.2%	2.6%	1.0%	0.8%
Not Reported	0.3%	1.5%	6.5%	—

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Decennial Censuses* (1940, 1950, 1960, 1970). Cited in Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America*, 195.

Table A.4. Chinese Population for New York State and New York City, 1880-1960

Year	New York State	New York City
1880	909	747
1890	2,935	2,048
1900	7,170	6,321
1910	5,266	4,614
1920	5,793	5,042
1930	9,665	8,414
1940	13,731	12,753
1950	20,171	18,327
1960	37,573	32,831

Source: *The Tenth Census, 1880*, 547; *The Eleventh Census, 1890*, 637; *The Fourteenth Census, 1920*, Vol. III, *Population*, 676, 679; *The Fifteenth Census, 1930*, Vol. III, *Population*, Part II, 297; *The Sixteenth Census, 1940*, Vol. II, *Population*, 157; *The Seventeenth Census, 1950*, Vol. II, *Population*, Part 32, 56, 171; *The Eighteenth Census, 1960*, Vol. I, 100, and Vol. II, *Population*, Part 34, 51.

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The rise of Flushing

In my opinion, Flushing is more like China than Manhattan Chinatown. It was originally a northern county in Queens, close to LaGuardia Airport, which and gradually attracted Chinese and other Asian immigrants in more than 30 years ago. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, there was a wave of Chinese migration from Manhattan, since the lower east side of Manhattan was being heavily affected by the attack, and most of them moved to Flushing. Manhattan's

⁴⁷ Min Zhou, *Contemporary Chinese America Immigration, Ethnicity, and Community Transformation*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2009), 57.

⁴⁸ Xinyang Wang, *Surviving the City: The Chinese Immigrant Experience in New York City, 1890-1970*, (Lanham Md.): Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 136.



FIGURE 3.1 Residential Concentration of Chinese in Extended Chinatown, New York City, Defined by 1980 Census Tracts. (Source: Adapted from Min Zhou, *Chinatown: The Socio-economic Potential of an Urban Enclave* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992], p. 188, fig. 8-1.)

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Chinatown is stagnant in a sense, like the hour hand on the clock is no longer ticking, or the history textbook stops on that page. Contrastly, in Flushing, from the expansion of the street to the construction of infrastructure, it follows the development track of any administrative region. Restaurants that are popular in mainland China or Manhattan will quickly come to Flushing to bloom and expand their markets. There are indications that Flushing seems to have more of a shadow of China's domestic development than Manhattan's Chinatown.

The name "Flushing" comes from the Dutch colonists from the seventeenth century. "Flushing" is an English transliteration of "Vlissingen", a city in the southwest of the Netherlands. In 1939 and 1964, two World Expos held in Flushing were an important opportunity for the development of Flushing. The building left behind by the Expo is located in Flushing--the Meadows--Corona Park--which later became the home of the National Tennis Center. The annual US Open is also bringing business opportunities to Flushing. The first Chinese who arrived in this areas are the Taiwanese. One thing that needs to be noted here is that comparing to the cantonese and hokkien dialect speaking population arrived in Manhattan Chinatown, the arriving Taiwanese speaks Mandarin, which laid the foundation of Flushing's dominant language as Mandarin.

My Flushing story

When you get off Line 7 at Main Street subway station, You may feel like you have time-traveled to China 30 years ago.

The neon signs are written in simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese and Korean. Every day here is like a town fair day. There are always a lot of people, the streets are crowded, and the

buses always seem to jam in the streets. There is always an unpleasant smell in Chinese supermarkets and thus the experience and decoration are not important to these stores. Therefore, Macy's Department Store is rather abrupt in the community. This is another New York City, which will not appear in any movies, nor the Chinatown that tourists will go to, but the air is full of well-being, making this place called Flushing a "village" in the city on the outskirts of New York City.

