2022

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

Lijun Li
Antioch University - PhD Program in Leadership and Change

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

Lijun Li

ORCID Scholar No. 0000-0002-7658-225X

April 2022

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 of Leadership & Change
Antioch University
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dissertation Committee:

Philomena Essed, PhD, Chairperson

Donna Ladkin, PhD

Vassilissa Carangio, PhD

ABSTRACT

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

Lijun Li

Graduate School of Leadership and Change

Yellow Springs, OH

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.

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

Acknowledgements

Tremendous thanks to the women who trusted me and shared their stories in this study. It was quite an enriching and humbling experience.

Special thanks to Philomena Essed, my committee chair and advisor, for her listening, understanding, encouragement, guidance, patience, and tolerance that carried me through this long and bumpy road. Also, to my dissertation committee members, Donna Ladkin and Vassilissa Carangio, for generously offering their time and responses.

I acknowledge with gratitude that the doctoral program offered me a wonderful educational opportunity in the U.S. during the past several years. It was within this safe learning community that my critical thinking and deep engagement were tremendously nourished. It is a wonderful gift to harvest friendship. I am grateful to the knowledgeable librarian, Stephen Shaw, for his wonderful service.

I am hugely indebted to Terry Moher, my writing mentor, friend, and my first reader, for all that she has done for this work and even beyond: skillful writing guidance that was always liberating and empowering, necessary and timely emotional support that kept me spirited when I felt low, endless labor of editing with careful and excellent advice, unfailing belief in me, and seeing me with new potentials in a way that nobody else has ever said to me.

Thanks for the generous support of Alan E. Guskin Scholar's Fund, International Fellowships Program Alumni award, Cambridge Scholarship, and the Homestretch Fund, which allowed me to complete this dissertation.

Heartfelt thanks to Lao Guo, my former supervisor in China, for the lasting mentorship and friendship, filled with many memorable conversations.

A long and overdue thanks to many incarcerated women I had interviewed in China two decades ago for sharing their life stories, the influences of which are present in this work.

Warm thanks to a mentor and friend—without naming her for obvious reasons—for awakening and inspiring in me a sense of civic participation by her courageous presence in an environment where there is little space for such action. To me, she is one of those few individuals that represents the light in the darkness.

Thanks to Tina Christodouleas for her friendship, proofreading, and taking my daughter to her home many times when I needed to travel for my residencies during the first couple of years of my doctoral journey.

Thanks to Cynthia Cohen for her mentoring in the early stage of my doctoral journey, which left indelible marks in my personal and professional growth.

Deepest gratitude to Catherine Brady and Nancy Cole, my American family. Their constant presence in my and my daughter's lives has made us feel much love and immensely helped me navigate American society in many different ways. I have greatly benefited and learned from the humanity embodied in their daily life: love, giving, care, kindliness, generosity, and good citizenship.

I give gratitude to my family in China for their love and support in spite of my being a rebel and being away for so long. Also, to my lovely daughter, Niuniu, for her presence in my life. Her unconditional love has taught me how to love, has kept me going, and has helped me develop as a mom and as a human; her existence has functioned as a reminder for me to slow down in order to be present and watching her grow in a society that is not my own has challenged me to learn from and with her, and continually grow.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This study is an effort to turn to older Chinese immigrant women, one of the most marginalized groups in the American society, to recognize their humanity and rediscover the unseen and unheard.

The study resonates with my own experience, having left China for study in the U.S. and coming to terms with disconnections from a homeland as a daughter and mother, and as a Chinese woman who did not grow up in the U.S. It also speaks to my on-going intellectual and political journey. Being in the U.S. has created opportunities to perceive China differently from a distance, and to discover a Chinese immigrant history of which I was not aware—a largely hidden past of anti-Chinese sentiments in the U.S., which has now taken specific forms in response to the COVID-19 crisis. I hope that Chinese immigrant women's stories offer insights to my own and younger generations about living with change and opportunities, challenges and uncertainties, freedoms and restraints.

In retrospect, this inquiry started nearly twenty years ago in south China, when, after obtaining my master's degree in education, I began to work as a teacher in the criminal justice department at a police training academy, teaching young women and men who would staff prisons. During the nine-year period there, I spent many hours doing research in women's prisons, primarily interviewing women prisoners about their life experiences and lives under incarceration. That practice proved to be a transformative experience that changed me profoundly, in the ways I perceived both the incarcerated women and myself as a scholar. Originally, I had considered the imprisoned women certainly different from me, the "object" of my study, defined solely by the crimes that they had committed. I was a researcher, occasionally an educator and a counselor; I was part of the prison system. Gradually, the numerous stories I

heard from the women—stories full of pain, struggle, fear, desperation, and, sometimes, a little hope—expelled my fear, dissolved the barrier between them and me, and led me to recognize their humanity, to see with a new eye the complexity, individuality, and richness that made up human beings. I became a listener, a companion, and sometimes even a friend. Paralleled with related research on gender and other broad social issues, those stories led me further to the questions "Who are they?" and "Why are they the most marginalized group?" I was forced to re-identify critically the economic, political, social and cultural construct in my society, and to counter through my teaching and daily interaction with people around me the prevailing discourse and misconceptions in textbooks, within the prison system, and in the society. I wanted to become a witness to the prison world, conveying the truth to the "free" society, hoping to help the incarcerated women to be heard and seen.

Along my research, I was also led to some scholars, artists, and social activists, such as Ai Weiwei and Ai Xiaoming, who, despite the risks to their security, freedom, and even life under the authoritarian system, have been dedicated to speaking the truth, to protecting the rights of the marginalized individuals and groups, and to calling the public to act as responsible citizens in the pursuit of a civil society. Inspired by them, I found myself being awakened politically with a strong sense of social responsibility and a passion for social change; meanwhile, I also found myself being liberated from the cultural constraints—from fears about how others would view me as a woman, from the pressure of conforming to the majority and the dominant norms as an individual. I came to be able to identify the privileges that I had had, such as my education and social-economic status.

