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Journal of Chinese Overseas 7 (2011) 24-44

brill.nl/jco

From Mott Street to East Broadway: Fuzhounese Immigrants and the Revitalization of New York's Chinatown

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Abstract

Since the early 1980s, immigrants from Fuzhou, southeast China, have revitalized and expanded New York's Chinatown in Manhattan and established satellite Chinese communities in Brooklyn and Queens. Fuzhounese entrepreneurs have transformed the ethnic enclave economy of Chinatown into the staging platform for a dynamic national ethnic restaurant economy in which East Broadway in Lower Manhattan has become the central hub for the circulation of capital, labor, goods and know-how. Despite recent revitalization, Chinatown's future as a gateway for new labor immigrants is threatened by real estate speculation and gentrification in the Manhattan and Brooklyn Chinatown areas.

Keywords

Chinatown, New York, Fuzhounese, Immigration, Ethnic Enclave, Ethnic Economy

Introduction

Manhattan's Chinatown exists in the American popular imagination as one of the signature sights of New York City, spoken of in the same breath as Little Italy, the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, and Wall Street. The name Chinatown evokes images of crowded streets, narrow alleyways, colorful Chinese signs, curbside fish and vegetable markets, and restaurants with whole roasted ducks dangling in the windows. Tourists from across the country and around the world snap up knock-off designer handbags, watches and sunglasses on Canal Street and sample Chinese pastries, noodles and bubble tea on Mott Street. But beneath the veneer and stereotype of old Chinatown's tourist shops, dim sum restaurants, fish and fruit stands lies the story of a

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Also available online – brill.nl/jco

DOI: 10.1163/179325411X565399

neighborhood struggling to sustain its role as a vibrant gateway for new generations of working-class immigrants.

Since the early 1980s, tens of thousands of Chinese from the towns and villages outside Fuzhou, southeast China, have immigrated to New York City. This massive international migration, spurred by economic restructuring in China and the United States, and facilitated by a vast and highly organized international human smuggling syndicate, has transformed New York's Chinese population and revitalized New York City's Chinatown. Fuzhounese have now supplanted the Cantonese as Chinatown's largest ethnic Chinese community and vie for leadership in the area's economics, politics, social life and even language use. Spatially, Fuzhounese immigrants have expanded the Chinatown ethnic enclave on Manhattan's Lower East Side and settled satellite Chinese communities in Sunset Park, Brooklyn and Flushing Queens. Economically, Fuzhounese entrepreneurs have recreated the economy of the immigrant gateway, transforming Chinatown — and specifically East Broadway — into a staging platform for a dynamic national ethnic restaurant economy of all-you-can-eat buffets and take-out restaurants spreading across the country in suburban strip malls, small towns and along interstate exits. New York is the hub for the circulation of capital, labor, goods and know-how, along with hopes and dreams of Fuzhounese workers pursuing the American Dream. As we will see, despite recent revitalization and dynamic economic activity, the future remains cloudy as intense real estate speculation and gentrification in the Manhattan and Brooklyn Chinatown areas threaten to undermine success of this gateway for the entry and incorporation of new immigrants and their families.

Research Methods

I have been following the migration patterns and immigrant incorporation experiences of rural Chinese from the farms and fishing villages near Fuzhou, southeast China for more than fifteen years. As an anthropologist, my primary research strategies have included participant observation in the wide spectrum of Fuzhounese community life in New York and China, six separate visits to Fuzhou and its surrounding out-migrant areas, and hundreds of in-depth interviews almost exclusively conducted in Mandarin. My original research examined the Fuzhounese experience through the lens of religion, particularly exploring the role of newly organized Fuzhounese religious communities in providing locations for the mobilization of social capital, constructing transnational ties even among undocumented immigrants, and living out

alternative identities outside the dominant U.S. imagination of working poor and undocumented immigrants. My current research on contemporary changes in Chinatown has involved historical research in Manhattan, Sunset Park and Flushing, extensive mapping of contemporary economic and social life, interviews with waiters, cooks, drivers, bus owners, community leaders and a steady diet of Chinese food. I have ridden Chinatown buses, mapped employment agencies, bus routes, ticket offices and waiting rooms and attended community meetings. I have also benefited from the wisdom and analysis of colleagues Peter Kwong, Tarry Hum and Margaret Chin who have generously shared insights into contemporary developments in Manhattan Chinatown and its satellites in Sunset Park and Flushing.

Early History of Chinatown

New York has served as a gateway for new immigrants from China for over 200 years. But even before the establishment of the small enclave of Chinese at the foot of Mott Street on Manhattan's Lower East Side in the mid-1800s, a complex web of relationships had been created between China and New York City. When Henry Hudson sailed into New York Bay in 1609, his expedition was financed by the Dutch East India Company in the hopes of finding a much-longed-for sea route to the riches of China and India. By the 18th and 19th centuries, Chinese luxury items arriving on British clipper ships had already become status symbols among New York's rising merchant and political elite. As the nation attempted to establish itself on the world economic stage after the American Revolution, New York's merchant class emulated its former colonial masters and turned to the China trade. On February 22, 1784, the *Empress of China* set sail from New York Harbor packed with Spanish silver coins and 57,687 pounds of ginseng, a highly sought-after medicinal tuber in China that grew wild up and down the eastern coast of America. The ship returned to New York fifteen months later with a prized cargo of porcelains, silks, teas, and other luxury items. Its voyage inaugurated direct links between the United States and China, drawing together merchants in the port cities of New York and Guangzhou (Canton). While China limited international trade to Guangzhou, the global circulation through this port linked thousands of agricultural workers picking tea in the hills of Fujian Province with their counterparts harvesting ginseng along the American coast. Their long-distance economic exchange and cross-cultural interaction would prove to be a precursor of developments over the next 200 years (Tchen 1999).