I have interviewed some people in Flushing for the project of Writing on International Affairs class at BGIA program. There used to be a photographer who didn't want to live in Flushing, but couldn't afford the rent of Manhattan. So he had to live in Queens 40th Street. Unlucky, the dull 40th Street was not even as good as Flushing. The neighborhoods around him had nothing but houses. The nearest supermarket was run by Mexicans, so he couldn't buy any Chinese food at all. Finally, he had to compromise and moved out of the 40th Street to find a house in Flushing.

There is a group of family originally from Henan Province, China. The parents came to New York from Henan a few decades ago, and they didn't want to go back China after their working visa expired, so they became illegal immigrants, which are very common in Flushing. Nearly half of the people you see in Flushing may be illegal immigrants either their visa expired or they are using a tourist visa for working. Except for those who can't have credit cards, can't leave the US, and can't be in the judicial system, they are no different from legal workers. In New York, the possibility of checking ID by the police is very small, not to mention that some people holds a fake ID, which costs about 300 dollars. Since her parents can't go back to China, she grew up with her aunt. After she finished her high school in China, she and her brother applied to study in the United States, and then legally went to the United States to reunite with

their parents. Now her brother has got a working visa and legally stayed in the United States; but her student visa is coming to an end, and she has graduated from college. She is entangled in whether or not to illegally stay the United States.

Another common situation would be a student coming with a F1 visa, instead of reporting to the academic institution, the student choose to work in Flushing. Although it is a legal visa, the student visa is different from the working visa, so the student can only do some work done by the unregistered residents. Working places with little need of technical content or showing up, such as the Chinese restaurants, laundry rooms, tea shops, massage rooms and even pet shops are the most suitable place for these “working-students”.

Comparing to the working class who came here for the better opportunities, the wealthy ones take root in Flushing and make it home. Self-built small villas can be divided into two or three houses, leaving one for self living, and the rest are for rentals, which is a great amount income. Although the corner area of Queens is close to LaGuardia Airport, prices are much higher in Flushing than in other areas of Queens. The influx of new immigrants into New York has also pushed up the price housing in Flushing, especially for those who come with their families. If their parents can't speak English, they can only live in Flushing, which is convenient for the elderly to find playmates and to manage their daily routines. New immigrants have also brought the characteristics from modern China to Flushing piece by piece as well. Big chain restaurants such as Little Sheep Hot Pot or “Haidilao” can be found in Flushing.

No matter how you look at it, you will think that Flushing is like a city in any province of China. It is not very big and has not yet developed very well. However, it does exists in New York, and the end of Line 7; it the second-largest Chinese community in North America, and the

home of many overseas students and immigrants. These young people, listening to Chinese pop music, crossing the streets of Flushing and driving to buy “real” Chinese food as their meal. In the signs along the street, slogans are written in simplified Chinese characters and traditional characters, “remittance to China”, “express to China” and “Wechat pay 10 percent off” or “Alipay 15 percent off”.

Whether it's about looking at Flushing as Americans who meet a foreign country at a corner or immigrants who has left their homeland to rebuild their life here, Flushing may represent a determination to break through their existing life. It's like a piece of land being pulled out of the earth, where everyone has the possibility of keeping a distance from the original life, so that they can truly establish themselves.

Conclusion

In this tide of anti-immigrants across the world, the numbers of immigrants are still kept at a pretty high level in NYC. As there are more people and less resources in the city, conflicts would definitely occur. Back in 1975, the city was in the midst of a major budget and funding crisis and was in deterioration for some time. One of the reasons for the happening of this crisis was that New York City had lost its economic and fiscal foundation pretty much into the 70s up until in the early 80s. The City used to be a industrial city who lots of factories that manufactured automobiles, and it was shifting away from being an industrial town. It was both a industrial place and Mecca for different industries, such as entertainment, financial and music. The city was also a repository for a lot of American mythology, where some of that mythology was based on the shrinking industrial base. NYC at time was shifting away from that shrinking industrial base very roughly, in to a basically service economy that we are having today.