In 2011, I came to the U.S. as a Ford fellow, studying Sustainable International Development at Brandeis University. The two-year period was a journey of letting go of my

resentments from the old life in China as a woman and former daughter-in-law, a journey of deepened alienation from my parents because of the divergent expectations about my life, and a journey of continually reflecting on my old life while contemplating what life I want to pursue as an independent woman. It has been a journey of digging with excitement into contemporary China's history through many materials forbidden in China but accessible here, part of which developed into a memorial design for the victims of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in China in the late 1950s, a hidden and silenced history. I saw it as my effort of being a Chinese citizen and a member of a generation with a sense of alienation and rootlessness from the older generation.

And now I am at a cross-point again, ready to reach to older Chinese immigrant women in the U.S., something I would not have been able to predict when I arrived almost 10 years ago.

Intellectually, my experiences under the two social and political systems have prompted in me a passionate exploration of how authoritarianism functions and maintains its power, how individuals can make social change happen in China, how democracy works, what an open society is, what a life "worthy of human dignity" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 32) means, how social arrangements can meet such a goal accordingly, and how different social arrangements impact individuals differently. During the past several years, some of the works that have had great influences on me are Havel's (1978) *Power of the Powerless,* Arendt's (1951) *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Fromm's (1965) *Escape from Freedom*, Hayek's (1978) *The Constitution of Liberty*, Scott's (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Sen's (1999) *Development as Freedom,* and Nussbaum's (2010) *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*.

During the recent turmoil with the pandemic, compounded by the Sino-U.S. tensions, I found myself being in a vulnerable position due to my multiple status as a single mom, as a

Chinese woman, and as an international student with a restricted visa. In addition to confronting the health and financial crises, I experienced fears about being crushed and caught in between by the Sino-U.S. tensions, about being deported for being either Chinese or for being an international student, about being potentially investigated for the stereotype of being a communist "spy," or about being subject to racial attacks for the so-called "China virus." Witnessing the rising racism against Chinese and other Asian Americans during the pandemic led me to relate it to and deepen my understanding of the Chinse/Asian immigration history and its legacy in particular, and of the broader social structure of the American society that has contributed to injustice to other "minority" groups as well. To a certain point, the racism took a toll on me after I experienced it, directly and vicariously, leaving me further emotionally stirred, intellectually arrested, and politically gripped. Challenged to counter all the fears, anger, pain, and frustration, I was propelled to reach out to some friends—Chinese and non-Chinese—as well as the strangers I encountered occasionally, to exchange experiences and feelings and to discuss strategies for better navigation and confrontation. This study offers an in-depth opportunity for learning from older Chinese immigrant women who met similar and other challenges along the way.

Gaps Identified in Literature and Beyond

Presenting the gaps identified from close engagement with the selective literature on older Chinese immigrant women, two trends helped contextualize more clearly the larger picture of the study theme.

One is the contrast between the amount of literature about the older population of mainstream White America and that about the non-White, with the latter including older Chinese immigrant women. The mainstream literature, predominantly about and among White

baby-boomers, including discussions on intergenerational connections, is increasingly and rapidly growing; to name a few, Freedman's (2002) *Prime Time: How Baby Boomers Will Revolutionize Retirement and Transform America*, Bateson's (2011) *Composing a Further Life: The Age of Active Wisdom*, Pipher's (1999, 2019) *Another Country: Navigating the Emotional Terrain of Our Elders* and *Women Rowing North: Navigating Life's Currents and Flourishing as We Age.* The intellectual as well as the practical engagement among and about the mainstream White population seems to be gaining momentum as a movement, if it has not already become one. By contrast, the literature about non-White older population in general and older Chinese immigrant women in particular is relatively limited.

The focus on women emerges from a critical point of view about gender inequities in societies at large, including much of the research on Chinese immigration to the U.S. In the most commonly found version of Chinese immigration history, which, as with Asian immigration history, was shadowed by mainstream American history (Burns & Yu, 2018a), women seem to be almost invisible. This omission led me to the question, "Where are the women?" which, in turn, led to an exploration of the history of female Chinese immigration to the U.S. Chinese immigrant women's history is different from that of their counterparts, Chinese men, for which I found confirmation in the works by Yung (1995) and others, such as Bao (2001), Espiritu (1997), Chan (1991a), E. Lee (2003), and Pascoe (1990). Moreover, hearing women's voices leads to a different understanding of history and politics.

A critical engagement with the selective literature on older Chinese immigrant women in the U.S., discussed in more detail in Chapter II, shows that a related stream of scholarship (e.g., Adler et al., 2000; Cheng, 2013; Liang et al., 2004; Menkin et al., 2017) has begun to examine aspects of the experiences of older Chinese immigrant women; however, the existing literature

indicates a few major gaps. First, the group of older Chinese immigrant women in the U.S. is understudied in the three relevant areas of feminist/gender studies, gerontology, as well as immigration/race relations studies, given the limited literature on this group overall. Second, most literature with a focus on older Chinese immigrant women is limited to their lives in the U.S., which creates an artificial division between pre-immigration and post-immigration. Third, most existing research on Chinese immigrant women diagnoses life by dissecting it into separate parts rather than seeing it as a whole. Fourth, older Chinese immigrant women's existential life reality is complex, given their multiple and related social positioning as immigrants, women of color, ethnic minority, and an aged generation; whereas a comprehensive and interdisciplinary reading of their lives is rare.

These gaps call for a research project on older Chinese immigrant women that sees life as a whole, embedding their life experiences in both the contemporary Chinese society and the Chinese immigration history in the U.S.

The Research Question

This study asks, "What can we learn from life stories of older Chinese immigrant women about the ways in which each experience(d) being a woman in different societal systems?" It focuses on those women age 60 and above, who grew up in Mainland China, emigrated as adults, and have lived in the U.S. for five years or longer.