The first Chinese ventured to New York in the early 1800s as sailors, cooks and stewards on the ships plying the U.S.-China trade. Most of those who stayed settled in the multiethnic Five Points neighborhood in lower Manhattan, located near the burgeoning maritime commerce of the East River piers. In the mid-1800s a number of Chinese-run boardinghouses emerged on lower Baxter Street to accommodate these Chinese seamen as well as others from the failed California gold rush and coolie labor in Peru and Cuba. Chinese street peddlers sold cheap hand-made cigars and rock candy. Chinese tea merchants marketed their wares to New York's middle and upper classes. Restaurants catering to the Chinese "bachelor society" gradually enticed other New Yorkers. Later the hand-laundry trade, which by the 1880s was being vacated by upwardly mobile Irish women, would grow into one of the most significant occupations among Chinese for a century. By 1869 sixty to seventy Chinese were regularly living in lower Manhattan, with many others passing through New York and its harbor (Anbinder 2001; Yu 1992).

New York's Chinese population began a steady expansion in the 1870s. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 allowed many Chinese to escape the intense anti-Chinese sentiment and legislation on the west coast and seek jobs and opportunities on the US east coast. Others were brought across the country as unwitting strike breakers in labor disputes, continuing a pattern of exploitation by American industrialists. Faced with threats and violence directed at the "Yellow Peril," Chinese created Chinatowns as safe havens and locations for mobilizing language, kinship and hometown ties to start small businesses and survive in a strange land. By 1900 a distinct but small community of 2,000 Chinese, mostly men, had settled in the area of Pell, Doyer and lover Mott streets on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

More extensive Chinese population growth in the United States was limited by increased discrimination throughout the later part of the 19th and early 20th century. Anti-Chinese sentiment was codified in 1882 when the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first and only federal immigration law to ban immigration of people of a single nationality. This act was extended and kept in place until 1943. While European immigration reached historic levels between 1880 and 1920, Asian immigration was systematically limited by state and federal law (Takaki 1998).

Despite intense immigration restrictions, Chinese continued to creatively build links between China and the United States. Tens of thousands of Chinese, particularly from the southernmost counties of Guangdong, are estimated to have migrated overseas in open defiance of both U.S. and Chinese legal restrictions. Upon arrival, their stories were lived out as sojourners in Chinatowns on the legal, economic, and social margins of U.S. society, in

predominantly male bachelor communities, laboring in restaurants, laundries, and groceries. The Exclusion Act had a profound effect on the self-understanding of Chinese laborers in the United States, locking in their sojourner status and ensuring that the identity of Chinese in the United States remained firmly rooted in China and linked to family, lineage, and home village. Like the Fuzhounese who would arrive 100 years later, to sustain themselves the Cantonese immigrants built ongoing transnational connections to hometowns, villages and family, sending remittances, returning home when possible, and encouraging a continuous flow of people across the Pacific (Kwong 1996 [1987]; Hsu 2000).

Twentieth-Century Growth

After World War II, American-born Chinese began to move out of Chinatowns and relocate to the suburbs. While many Chinatowns in the United States experienced a shrinking population, New York's Chinatown has attracted a continuing flow of new immigrants, particularly low-wage immigrants. Changes in U.S. immigration laws have provided the legal framework for this growth. In addition, the creation of low-wage, low-skill entry level jobs appropriate for labor immigrants has provided the pull for migration and the mechanism for survival after arrival in the gateway city.

Impact of Changing Immigration Laws

Substantial changes to U.S. immigration laws, beginning in the 1940s, have cleared the path for renewed Chinese immigration to the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943 — in recognition of China's World War II alliance with the United States. In addition, the U.S. government granted citizenship to all those who had served in the U.S. armed forces and allowed limited family unification under the War Brides Act. By 1945, four thousand Chinese inhabited Chinatown. By 1953 the Chinese population had expanded to 15,000 with thousands of new immigrants arriving annually, many admitted under special legislation for refugees fleeing Communist mainland China through Hong Kong.

Passage of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 opened the door for even more dramatic growth of Chinatown. Previous federal immigration law — The National Origins Act of 1924 — had given preference to nationalities already represented in the U.S. population, ensuring continued immigration from northern and western Europe. The new 1965 law, expanded

in the 1970s, substituted a flat quota of 20,000 immigrants for every country, without regard to race and nationality, and included special provisions for reunification of families. Initially Taiwan was granted a quota of 20,000 with an additional 600 places available for immigrants from Hong Kong. With the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States in 1979, an additional quota of 20,000 was granted to mainland China. In the late 1980s, as Britain prepared to return Hong Kong to China, the territory received its own quota of 20,000, as the United States sought to attract immigration of the area's professional and economic elite. As a result the total Chinese immigration quota rose to 60,000 annually. Beyond the base quota, the 1965 law also allowed citizens and legal residents to petition for immigration of their spouses, parents and minor children. Fuzhounese, along with many other immigrant groups, have been adept at maximizing the new law's family reunification provisions and sustaining chain migration that has enabled the movement of extended family networks and kin groups. These combined provisions of the 1965 Immigrant and Nationalities Act are keys to understanding the rapid overall growth of the U.S. Chinese population and the number of Chinese in New York City. As a result, New York's Chinese population has expanded exponentially. A total of 32,831 Chinese lived in New York City in 1960. By 2000 that number had grown to 361,000.

