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Life Stories of Older Chinese Immigrant Women in the U.S.

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LIFE STORIES OF OLDER CHINESE IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE U.S.

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Graduate School of Leadership & Change
Antioch University

In partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

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LIFE STORIES OF OLDER CHINESE IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE U.S.

This dissertation, by Lijun Li, has
been approved by the committee members signed below
who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of
Graduate School in Leadership & Change
Antioch University
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

LIFE STORIES OF OLDER CHINESE IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE U.S.

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This study is an effort to turn to older Chinese immigrant women aged 60 and above, one of the most marginalized groups in American society, to recognize their humanity and rediscover the unseen and unheard. It asks what we can learn from their life stories, particularly from the ways in which each experience(d) being a woman in different societal systems. Using in-depth life story interviews supplemented with secondary sources of information, this study crafts four women's stories that are first read and interpreted individually to capture the whole person in context, and then are looked at thematically. Nine themes are presented, ranging from their remembered histories to their life journeys in different societies, integrating three lenses: the dialogue between the past and the present, the intersectionality (of race/ethnicity, gender, class, education, age, location, generation, nationality, immigration, etc.), and the interplay between the individual and the historical, political, and economic environment in different contexts. This study acknowledges that all of these women, across time and space, have developed capabilities that brought about positive changes to their lives, and that perhaps they have relied on their strengths and capabilities developed throughout their lives to become resilient and accepting of the unknown challenges. It is in this light that these women, as "normal" people whose lives are often overlooked by society in general, become heroic. It is hoped that the stories can serve for any readers as a small window into the older Chinese immigrant women's worlds, sparking empathy and imagination, helping break down the barriers of differences, and leading readers to

see and hear these women's stories that are different from theirs. From there, it is hoped that this study prompts more connections and conversations with immigrants and refugees in daily life, and that one effort of that kind begets more. This study also provides implications for other Chinese immigrant women and men and even beyond, as well as for the younger generation. For information regarding full-text access, please contact the author at: lli@antioch.edu.

Keywords: older Chinese immigrant women, life stories, history, memory, immigration, capabilities, leadership