Some of the questions significant to this study are: How did older Chinese immigrant women navigate both systems? Did they experience congruity, or did they feel tension between their own sense of capabilities and family, community, or societal expectations? How did they reconcile with the past? How did they feel about the circumstances of their lives in relation to gender, race-ethnicity, social-economic and political circumstances? Did the women experience

agency to shape their lives according to their sense of future? How have the women's self-images changed, if at all? How do they compare their life as a woman with their mother's and, if any, with their daughter's? What wisdom/insights about being a woman would they like to pass on to their daughters, if any, or to other younger women?

Theoretical Frames

Focusing on older Chinese immigrant women's experiences as women, the study adopts at the same time an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 2011; Essed, 1994; UN Women, 2020), a view that recognizes that women are not a homogenous group, and neither are their experiences as women. The combination of race/ethnicity, social-economic status, education, generation, region, and other structural factors shape their individual experiences.

The concept of "race" is not often acknowledged in the Mainland Chinese literature or political discourse (Dikötter, 1992). Given the existence of racism in the American society, however, 'race' is still a useful and necessary concept (Chan, 2004), even though the concept itself is not without problem (Balibar, 2005; Dikötter, 1992; Essed, 1990, 1996; Pascoe, 1991a**)**. As with "gender," "race" as a concept is not immutable but socially constructed, Peggy Pascoe (1991a) argued, pointing out a fact that is not always easily understood, due to the "lack of a term for race analogous to gender" (p. 10). Urging us to consider its historically shifting meanings during its social construction, Pascoe (1991a) stressed that we should look beyond black-white racial relations, which finds resonance in other scholars, such as Vicki Ruiz and Ellen DuBois (1990), James Loewen (1988), and Judy Yung (1995).

A relevant question in this study is whether the "gender" concept, developed in the western context, would be appropriate for capturing, understanding, and interpreting the Chinese

experience of older immigrant women. This brought Asian American feminism into central stage to serve as a frame of reference.

It has to be noted that there is a distinction between women-centered perspective and gender perspective (Espiritu, 1997). The former—to "recenter women to make their worldviews and experiences more visible and central in the construction of knowledge"—does not necessarily mean that it attempts to "integrate the women's experiences into gendered accounts" (Espiritu, 1997, p. 3). Gender perspective, in particular when using intersectional analysis, allows for diagnosing both the patriarchy that produces power differentials between women and men and its intersection with other systems of inequalities such as race and class (Espiritu, 1997). Using an intersectional gender perspective in the research can reveal older Chinese immigrant women's agency, if any, in different stages and areas of their identity and experience making their own life and history.

As for the immigrant dimension, the study not only looks at older Chinese immigrant women's lives in the U.S., considering their multiple social positions in the U.S. as women, as ethnic minority, as immigrants, and as older people; it also hopes to bring to the surface their past in China, as past shapes one's habits, hope, love, fear, transition, and many other aspects of humanity. However, it might be right to say that the past of immigrants, in general, seems to be invisible to some extent in their daily interactions with others (W. Tsen, personal communication, April 28, 2019).

Part of the past of this older Chinese cohort are national historical events in China, particularly the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) which all of the women in this study experienced. While this study does not plan to retell the history, it is relevant to include if and how cohort experiences have shaped older Chinese immigrant women.

While weaving together the past and present of life experiences of older Chinese immigrant women in different societies, the study acknowledges that neither the past nor the present are static but both keep evolving, and that, through constant dialogue between the two, each gains new light from the other (Andrews, 2007; Mead, 1970).

The women's individual stories are likely to reveal something about the opportunities they felt society offered for them to adapt to or reject societal expectations, to express agency in pursuing personal aspirations. In order to get a sense of what can be perceived as acceptable circumstances to be able to develop, grow and age using their potential as girls, as women, I have been inspired by the Human Development Approach cofounded by Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2011), particularly the latter's version of it.

A fundamental view I take from the Human Development Approach is that it is human centered—human development is the end, not the means, of development (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). This premise can be found in both Nussbaum's (2011) and Sen's (1999) accounts. Nussbaum (2011) stated clearly that "the real purpose of development is human development," that is, "to enable people to live full and creative lives, developing their potential and fashioning a meaning existence commensurate with their human dignity" (p. 185). Sen (1999) made a succinct analysis of development as follows:

> Development treats the freedoms of individuals as the basic building blocks. Attention is thus paid particularly to the expansion of the 'capabilities' of persons to lead the kind of lives they value—and have reason to value ... [And] the success of a society is to be evaluated, in this view, primarily by the substantive freedoms that the members of that society enjoy. (p. 18)

Nussbaum's (2011) version of the human development approach—the Capabilities Approach—addresses basic social justice by constructing a normative political proposal as "a partial theory of social justice" (p. 40). It asks what she believed to be universal—"What is each

person able to do and to be?" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 20) or, framed differently, "What does a life worthy of human dignity require?" (p. 32). The approach is centered around the concept of "combined capabilities" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 21), referring to "the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social and economic environment" (p. 20). Emphasizing that each person should be treated as an end, Nussbaum (2011) contended that the social goal a society should pursue is to support and protect all its members to "get above a certain threshold level of combined capabilities" (p. 24). As a guidance, she listed ten irreducible and interrelated capabilities: "life," "bodily health," "bodily integrity," "senses, imagination, and thought," "emotions," "practical reason," "affiliation," "other species," "play," "control over one's environment," including both "political" and "material" (Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 33–34).

Aware that the Capabilities Approach, as a normative, is set in the context of political liberalism where choices are essential (Nussbaum, 2000a, 2000b, 2011) and that the older Chinese immigrant women in this study grew up in a different societal and political context, this study will not use its list of central capabilities as a criterion for evaluating the women in this study. Rather, what this study takes from the Capabilities Approach is that it is social justice oriented, that it treats the individual as an end, and that it addresses the interplay of the individual and the society explicitly (Nussbaum, 2000a, 2000b, 2011).