Population growth has brought increased diversity to New York's Chinese community. While the earliest Chinatown residents, mostly men, hailed from several counties around Taishan in southern Guangdong Province, today residents are from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, Guangdong Province, Fuzhou and even Wenzhou further up the east China coast. New residents arrive legally and illegally. They are young and old. They speak many variations of Chinese, though Mandarin is becoming the primary language of communication. The complex internal dynamics within this diverse population often pit Chinese against Chinese based on differences of regional origin, language, educational background, economic resources, political persuasion and legal status.

Fuzhounese represent the majority of new Chinese immigrants to New York City and have now surpassed the total Cantonese population in Manhattan's Chinatown and Brooklyn's Chinese community. Because as many as fifty percent of Fuzhounese immigrants are undocumented — brought in by Chinese human smuggling networks — their exact population is difficult to ascertain. The major Fuzhounese associations in New York City claim between 300,000 to 500,000 Fuzhounese who have come to and through New York City since the 1980s. While many have found work beyond the New York metropolitan area, perhaps a majority continues to call New York City home or at least home base.

The Garment Industry

Immigrants settle where jobs can be found, where housing is inexpensive, and where they can find a language-friendly community. Chinatown's growth and vitality have been enabled by the creation of jobs accessible to new immigrants. The expansion of the garment industry, restaurants and construction trades has been key to Chinatown's continuing vitality, providing jobs for low-wage, low-skill laborers, particularly in the informal economy. Garment manufacturing became the first growth industry for new arrivals. Until the 1960s, the U.S. garment industry primarily employed unionized Italian and Jewish immigrants. But in the 1960s and 1970s, as aging garment workers retired and the bulk of New York's garment manufacturing was relocated overseas, manufacturers increasingly turned to Chinatown's shops filled with young immigrant women workers, to preserve a local base of operations that could respond quickly and cheaply when the overseas supply line was disrupted. In the early 1980s, Chinatown's garment shops employed 20,000 workers.

By subcontracting jobs to Chinese owned garment shops, American apparel companies were able to lock in low costs with little risk of running afoul of U.S. labor laws. Chinese owners attracted vulnerable workers by promising them jobs with other Chinese in a Chinese language environment. To accommodate young mothers, owners "allowed" them to bring children to work after school or on weekends to help with the work, a not-so-subtle foray into illegal child labor. Unscrupulous owners would often keep women waiting months for back wages, claiming non-payment by apparel companies. In many cases, owners would simply close the shop in order to avoid paying their employees, only to reopen under a new corporate name a few weeks or months later. Working conditions became increasingly grim through the 1970s until by the 1980s garment shop conditions in New York were comparable to those in Hong Kong, with women working six or seven days a week, ten to twelve hours a day for well below minimum wage and with no overtime pay. The lack of alternative employment opportunities within Chinatown, the lack of English language skills that would allow employment outside Chinatown and regular threats to report undocumented workers, kept garment shop employees from filing labor complaints or organizing against the owners. Labor unions that still controlled some garment shops largely failed to demand fair wages and better conditions for fear of losing the few jobs that remained (Chin 2005).

The rise of Chinatown's restaurant industry also has roots in the expansion of the garment industry. With so many women working long hours, Chinatown's restaurant industry expanded to meet the needs of families with less

time to cook. Small home-style restaurants catering to the local Chinatown population emerged alongside larger restaurants frequented by tourists. As the population grew, Chinese entrepreneurs seized opportunities to open small retail businesses in low-rent buildings, including clothing shops, grocery stores, pharmacies, fruit and fish stands either in sidewalk stalls or mini-malls.

Over the past 20 years, the Chinatown garment industry has experienced a steady decline as rising rents pushed shops out of Manhattan and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center undermined economic activity throughout Lower Manhattan. Chinatown was especially hard-hit. Police cordoned off the neighborhood for months, putting thousands of women seamstresses out of work. Recovery and reinvestment funds arrived extremely slowly, bringing about a lethal combination that hastened the demise of the Manhattan Chinese garment shops. Only a few Manhattan shops remain today. The ones that have relocated to Brooklyn's Sunset Park struggle with rising rents.

The Fuzhounese

Since the early 1980s, Fuzhounese immigrants have been the primary force behind the transformation and revitalization of New York's Chinatown. The earliest Fuzhounese immigrants arrived in New York in the 1940s: a few sailors who jumped ship after arrival and a few hundred who were granted residency for serving in the U.S. Merchant Marine during World War II. New York's Fuzhounese population remained small over the next three decades, adding a few seamen who had escaped from China to Hong Kong in the 1950s and made their way to the United States illegally. Attempts to reunite with their families in the 1970s in New York provided an early stimulus for the extensive smuggling network that exists today, as Fuzhounese worked through Chinese travel agencies to get relatives to Hong Kong and then procure the documents and tickets for the onward journey to the United States (Kwong 1997).