Under this kind of environment, the Chinese, for the first time, was highlighted in the media. There was a proliferation of gang activity among different nationalities, “it was kind of scary. And some of that was verified when I arrived here, because we moved to the lower east side and it was clear that when you walking on Henry Street just east of the Chinatown section, you can see broken glass, drug dealers in the corner.”⁴⁹ Gang activity was a reflection of oppressiveness particularly in minority communities has escalated, since a lot of gang activities have been a feature in the US society for many years, but it became really pronounced at that time. In the same time, the gang activity in the Chinese community became one of the major actors.

⁴⁹ Steve, in discussion with the author.

Some of the conflicts was directly related with the influx of immigration in 1965. In 1965, most of the immigrants were working immigrants from Hong Kong, some of them came from the mainland China as refugees, which put a great string on social services and educational service, both in West Coast and East Coast. At the same time, because of the poverty, the rise of gangs became inevitable. One of the major gangs was called “Wah Ching”. There was a major controversy, in 1965, a press conference was held in which held by a community organizer, George Woo, threatened there will be a riot in Chinatown of San Francisco if there is no government poverty funds coming to the community.” Previously, the stereotypical perception of the Chinese community was that these were tight communities: they took care of their own, they had no problems, they were model citizens and they were kept segregated. “They had the same phenomenon here at NYC too when I arrived in 1975.”⁵⁰

The major gang wars were between the Chinese immigrant gangs and the Chinese-American gangs. The war maybe was for the control of resources, but more likely it was just because of the culture collision. There was this kind of attitudes from Chinese-American looking down at the immigrants, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, the immigrants would be called as “FOBs”. The two groups have different cultural perspectives: one of the ways at that time to differentiate which gang did a certain person belong to was by looking at their hair style. Chinese gang member has high pompadour hair while the Chinese-American gang member has long hair. Also the Chinese-American gang was more integrated: they had Japanese in them.

Back to the conference, which created a controversy. That basically blew the gasket. It caused a response and reaction from CCBA. People moved to Arizona and New York because of the anti-Chinese act in California that time, but there were still many discriminations in those

⁵⁰ Steve, in discussion with the author.

destinations. This is the time that these Chinese people were being segregated, until the 1950s or even the 60s. “If you go to the San Francisco Chinatown, there is a line between the Chinatown and the North Beach which was predominantly Italian. Just like today, there used to be a line between the Chinese community and the Italian community on Grand Street. Back in 1974 and 1975, it was very clear.”⁵¹ As the Italians became more assimilated, they moved to neighborhoods such as Long Island. Then the incoming Chinese moved into these spaces which were left by the Italians. There are still some of the vestige of the Italians like the restaurants. You can see the same situation at Sunset Park, it used to be dominated by the Scandinavians. Then the Puerto Ricans moved in. As they became more assimilated, then the Chinese and the Mexicans moved in. There is a phenomena and trend going on here. As people began to assimilate with the community, they are both shaping and being influenced by the neighborhood. However, the slowly assimilation of the Chinese in America becomes reasonable and unexpected. On one hand, since ancient times, the ethnic of Han has always been successful on assimilating other ethnic groups into Han; on the other hand, the skin color qualifies the degree of assimilation because of the white majority in the big melt-pot.

When we understand more, we think we can see the world better, and thus we can be good “teachers” to others which we think are narrow minded. We feel that parents can not keep up with the times, we feel that people in our hometown can not keep up with the current concepts, we feel that the old customs are backward. As a result, we want to change everything. In fact, we are narrow, because we always want to put our logic in their heads. The society is changing and developing, although we seem to be better than before, but we can not force those who used to be like us, they have their growth environment, they live in harmony in their environment. In fact,

⁵¹ Steve, in discussion with author.

that is their foundation, and that is their origin. We want to change them, after all, in order to achieve their own values, in order to prove our correctness. We shall pay respect to every person's recognition and decision.

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