Terminologies

Immigrant/Foreign-Born

For the purpose of my study, "immigrant" will be used in a broad sense, referring to one who was born and raised in a different country than one's country of residence, regardless of current legal status. "Immigrant" and "foreign born" are used interchangeably (U.S. Census

Bureau, n.d.). To be more specific, the foreign born, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.), is defined as "anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth," including "naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents (immigrants), temporary migrants (such as foreign students), humanitarian migrants (such as refugees and asylees), and unauthorized migrants."

Chinese Immigrant

Not all ethnic Chinese come from Mainland China. There are persons of Chinese ancestry who live in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, Southeast Asia, and other places throughout the world. In this study, "Chinese immigrant" will be used in the narrow sense, merely focusing on those from Mainland China, which is constituted by 56 different officially identified ethnicities, with Han being the dominant and mainstream. Chinese immigrant women in this study will be presumed to be foremost Han women unless explicitly stated otherwise. Also, neither "Chinese" nor "Chinese immigrant" implies that one identifies him/herself with it.

Chinese American

Different from Chinese immigrants, "Chinese American" will be used selectively, referring to those who were foreign-born but came to the U.S. at a young age, or those who were U.S.-born, many of whom identify themselves as "Chinese American," whereas many Chinese immigrants do not.

Culture

"Culture" is an ambiguous term, often used in many different ways (Chan, 2004). There is an essentialist risk in using "Chinese culture" or "American culture" (Chan, 2004; Poscoe, 1991b), which imply "culture" as "separate, static, and free from internal and external domination" (Pascoe, 1991b, p. 3), failing to pay attention to its change over time (Pascoe, 1991b). Thus, I will borrow the practice from historian Sucheng Chan (2004), using quotation

marks to signify that I am aware of the diversity (Chan, 2004) and change (Pascoe, 1991b) within each one.

Agency

Having not found a better word, this study uses "agency" with caution: widely used in the West, "agency" implies a liberal position, presuming the existence of one's individuation or one's sense of autonomy. Such individuation or autonomy, however, cannot and should not be taken for granted in a different societal and political system such as the one in Mainland China.

Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature. Life story inquiry is the research method that has been adopted. Originally, the research plan was to conduct in-person, face to face, interviews with older Chinese immigrant women. Given the coronavirus-crisis, it was not be feasible to visit the women personally, and their comfort with visual technology might vary. The alternative plan was to conduct interviews on-line, via phone, through emails, or in a combination of any two of them. The decision was mostly pragmatic and depended on who would be willing to be interviewed and whether the potential participant had access to and capability for technology. The factor of "trust" became larger than I originally had foreseen. Given the many stresses of the current health (and social trust) crisis in the U.S., it was even more relevant that the women could talk to someone whom they know, or who has been recommended through someone they can trust. In light of this it was more difficult to find women willing to participate, which reduced the study to four women, with each of whom I had two or three interviews rather than aiming for a larger group. This will be further discussed in Chapter III on Methodology.

Where possible, I supplemented the interviews with other secondary sources of information revealing the stories of these women, when relevant and available, such as journals,

photographs, biographies, autobiographies, written letters, etc. In addition to the "formal" data, I considered all the informal interaction—including my thoughts, discoveries, and impressions as data, as well. It became, in some ways, a study of my own autobiographical journey of growth, through learning from the biographical stories of the women.

Researcher's Stance

Being the researcher of the current qualitative study, I see myself as the "primary research instrument" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 14). Thus, my self-knowledge matters, as it is an issue of epistemology. Seeing a researcher as the instrument means identifying and being aware of the properties of the researcher, including the nature of the researcher's mental process and how significant experiences and relationships have shaped the researcher's perceptions (Bateson, 2004). It also means developing a measure of detachment to one's subjective response by becoming conscious of it rather than suppressing it (Bateson, 2004). With the consciousness of this kind, I approach this subsection, intending to make transparent my positionality—where I stand and what I bring to this study.

Bringing to the study the whole person I have become so far in my lifetime, I see three components essential to my multifaceted positionality in this study. One is my role as a woman, a mom, and a daughter, which I hoped would help build connections with and better understand the participants. Another layer of my positionality is my own marginality concerning both the Chinese and the American societies, which laid a solid foundation for understanding, interpreting, and analyzing life stories of the older Chinese immigrant women from a critical perspective. The third part of my positionality is age-related. Younger than the older Chinese immigrant women, I was aware of both the challenge it posed for me and a potential learning opportunity it offered.

To me, my position of marginality means simultaneously being familiar with and critical to both the Chinese and American societies. It is a position quite close to, if not exactly the same as, "connected critics," a position taken by Mary Pipher (2006) as a change writer and Molly Andrews (2007) as a professor of political psychology, in their respective works. The position of marginality, Michael Walzer (1985) wrote, "has often been a condition that motivates criticism and determines the critic's characteristic tone and appearance" (p. 32). In the position of marginality, "marginal men and women are … in but not wholly of their society. The difficulties they experience are not the difficulties of detachment but of ambiguous connection" (Walzer, 1985, p. 32).

In my case, the position of marginality, no doubt, is a position that has been shaped and complicated by my three-decade-long life experience in China and my life in the U.S. It is a position most inseparable from "Chineseness"—a major part of my "involuntary group membership" (Andrews, 1991, p. 26) as a reality I have had to live with in both societies, though differently, and which finally led me to a new consciousness, respectively, as well as the corresponding intentional choices.

To be more specific, living in the Chinese society, "Chineseness" is something I had unconsciously and consciously rejected and resisted—its omnipresent strong force throughout the authoritarian society on individuals to conform, the patriarchal and oppressive environment both at my workplace and within my families (as a daughter and a former daughter-in-law).