Opportunities for Fuzhounese outmigration expanded as China launched its economic reform program in the late 1970s and opened up to overseas investment. Those with relatives in Hong Kong and Macau attempted to "visit" or to get temporary permission to work in those two places. If allowed out by the Chinese government, they stayed, gradually bringing their families to join them. In turn, those in Hong Kong and Macau began to look for ways to relocate to New York, often overstaying tourist visas obtained to "visit relatives" in the United States. At the same time, overseas Fuzhounese networks were drawn into the establishment of the human smuggling enterprise.

By the mid-1980s a growing number of rural Fuzhounese were seeking to follow their compatriots abroad. New York was not the only option as Fuzhounese networks also extended to Japan, Australia, and Europe. But New York has been for many the most attractive. News of economic opportunities, even for undocumented workers in the restaurant and garment industries, had reached Fuzhou, and remittances from New York had begun to flow into hometowns and villages. Some utilized family reunification clauses in the U.S. immigration laws after their relatives had attained U.S. legal status. Others made use of human smuggling networks in the Fuzhou area that were rapidly expanding with support from opportunistic Taiwanese crime syndicates already deeply involved in the global smuggling trade. Some Fuzhounese were smuggled to the United States directly by air either from China or after exiting to Hong Kong. As the air routes became more carefully monitored, smugglers took the sea routes, often to Mexico, where Fuzhounese immigrants and their snakeheads crossed the border alongside Central American immigrants and their "coyotes." Chinese smugglers have continued to adapt their routes to best evade U.S. government border control efforts, becoming ever more creative and brutal while charging ever-increasing smuggling fees. The average smuggling fee in the mid-1980s was \$18,000 (Chin 1999). By 2010, recent arrivals report paying fees in excess of \$70,000 per person. Early waves of Fuzhounese borrowed their smuggling fees directly from snakeheads. If unable to repay these debts quickly through loans from family and friends, they were at times forced into criminal activities in service to the snakeheads, including prostitution. More recently undocumented immigrants have pre-arranged payment to the snakeheads by borrowing money through the extensive network of Fuzhounese already in the United States particularly mobilizing ties of kinship, hometown and even religious communities. These loans, however, often carry high interest rates. Even working long hours and living frugally, new immigrants are lucky to pay off their debts in five years (Kwong 1996 [1987], 1997; Chin 1999).

Why do they Come to the U.S.?

Rural Fuzhounese continue to leave their homes in large numbers on an expensive and often dangerous international journey despite the prospect of difficult work in restaurants, garment shops and construction trades in the United States and the recent expansion of economic opportunities in the Fuzhou region. How do we make sense of this situation?

Fuzhounese leave to make money, more money than they can imagine making at home. The annual income from working in a farming or fishing village may range from U.S. \$500 to \$750. Some younger people chose to work in

Fuzhou's export processing factories, but their income there, before labor unrest in factories across China in 2010, was only around \$1,500 a year for doing work under grueling sweatshop conditions. Ultimately, foreign investment and industrial growth in Fuzhou City and its surrounding export processing zones have had limited impact on Fuzhou's rural areas. In contrast, a busboy working in a Chinese restaurant in the U.S. may make \$1,500 a month plus room and board, a total of \$18,000 annually. A chef may make \$2,500 a month. In the calculations of a Fuzhounese villager, once her smuggling debt is repaid, the remuneration for working each year in a U.S. restaurant equals at least 12 years in a sweatshop factory in Fuzhou.

Rural Fuzhounese immigrate to New York because of the seductive and powerful pull of the U.S. labor market. Despite the hardships and costs of the journey, they know they will find work. The U.S. economy needs low-wage, low-skilled workers. And Fuzhounese entrepreneurs have been uniquely successful in creating a migration industry that not only transports immigrants from rural Fuzhou to the intensely urban New York, but also continues to circulate them through low-wage jobs in an expanding ethnic restaurant economy.

Outmigration has become part of the local culture of the towns and villages outside Fuzhou. The human smuggling industry has made transportation easily accessible for those without kinship connections with legal status in the United States. For a down payment of 10 to 20 percent, a villager can begin his journey arranged by any of the local snakeheads — the Chinese term for smuggler. Residents know the local agents. Snakeheads spray paint their cell phone numbers and post advertisements on the walls of stores, temples and town halls. In most areas, more than 70 percent of the population is no longer at home. Very few young people between the ages of 18 and 40 remain behind. Local government officials in the Department of Overseas Relations estimate that well over 500,000 Fuzhounese have left the country. The effects of this migration are everywhere. Remittances from villagers abroad have transformed hometowns. Four- and five-story mansions rise to tower over traditional family courtyards and slate shingled homes. Ancestral halls are rebuilt, churches and temples constructed, and waterworks, new roads and schools are put in place. The pressure to keep up appearances with fellow villagers raises the stakes ever higher.

From Mott Street to East Broadway

Today, large-scale Fuzhounese immigration has expanded Manhattan's Chinatown far beyond its earlier core around Mott Street. The Fuzhounese have pushed north through Little Italy, east along East Broadway through the

Jewish settlements of the lower East Side, and south into government housing projects and toward the Brooklyn Bridge. Chatham Square stands as a symbolic crossroads between the new and the old, where Mott Street ends and East Broadway begins. Located near the key intersection of old Five Points, the area around Chatham Square has been known for nearly 200 years as a central location for newly arrived and poor immigrants. From Chatham Square, Mott Street runs north through the heart of the original Chinatown section. Parallel to Mott, the Bowery conjures images of poor unemployed men and their flop houses and Christian missions. To the west, Park Row runs directly toward City Hall and a concentration of municipal and federal office buildings. East Broadway runs eastward, anchoring the new Fuzhounese district.

Two statues stand in Chatham Square, constructed by competing political elites in Chinatown symbolizing the stark political and cultural differences between the Chinese immigrant generations. One, of Confucius, was erected in 1984 by earlier immigrants from Hong Kong, Canton, and Taiwan. Its construction was organized by the Consolidated Chinese Benevolent Association — led by older Cantonese immigrants — and largely paid for by the Taiwanese Nationalist government as a sign of respect for traditional Chinese culture that had been destroyed under the mainland Communist government, particularly during the Cultural Revolution. The second statue, constructed in 1997 by Fuzhounese individuals and civic associations at a cost of \$200,000, is of Lin Zexu, the famous Chinese patriot from Fujian Province who led the Chinese resistance to the British importation of opium into the port of Canton in the 1840s. The Lin statue, two feet taller than the Confucius statue, stands facing East Broadway, the main thoroughfare in Chinatown.

While Mott Street, lined by Cantonese-owned stores and restaurants and community organizations, caters to an extensive tourist trade, East Broadway has become the heart of the new Fuzhounese community in New York. This vibrant five block area teems with new immigrants and the businesses that serve their needs. East Broadway is the heart of the Fuzhounese immigrant gateway to New York. It is also the staging platform for the circulation of Fuzhounese immigrant workers beyond New York to employment and opportunities in an ethnic economy of all-you-can-eat buffets and take-out restaurants expanding across the United States. Immigration service agencies, snakeheads, lawyers specializing in legalizing undocumented workers, remittances companies like Western Union and Moneygram, a dozen banks, money lenders, and providers of legitimate and false documents facilitate interna-

tional migration and the continuing transnational flow of money, people and communication between New York and China.

Today there are more Chinese restaurants in the United States than McDonalds, Burger Kings and Wendy's combined (Lee 2008). A large and growing number of these, especially the all-you-can-eat buffets and small take-out restaurants, are owned and operated by Fuzhounese who recruit their cooks, waiters, delivery men, busboys and receptionists on East Broadway. More than twenty employment agencies dot the blocks around East Broadway. These are the true lynchpins of the new Fuzhounese restaurant economy. Thousands of workers, men and women, circulate through these employment agencies every day searching for work. Inside the agency, jobs are posted on white boards or on post-its on plexiglass windows. Jobs are listed by area code, type of work and salary. Busboys make around \$1,500, receptionists \$2,000 and Chefs \$2,500 a month depending on location. The further the job is from New York, the higher the wage. Employment outside the New York area also includes room and board. Area code maps of the United States placed on walls inside the agency help workers know where exactly they might be going: 813 is Tampa, Florida, 630 is near Chicago, 404 is Atlanta, 317 is Indiana. Most Fuzhounese immigrants speak little or no English, so the area code becomes crucial for identifying job locations. Few workers ever know the names of the cities where they have worked, but they do know the area codes and the interstate exit numbers. If a match looks promising, employment agency staff arrange a telephone interview and negotiation between worker and restaurant owner. Workers pay a \$25 fee to the agency for a successful placement.

Fuzhounese entrepreneurs have created an extensive bus and van transportation system that links East Broadway with thousands of Chinese restaurants across the country, circulating workers, restaurant supplies and money. Many New Yorkers are familiar with the Chinatown buses that run on routes along the northeast corridor to Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, D.C. These bus lines originated in the early 1990s as cars and vans transporting workers between East Broadway's employment agencies and restaurant jobs. Today they have crossed over into the mainstream U.S. transportation industry and are challenging U.S. bus companies along these once lucrative routes. Roundtrip tickets to Boston can be as low as \$25 or \$35 to Washington. Family run companies operate with extremely low profit margins to keep such low ticket prices. In 2009, unable to compete head-to-head, Coach, USA, one of the largest US bus lines, simply bought the two major Chinese bus companies operating between New York and Washington. With an

elevated public profile, online marketing and stunningly low ticket prices, today these buses are filled primarily with students and other budget travelers, not Chinese restaurant workers.

Later in the evening, long after the last northeast corridor bus has departed for Boston or Washington, Fuzhounese workers fill East Broadway bus waiting rooms and sidewalk pickup zones preparing for their long-distance trips to restaurants across the country. A dozen small bus companies run at least one large Greyhound-style bus each way six days a week along routes to Maine, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Chicago, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Ohio, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, Atlanta and all points along Interstate 95 to Florida. The movement of buses is highly coordinated. On the Florida line, once in Jacksonville, Florida, the bus company transfers passengers to smaller vans along Interstate 10 as far as Mississippi and down through Florida along both coasts. Buses stop at exits where a quick phone call by the worker brings the restaurant owner to make the pickup and complete the journey. Workers quickly tire of the social isolation and grueling work hours of these restaurants. Four to eight weeks may be all they can tolerate, even under the best work conditions. When they decide to leave — exhausted, lonely or dissatisfied with the job — a call to the long-distance bus company is all it takes to arrange a pick-up the next day at a nearby interstate highway exit and begin their journey back to New York.