Living in the U.S. and being perceived as a Chinese/Asian woman, "Chineseness" seems to have become a new reality from which I had nowhere to escape but had to accommodate. Partly it piqued me to plunge into Chinese contemporary history through the exploration of many materials forbidden in China. Partly it gradually led me to a "minority awareness"—not in the

sense of belonging, but more in the sense that affords me to see the realities in which different ethnic groups live. The combination of the "minority awareness" with my heightened—and hard-learned—sense of change agency situates me in a position where I choose to engage.

In short, my marginal position in the Chinese and the American societies is coupled respectively with a new irreversible awareness and, along with it, the intentional choices of engaging and participating from a critical position as an individual.

Younger than the intended Chinese immigrant women participants, I had initially been aware of possible age difference barriers. Would I be able to deeply empathize and fully understand older people who are in a different life stage where I have not experienced yet?

Such a challenge was discerned by Andrews (1991) while she was conducting her dissertation research in Britain on 15 lifelong socialist activists between age 70 and 90. She shared insights by Kohlberg and Shulik (1981, as cited in Andrews, 1991) about the implications for younger researchers: "If an aging person has developed some wisdom we do not have, it is hard for younger researchers to detect it" (p. 10); as for the wisdom aging people possess, what researchers should do, among other important things, is "to clarify and communicate that wisdom to others" (p. 10). To do that, a younger researcher needs "to be not only a psychologist and a sociologist but also a philosopher" (Kohlberg & Shulik, 1981, as cited in Andrews, 1991, p. 10).

My awareness of the built-in gaps between older Chinese immigrant women and me in terms of age, experience, and the intersection of autobiography and history led me to dive into gender issues in China, Chinese female immigrants' history, and literature of old age and aging. Exploration of the first two areas, as presented in Chapter II, will situate the life stories of older Chinese immigrant women into the appropriate context, while also facilitating the interview and

interpretation processes. To explore old age and aging enhances understanding of a developmental life stage different from mine. Also, such an awareness of age difference has altered the way I have conversations with older people I encounter in my daily life. I have come to realize with an increased awareness that I need to approach older Chinese immigrant women with an attitude of respectful curiosity, with deep listening with humility, with a compelling desire to learn from them and, as Andrews (2007) did, even to discover an image I can potentially envision for my old age.

To me, being a younger researcher in this study is also closely connected to my sense of history, which can be best articulated in the concept of "200-year present," which futurist Paul Saffo (2010) had mentioned in a blog. He was quoting peace activist and sociologist Boulding (as cited in Saffo, 2010), who had coined this notion. "200-year present" refers to the present day as the middle point between 100 years ago, when people who turned 100 today were born and 100 years from now, when the babies born today will have their hundredth birthday (Saffo, 2010). Prompted by this concept which I encountered several years ago, I started imagining myself—born at a particular time—standing on a specific spot along an expanded historical spectrum, bearing certain responsibilities. This concept afforded me an opportunity to engage with a new perspective of history and a new way of thinking of the present moment and of change. As an individual, I wanted to be one of those who can bridge the "200-year present." To reach out to the older generation of Chinese immigrant women is an effort of that kind. As a citizen of the world, I wanted to discover where the world is going; in which direction; what visions of a better world and humanity I would like to see; and along with all of them, how to cultivate and maintain human connection across generations; and what is, if anything, the meaning of the past. To all of these questions of which I do not yet have any answers, I would

like to continue my search. In this sense, my study is part of a future-orientated journey of this kind.

Significance of the Study

While the study bears personal importance to me, which has fueled the process of research and writing, the meaning of the study can go beyond the personal level.

I hope the study provided the older Chinese immigrant women meaningful space for sharing and reflecting.

To the public in the American society, it is hoped that the study can learn from Chinese immigrant women's perspectives on America as a social system through their individual and collective stories. By looking at their past and present, the older Chinese immigrant women can help us all revisit how we live and how we can live better together.

To other immigrant women who came from China and now live in the U.S., the stories may present them a mirror to reflect on their life journeys in different societies, on transition and agency, on the forces that prevent them and/or forces that liberate or provide them agency, or on the relationship between the individual and the society, including how each affects, or can affect, the other.

The study holds a modest hope that it may contribute to exploring universal implications on the understanding of social justice. Similar to Nussbaum's (2000a, 2000b) argument that while the Capabilities Approach can be used for comparative purpose between nations, it goes beyond such use to construct a normative theory of justice, this study hopes to add knowledge to that theory.

In addition, the study's significance can also be seen in light of a close reading of what "now and here" means to me as a Chinese international student living in the U.S. On the one

hand, the study—part of which touches on "sensitive" issues related to Mainland China, such as the silenced history of certain historical events—is made possible while I still live in the U.S., where I enjoy more academic freedom than in China. On the other hand, I am also aware of the surveillance by the Chinese government beyond its national border, especially towards its dissenting voices, while attentive to the global story about its recent aggressive actions in Hong Kong. Thus, conducting the study "here and now" is of great particular political importance to me in this sense, as well.

Dissertation Structure by Chapter

Chapter II will engage with relevant literature in order to inform my research. The literature will include issues of gender in China, an overview of historical and contemporary experiences of Chinese immigrant women in the U.S., and the experiences of older Chinese immigrant women. Chapter III will address the research methodology, specifying in detail life story inquiry, including why life story inquiry is essential to such research, and how the research was conducted. To embed the life stories of older Chinese immigrant women in this study, Chapter IV will overview the historical context referred to in their accounts. Chapter V will present the individual life story of four older Chinese immigrant women interviewed in this study, followed by the interpretation and analysis in Chapter VI which looks across the life stories altogether and present nine themes. The dissertation will end with a conclusion in Chapter VII.

CHAPTER II: CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter firstly focuses on a review of literature concerning gender in China. It then maps the historical and contemporary experiences of female Chinese immigrants in the U.S. and, finally, discusses existing research on older Chinese immigrant women.