These long-distance buses link restaurants across the country to the dynamic hub of East Broadway. Buses carry more than just workers. Into the cargo bays are also loaded restaurant supplies from Chinatown's shops, Chinese signs made in local sign shops and boxes of Chinese menus printed in one of East Broadway's nine print shops. Since restaurant workers are paid in cash, buses also become vehicles for couriering earnings back to East Broadway where debts are repaid, remittances sent home to China and capital accumulated in the hope of moving up the restaurant ladder someday to ownership.

As many as 50,000 Fuzhounese workers circulate between restaurants outside New York at any given time, but they return to East Broadway regularly for rest and recuperation between strenuous jobs. East Broadway's Fuzhounese entrepreneurs provide a vast array of goods and services to meet the needs of a highly transient population with little time and limited resources: Chinese and Western doctors, English classes, driving schools, insurance agents, video stores, barbershops, two-dozen hometown associations, temples, short-term housing, wedding parlors, gambling parlors, prostitutes, buses to Atlantic City and Connecticut casinos, employment agencies and long-distance buses that deliver workers to restaurants across the country. The surrounding neighborhood boasts an extensive network of Single Room Occupancy hotels that offer

rooms for \$15 and \$20 a night, exactly the short-term housing arrangements needed by workers as they circulate through East Broadway in between jobs.

The East Broadway Mall stands at the epicenter of the New York Fuzhounese community. This three-story brick building built into a full block under the Manhattan Bridge provides one-stop shopping hair cuts, new clothes, DVDs rentals, phone cards and wire transfers to China. Upstairs a large restaurant is packed with dim sum diners at lunch and hosts wedding banquets and community dinners in the evening.

Fuzhounese entrepreneurs have also established a transportation system to move immigrants within New York City. Circling the East Broadway Mall are fleets of passenger vans that run routes from Manhattan's Chinatown to the major Chinese communities in Flushing, Queens and Sunset Park, Brooklyn. These vans allow immigrants to navigate easily through New York without ever learning about the city's subway and bus system or learning English. Charging less than the New York City subway and bus fare, these \$2 vans deliver residents door to door. Riding them is a bit like riding a bus in Fuzhou. The language changes to the local dialect. Chinese movies blare. Drivers stop along the route to pick up and drop off passengers until the bus is full to overflowing. But they serve a very particular niche for new immigrants who must circulate in a Chinese community that is now stretched between three New York City boroughs.

Fuzhounese entrepreneurs rely on New York's East Broadway hub for more than access to cheap, vulnerable labor. East Broadway is also the primary location for mobilizing the financial capital to buy or renovate a restaurant. Kinship networks, hometown associations, and even religious communities provide informal credit networks and revolving loan funds that make capital available to immigrants regardless of U.S. credit rating or even legal status. Local businesses also provide other components for the restaurant business, from chopsticks and tea cups to packages of soy sauce and placemats emblazoned with the Chinese zodiac.

Transforming the Religious Landscape

The arrival of the Fuzhounese immigrants has transformed New York's Chinatown in many respects, including its religious life. Religious life has been largely ignored in the scholarship of Chinese in the Americas, but Chinese religious life is vibrant in New York. Chinatown's religious landscape today reflects the complex immigrant history of this New York neighborhood. Walking around one discovers old Jewish synagogues, both active and empty;

Catholic churches built by Irish and Italian immigrants and now home to Cantonese, Fuzhounese, and Hispanic congregations; Protestant churches ranging from old mainline denominations like the Methodists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians to Hong Kong and Taiwanese imports like Overseas Chinese Mission and Ling Liang Church. There are newly formed independent religious communities primarily comprised of undocumented workers from southeast China, operating in the local Fuzhou dialect, large Buddhist temples whose leaders are monks with advanced theological training and whose constituents are primarily older Cantonese immigrants or recent Hong Kong and Taiwanese immigrants; and numerous storefront Buddhist, Daoist, and Chinese popular religion temples oriented around home villages, whose festival celebrations, fortunetelling, and spirit possession reflect the vibrant and complex religious life of rural mainland Chinese from the areas around Fuzhou.

A recent study (Guest 2003) identified 84 religious institutions in Manhattan's expanded Chinatown, of which 59 are exclusively Chinese. In addition, three Catholic churches have multiple congregations in one parish, combining Chinese and Italian or Chinese and Hispanic. Another dozen Chinese religious institutions were identified in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. The 62 Chinese institutions in Manhattan with Chinese members include Buddhist, 26; Protestant Christian, 23; Chinese Popular Religion, 8; Catholic, 3; Daoist, 2. Fourteen congregations serve Chinatown's Fuzhounese population specifically. Two independent Protestant Christian congregations have been established. The two Catholic churches with Fuzhouense constituents also serve Cantonese-speaking members and small older groups of Italians. In addition, dozens of small Catholic and Protestant house-church groups meet in member's homes, largely operating outside the purview of the larger institutions. Four congregations explicitly identify themselves as Buddhist temples, though they may also incorporate Daoist and popular religion symbols, statuary and iconography. One temple identifies itself as Daoist, but also includes the Buddha and the bodhisattva, Guan Yin, on its altar. Five popular religious temples venerate local home village deities.