Gender in China: Past and Present

The section that follows is a brief sketch of China's gender issues against which to appreciate the lives of Chinese immigrant women and their pre-immigration background. In light of their expected ages, 60–80, the year 1949, the founding of P. R. China, is taken as a starting point, when the Chinese communist revolution reached its culmination after over two decades.

During Mao Era (1949–1976)

Since the Communist Party came into power in Mainland China in 1949, the rhetoric of "equality between men and women" and "women's liberation" was adopted and even enshrined into the constitution, whereas "feminism" was—and is still—shunned (Fincher, 2018a). During the period of the 1950s and 1960s, women's (mandated) labor power was used to an unprecedented extent when China experienced an agricultural collectivization movement (1953–1957) and the Great Leap Forward Campaign (1958–1962; Fincher, 2018a; Guo, 2007, 2013; Hershatter, 2011). The former was a radical movement of depriving the wealthy of their property and abolishing the industry (Guo, 2007, 2013). The latter, a utopian economic and social campaign aimed at making China catch up with the U.S. and Britain, led to a severe famine and the deaths of tens of millions of people (Dikötter, 2010a; Guo, 2013; J. Yang, 2012). Women's labor power continued through the Cultural Revolution during 1966–1976 (Guo, 2013; H. Gao, 2017; Honig & Hershatter, 1988). Women's labor-force participation rate in urban China, less than 12% in 1952 in state-owned enterprises, rose to over 90% by the end of the

1970s (Fincher, 2018a). For propaganda purposes, women's heroic images—such as "iron women"—were created in order to urge them to pursue traditionally male jobs and even compete with men for high productivity (H. Gao, 2017). Meanwhile, women also had to assume all the domestic work and often had to leave home young children unattended and hungry (Guo, 2007, 2013; Hershatter, 2011). Guo Yuhua (2007, 2013) contended that women's liberation was actually an illusion under the disguise of the dominating discourse that equates revolution to emancipation. Women's subordination switched from within the family to the state, whereas their status of being dominated remained the same (Guo, 2007, 2013).

Gender equality endorsed by the Communist Party was, and still is, a myth (Fincher, 2018a; H. Gao, 2017). The "liberated" images of women during the 1940s to late 1970s simply denied or neutralized sexual differences (Fincher, 2018a; Honig & Hershatter, 1988). This can be inferred from the work they assumed, traditionally male jobs, or from their bare faces—no make-up—and sexless clothing style (Fincher, 2018a). Those who spoke out about gender inequalities, such as the Party's sexist double standards or women's double burden, were persecuted during the Anti-rightist campaign in 1957 for being "narrow feminist" and "non-revolutionary" (Fincher, 2018a). While the liberation of women was boosted as the success of the Communist revolution, Guo (2007) cautioned that women's voice was invisible in the official history of the Party. Leta Hong Fincher (2018a) maintained that women's liberation in the Communist era was largely symbolic, as was the rhetoric of the women's emancipation at the turn of the century and the New Culture Movement (1915–1924), both of which were "more about modernizing and strengthening China than about improving real women's lives" (p. 125).

In the Post-Mao Era

During the post-Mao era, the lives of tens of millions of women and families were affected by China's "one-child policy"—an aggressive population-control plan that lasted over three decades (1979–2015), limiting each Han family, mostly in urban areas, to one child (Fincher, 2018a; Fong, 2016; N. Wang & Zhang, 2019). The policy was firstly introduced in 1979 when China's economy was almost paralyzed (Piao et al., 2015). The common position was that China's huge population was a burden of, and the primary reason for, the sluggish economy, so the fertility rate had to be controlled, that is, reduced (Piao et al., 2015). We can get a peek of the extensiveness of the enforcement of the policy from a couple of numbers (R. Huang, 2017): According to the official statistics, during 1980–2014, 324 million women had intrauterine devices (IUDs); 107 million women did tubal ligations. The human cost and tragic consequences of the policy continue to be much more than numbers can reveal. As the compelling documentary *One Child Nation* (N. Wang & Zhang, 2019) shows, the strict policy involved the disappearance and abandonment of numerous girls, the suffering of their families, and the government's intentional abduction and human traffickers' selling abandoned girls to orphanages that arrange international adoptions.

At the end of 2015, more than three decades since its implementation, the coercive one-child policy was officially abandoned by the government, given China's new challenges—low birth rate, rapidly aging population, and shrinking labor force (Fincher, 2018a, 2018b). In an interview with the *New York Times*, Liang Zhong Tang (as cited in Piao et al., 2015), an economist who has been against the policy since the outset, argued that, in fact, the reasoning behind the "one-child policy" was wrong; what accounted for the situation of the economy in the late 1970s was partly the devastating impacts of the Cultural Revolution and partly the highly

planned economy that no longer worked. Both Liang (as cited in Piao et al., 2015) and Fincher (2018a, 2018b) criticized the "one-child policy" for its violation of people's reproductive rights. Using Fincher's (2018a) words, the "catastrophic" one-child policy "grossly violated the reproductive rights of all of China's women" in its practices of the "egregious abuses" of Chinese women—"large-scale forced abortions, sterilizations, and compulsory birth control, including the coercive insertion of intrauterine devices (IUDs) on a mass scale" (p. 170). Sen (2015) stressed that the fertility rate in China had fallen rapidly even before the policy started, as the number of births was 5.87 per woman on average in 1968, which dropped to 2.98 in 1978. They urged that "boy preference" in China be dismantled, as it is still rampant (Sen, 2015).

Since China bid farewell to the one-child policy, a new one—"two-child policy"—is in place, allowing most couples to have two children while the state offers free "service" of removing IUDs, which involves risks for women's bodies (R. Huang, 2017). Challenging the opinion that the new policy grants women greater reproductive freedom, Fincher (2018a) argued that "the government was only embarking on another grand experiment in population engineering: this time it was urging women—though only the right sort—to reproduce for China" (p. 171). "The right sort," she revealed, is the urban, highly educated Han woman (Fincher, 2018a, 2018b). Fincher (2018b) also stated that women were seen as "reproductive agents," serving the state's "eugenic development agenda" (para. 7).