The largest new Fuzhounese religious community is the Protestant Church of Grace to the Fujianese that was started as a house-church in the early 1980s by women garment workers and now includes several thousand members and a branch church in Brooklyn's Sunset Park. The home congregation worships in a renovated bathhouse and fills its sanctuary every Sunday with crowds spilling into the social hall and classrooms to watch services on big screen televisions. Baptisms, held twice a year, ritually welcome up to 100 Fuzhouense into the Christian faith. The Church of Grace, like the other Fuzhouense

religious communities surveyed, serves both as a center for ritual and a center for mobilizing social capital. After church hundreds of recent immigrants gather around large pots of Fuzhou noodles and cups of tea to exchange news of housing and employment opportunities, references for doctors and lawyers, and word from home. Parishioners collect money to support needy members and to contribute to church building projects back in the villages. Throughout the week The Church of Grace, like other churches and temples, receives a steady stream of visitors seeking advice and counsel from the religious workers about everything from childrearing to immigration. These religious communities also function as points for building and accessing transnational networks that influence events and institutions in New York and back home in China, particularly through remittances and visits. As a result, the areas around Fuzhou are experiencing a dynamic religious revival largely fueled by money sent home from New York to build churches, temples and ancestral halls and pay for elaborate rituals and ceremonies. Not insignificantly, religious communities in New York also allow the construction of alternative identities that provide counterpoints to the Fuzhounese experiences of marginalization and dislocation and the discourses of illegality and otherness associated with Fuzhounese that are dominant in the Chinese ethnic enclave and U.S. culture.

Chinatown's Geographic Dispersion: Sunset Park and Flushing

Over the past twenty years, New York City has experienced a dramatic dispersion of the Chinese population from its earlier center in Manhattan's Chinatown to satellite Chinatowns in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, and Flushing, Queens. As immigration, particularly Fuzhounese immigration, increased in the 1980s and rents in Manhattan's Chinatown increased, working class immigrants began to explore alternative areas with cheaper housing but with direct transportation links to the jobs in Chinatown, a priority for those struggling to learn English. Sunset Park became the primary destination. In the late 19th century, the two-mile stretch along Brooklyn's waterfront had been settled by Scandinavian immigrants who found work as sailors, dockworkers, shipbuilders and harbor pilots in New York's bustling maritime trade as well as jobs in light industry and manufacturing throughout the neighborhood. The port economy remained central to Sunset Park's vitality until the 1960s when New York City's maritime trade went into steep decline. By the 1970s, Sunset Park, faced with rapid deindustrialization and loss of union jobs, was declared a federal poverty area. By the time Chinese began to relocate to Sunset Park in the 1980s, the neighborhood had become majority Puerto Rican. Today the

area has a growing number of Dominicans, Mexicans and a small Middle Eastern population as well. Sunset Park has undergone a dramatic revitalization over the past twenty years as Chinese immigrants invested labor and capital into a formerly dying community. Chinese settled along 8th Avenue in order to take advantage of direct subway connections to jobs and shopping in Manhattan's Chinatown along the B, D, and R trains. Chinese entrepreneurs quickly followed, establishing a vibrant business district of small stores and restaurants along 8th Avenue. Manhattan's garment shops, also faced with rising rents, began relocating to Sunset Park to take advantage of the large pool of immigrant labor and existing underused manufacturing space. The Chinese population has now spread west toward 4th Avenue and the Brooklyn waterfront. With rents now rapidly rising in Sunset Park, significant numbers of Chinese are also settling further out along the subway lines in Bensonhurst and Avenue U (Hum 2004; Kwong 2005).

As the Fuzhounese restaurant economy expanded beyond New York's metropolitan area, first along the northeast corridor and then north, south and west into America's heartland, Sunset Park has developed a particular role providing housing for circulating workers and their families. Many of the old apartment buildings have been further subdivided — illegally — and functionally converted into dormitories for single workers. In other cases, extended family networks have been able to leverage loans from Chinese banks to purchase relatively inexpensive brownstones and townhouses. As a result of this influx of younger immigrant workers, the public schools of Sunset Park are full of 1.5- and second-generation Fuzhounese children whose parents may work primarily out-of-town and who are raised by extended family networks. These children some of whom were born in the United States and others who followed their parents from China as teenagers, are beginning to enter the City University of New York colleges in significant numbers. The first generation in their families to attend college, these young people carry their family's hopes and dreams for American incorporation along with intense family pressure to succeed (Guest and Liang forthcoming).

Sunset Park's revitalization has brought with it potential seeds for destruction as a working class community. Investments in real estate by extended family groups have rejuvenated the housing stock, but also pushed rents higher. Banks and real estate developers are reinforcing this process of gentrification, hoping to reap profits from escalation in land values. A heated battle is currently being fought by community groups as political and economic elites seek to have the area rezoned to allow high rise developments along the major avenues. Developers and representatives of New York City government

argue that rezoning will spur the construction of new and improved housing in the community while community activists see a ramped up gentrification process quickly pushing low income residents out of the neighborhood in favor of middle and upper income residents attracted by modest housing costs — by New York City standards — as well as proximity to the waterfront and other urban renewal projects. Following a pattern of development and gentrification seen in other areas of New York City, the changes underway in Sunset Park threaten to leave little room for working-class Chinese who are the life-blood of the restaurant industry centered along East Broadway.

Flushing, Queens, also experienced rapid growth in its Chinese population over the past 25 years. Flushing's Chinese population differs significantly from the populations of Manhattan's Chinatown and Sunset Park. While the latter two areas are comprised primarily of working class residents and now are majority Fuzhounese, Flushing's Chinese population — largely of Taiwanese, Cantonese and northern Chinese descent — is decidedly more middle-class and professional. Flushing's Chinese population shares the neighborhood with large numbers of Korean, Indian and Pakistani immigrants, along with an older white population, making Flushing primarily a middle-class "Asiatown" rather than exclusively a Chinatown. Chinese first arrived in Flushing in the 1940s as employees at the newly established United Nations and sought affordable housing near the UN's original headquarters in Long Island. This primarily Taiwanese population expanded even when the United Nations relocated to Manhattan in 1951 and set the tone for Flushing's Chinese population as Mandarin-speaking, high-income professionals, dominating the political and economic character of Flushing. The area's stores and restaurants, beauty salons and shopping centers cater to Taiwanese tastes. Flushing has continued to attract immigrant professionals from Taiwan, Hong Kong and the northern provinces of mainland China. Flushing's Main Street, at the eastern end of the No. 7 subway line, is crowded with real estate brokers, banks, travel agents, Asian food stores and top-quality Chinese restaurants. Chinese who have relocated to New York's suburban areas in New Jersey, Connecticut, Westchester County and Long Island make regular visits to eat and shop. While Fuzhounese laborers staff many of the Chinese businesses along Flushing's Main Street, Fuzhounese residents of Flushing tend to be those who have worked their way up to middle class status as restaurant owners, postal clerks, or small businessmen who have been able to "escape" Manhattan's Chinatown or Sunset Park (Chen 1993; Kwong 2005).

Into the Future

Despite recent revitalization of Manhattan's Chinatown and Sunset Park, Brooklyn through new immigration, the future of these areas is uncertain. Can they remain viable immigrant gateways and venues for immigrant entrepreneurship? Or will Chinatown experience the fate of neighboring Little Italy, now a shadow of a once vibrant Italian immigrant community reduced to a tourist destination of restaurants and pastry shops? Warning signs abound. In both Sunset Park and Manhattan, immigrant driven neighborhood revitalization has brought about rising rents for residents and businesses as real estate developers and speculators — many of whom are overseas Chinese — seek to cash in on the rising neighborhood property values. Change is underway. While sections of Manhattan's Chinatown appear vibrant during the day — particularly East Broadway and Canal Street — the old core of Chinatown, including Mott, Elizabeth, Doyer and Pell streets, are largely deserted in the evening. Rising rents have driven many long-term residents out of the neighborhood. A study of housing and development in Manhattan's Chinatown (CAA AV 2008) found that the number of subsidized housing units had decreased from 17,696 to 16,236 between 2003 and 2006. At the same time, the number of new building permits in Chinatown and the Lower East Side rose to 920 in 2006 from only 40 in 1990. Dramatic shifts are already taking place on the edges of the new Chinatown as old tenements are being renovated to make luxury condominiums and trendy nightclubs and bars frequented by young professionals from outside the neighborhood are popping up next to long-time local businesses. Increasing development of luxury housing is spurring increased gentrification, rising costs and instability for local businesses. Chinatown merchants are particularly vulnerable as only seven percent own their own buildings. The neighborhood is already dotted with boutique hotels, high-rent office spaces and luxury condominium apartments where warehouses and garment factories once provided jobs and trade for the local garment and restaurant economies.

A looming battle over zoning in Manhattan's Chinatown, like the one previously described in Sunset Park, pits real estate developers and government planners against a coalition of community organizations and threatens to intensify the gentrification of the neighborhood. Developers promise to build some low income housing units in return for government tax breaks and the right to build high rise luxury apartment complexes on Chinatown's major thoroughfares. The benefits to the developers are clear. The benefits for the current residents and businesses are far less so. The neighborhood is currently

built well below the allowable zoning heights. Sixty-nine percent of the neighborhood's buildings are low-rise units built below the current modest zoning height allowances (CPCLES 2010). Proposals currently under consideration to "up-zone" the area could radically increase the air space available for development. Community groups argue that additional development would overwhelm existing neighborhood services, raise rents and consumer prices throughout the community and displace existing residents and small businesses. This is a pattern that has been repeated throughout New York City — especially Manhattan — as the City government pursues neighborhood development and renewal through tax breaks, rezoning and partnerships with private developers (Kwong 2009).

Much is at stake for Chinatown — a neighborhood and community that has preserved its vitality over 200 years by welcoming a steady stream of new immigrants into an area with affordable housing, abundant work opportunities for low-wage, low-skill laborers, a Chinese language friendly environment, and easy access to major transportation routes both within New York City and beyond. Even the recent revitalization brought by Fuzhounese immigrants discussed in this paper is precarious and vulnerable to the encroachment of powerful real estate forces. The demise of Chinatown is not inevitable, but change is underway and the future of Chinatown as a vibrant immigrant community will be largely determined by the outcome of these current debates.

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