Urban women's labor-force participation dropped dramatically when China's planned economy was dismantled and many women and men lost jobs at state-owned enterprises (Fincher, 2018a; A. Qin, 2019b). Women were usually the first to be fired and the last to be rehired (Fincher, 2018a; A. Qin, 2019b). In the late 1980s and 1990s when unemployment worsened, a "Women Return to the Home" movement was born, urging women to make space

for men (Fincher, 2018a; A. Qin, 2019b). The workforce participation rate dropped from 73.2% in 1990 to 63.3% in 2017 among women who were 15 and older (International Labour Organization, n.d.). By contrast, 76% of men from the same age span were in the workforce in 2017 (International Labour Organization, n.d.).

Gender discrimination in hiring was and still is rampant and blatant in China (Chinese Feminism, 2020; Fincher, 2018a; Human Rights Watch, 2018; Ke, 2015; A. Qin, 2019b): a woman's sex, marriage status, age and her decision of having a child or not, and even her appearance, can all determine whether she can be hired or not.

Gender inequality can also be found in the widening income gap: among urban women, the average annual salary was 77.5% of that of men in 1990 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2001), which dropped to 67.3% in 2010; Among rural women, their annual income was 56.0% of that of rural men's in 2010 (All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011).

Gender gaps can also be found in property wealth (A. Qin, 2019b; Fincher, 2016, 2018a). Chinese parents tend to buy homes for their sons, but not for their daughters. Homes are usually registered in men's names even though women usually contribute financially to the purchase of the property. As women's names are lacking in the registration of the property wealth, they find themselves in an extremely vulnerable and disadvantaged position, especially those who experience domestic violence and/or want to divorce (Fincher, 2016, 2018a; A. Qin, 2019b).

Gender inequality also exists in the area of education. There is evidence that the criteria for college admission are gendered, requiring that women have higher grades in order to get admitted into certain majors or explicitly claiming that men are preferred (Chinese Feminism, 2020; Ke, 2015; Zhuang & X. Yang, 2013).

Besides the above gender inequality in various areas, omnipresent sexism and misogyny can also be found in the way women are expected to assume their roles: Chinese women are not only expected but also pressured to enter heterosexual marriage, have children, and take care of children and the elderly (Chinese Feminism, 2020; Fincher, 2018a; Ke, 2015; A. Qin, 2019b). During the past two decades, social media have stereotypically labeled single women in the late twenties as "leftover women," pressuring them to rush into marriage (B. Li, 2017; Fincher, 2016, 2018a; A. Qin, 2019b). Further, common knowledge about having healthy babies believes women should get pregnant before they turn thirty, otherwise, the probability of new-born babies with defects is high (Fincher, 2018a). At the same time, in the government's propaganda, the significance of family and marriage has been reemphasized as the foundation of a "harmonious" society (China Daily, 2007; K. Xu, 2020; Shen, 2020). Societal and family pressures to find a husband and start a family as the only legitimate path for young women can become overwhelming, as many women have experienced.

In the first two decades of the 21st century, certain feminist efforts emerged in China against all odds, at different levels and in different forms, and gradually became visible. To name a few, some women began to resist marriage, delay their first births, claim their lesbian gender identities, or make lawsuits against domestic violence (Fincher, 2018a; Lü, 2018; Xiaowu, 2018). Nongovernmental or other independent women's rights organizations have been formed since the 2000s (Fincher, 2018a; Xiaowu, 2018; Zou, 2018). After over 10 years of concerted efforts by a group of women's rights lawyers and academics, China's first anti-domestic violence law was passed at the end of 2015, though its implementation, starting from 2016, was flawed for various reasons (Lü, 2018; Xiaowu, 2018). In the 2010s, an expanding group of feminist activists participated actively in a wide range of activities, fighting against gender inequality (Lü,

2018). It is not surprising that all these efforts met heavy suppression from the government (Fincher, 2018a; Zou, 2018). The year 2015 witnessed a nascent feminist movement being crashed when five young feminists were detained for their efforts against sexual harassment on public transportation (Fincher, 2018a; Zou, 2018). Accordingly, some women's rights NGOs were forced to close down, especially those funded internationally or those having the history of international civic cooperation; women's study programs were ideologically tightened; "feminism" and "Me too" have become sensitive words for the Chinese government because the terms have been seen as representing "hostile international forces" "intervening China's women's issues" (Di, 2017; Fincher, 2018a; Mou, 2018; Zou, 2018).

Summary

To conclude, looking back across the historical course from 1949 until today, it is not difficult to identify parallels in the expected roles of women in China: to contribute to the Communist revolution, to subject their bodies' integrity to a national population-control plan so as to ease the burden for the economy, to make space for men by "returning home" when the employment prospect became dim, to maintain societal stability by rushing into marriage and becoming good wives and moms, to reproduce more high-quality next generation out of the need of the state for more labor force. Fincher's (2018a) insight linked women's situation to the system: "[I]t is impossible to understand the longevity of China's Communist Party without recognizing the patriarchal underpinnings of its authoritarianism" (p. 4).

This section contributed to a better understanding of the interplay of Chinese immigrant women's past and present. Several implications of the Chinese women's lived experiences for understanding Chinese immigrant women's experiences and perceptions as women might be relevant: (a) It is not easy to tell if Chinese (immigrant) women really pursued—of their own

will—the heterosexual marriage and their roles as moms and wives, given that they rarely had other options in their lives; (b) The constraints imposed on Chinese women may explain the efforts—and motivations, as well—that certain Chinese immigrant women made in breaking away from their past; (c) It may help identify the continuity and rupture in Chinese immigrant women's life stories, individually and collectively; (d) It may help in understanding the intergenerational dynamics between the older Chinese immigrant women and younger generations.

An Overview of Historical and Contemporary Experiences of Chinese Immigrant Women in the U.S.

This section will present an overview of the history of female Chinese immigration to the U.S., followed by an exploration of the experiences of contemporary Chinese/Asian immigrant women. By delineating some of the major events and movements that have shaped the history of female Chinese immigration, I hope the overview can provide a historical context in which Chinese immigrant women's life experiences are embedded. It should be noted that the history of Chinese immigrants who settled on the mainland of the U.S. bears distinction from that of those immigrants who settled in Hawaii (Chan, 1991b). For this study, the review here will mainly focus on the former. The exploration of life experiences of contemporary Chinese/Asian immigrant women, by integrating multiple analytical lenses, including race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and immigration, hopes to capture the complexity of their lives as women, as an ethnic minority, and as immigrants.

The Dearth of Women in Early Immigration

The experience of (older) Chinese immigrant women in the U.S., in particular its gender, class, and racial implications, cannot be fully understood without a reflection on the historical context of almost two centuries of immigration from China, which laid the grounds for their

marginalization today. The history of Chinese migration to the U.S. started foremost with men who crossed the ocean in the 1840s after gold was discovered in California (Burns & Yu, 2018a; Yung, 1995). The resulting shortage of women and what it meant for individual lives constituted a striking characteristic of Chinese immigrant communities from mid-nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century (Chan, 1991a; The Chinese Historical Society of America, n.d.; Yung, 1986, 1995). The Chinese immigrant sex ratio of male to female was extremely unbalanced: 19:1 in 1860, 13:1 in 1870, 21:1 in 1880, and 27:1 in 1890 (Yung, 1990). Among Chinese immigrant women, very few were wives of Chinese merchants; the majority of them were young women from poor families who were forced into the Chinese slave trade and became prostitutes and *mui tsai* (domestic slave girls; The Chinese Historical Society of America, n.d.; Pascoe, 1990; Yung, 1995).

Multiple factors account for the low number of Chinese women immigrants (Yung, 1995): the Chinese patriarchal system that kept most women, with bound feet, at home and young wives with in-laws, the limited financial ability to afford the trip to the U.S, and the anti-Chinese sentiment in the West. Overall, the lives of most Chinese immigrant women in the nineteenth century were "doubly bounded by patriarchal control in Chinatown and racism outside" which were "more inhibiting than liberating" (Yung, 1995, p. 5).

The shortage of Chinese immigrant women lasted for a century rather than a few decades, which distinguished them from other immigrant women (Chan, 1991a). Among other reasons, the restriction by American public policy became a more significant factor contributing to such a shortage (Chan, 1991a). The earliest policy efforts to limit Chinese women can be traced back to 1854, which targeted Chinese prostitutes in California (Chan, 1991a). In 1875, the Congress passed the Page Law—the first Chinese exclusion law—to ban most Chinese, especially

criminals, contract labors, and “Mongolian” prostitutes (Burns & Yu, 2018a; Chan, 1991a; The Chinese Historical Society of America, n.d.; Ngai, 2010; Yung, 1986, 1995). Behind the prohibition of Chinese women lay a stereotype that all Chinese women were or were prone to become prostitutes (K. S. Wong, as cited in Burns & Yu, 2018a). Being racial and gender specific, The Page Law kept Chinese women out successfully, because of the horrific interrogation process, explained K. S. Wong in an interview by Burns and Yu (2018a). Chan (1991a) determined that Chinese prostitutes (out of many white prostitutes) were singled out for seemingly moral reasons; however, behind such moral expression there was a hidden racial concern. Seen as “potent instruments for the debasement of white manhood, health, morality, and family life,” Chan (1991a) stated that “their continued presence was deemed as a threat to white civilization” (p. 138).

The plummeting population of Chinese female immigrants (Burns & Yu, 2018a) was seen by Jean Pfaelzer (2008) as a form of “ethnic cleansing.” Citing her words when interviewed by Burns and Yu (2018a), “[W]ithout women, the population will just die off.” Chan (1991a) maintained that the Page Law impacted all Chinese immigrant women, regardless of their social status, including wives of Chinese labor, wives of “domiciled” Chinese merchants, U.S.-born Chinese women, and wives of U.S. citizens of Chinese ancestry.

In the mid-1870s, as the American economy took a sharp downturn, Chinese were targeted and accused of being a threat to American society by stealing jobs away from the white population (Burns & Yu, 2018a; Chan, 1991b). The rising anti-Chinese sentiment and violence culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882–1943), one of the nation’s first comprehensively restrictive immigration laws, that lasted six decades, prohibiting not only the immigration of Chinese but their naturalization in the U.S. (Burns & Yu, 2018a; Chan, 1991a). The mechanisms

of the exclusion, Chan (1991a) stated, was, in fact, put in place by the Page Law. “The legal exclusion gave whites license to harass, lynch, and drive Chinese out of small towns throughout California” (Ngai, 2010, p. 43). Chinatown became a place for self-protection, as well as a space of confinement for Chinese immigrants who were not allowed to move out (Burns & Yu, 2018a). Beyond scholarly words, one can learn more about the devastating experiences of the Chinese immigrant communities under the exclusion from the comprehensive and compelling documentary *American Experience: The Chinese Exclusion Act* co-directed by Ric Burns and Li-Shin Yu (2018a).

The Exclusion Act was grounded on the assumption that the Chinese were different from European Americans, thus, they were unassimilable (Ngai, 2004). The same logic applied through the 1924 Immigration Act. The latter, also known as the Johnson-Reed Act, excluded other Asian nationalities and restricted Southern and Eastern European immigrants, for their assumed inability to be assimilated (Burns & Yu, 2018a; Ngai, 2004). As legal and political historian Mae M. Ngai said in an interview (Costantini, 2019), “[T]he law placed numerical limits on immigration and established a quota system that classified the world’s population according to nationality and race, ranking them in a hierarchy of desirability for admission into the United States” (para. 20). One has to know that these restrictive laws found support in the eugenics and pseudo-scientific theories of race, theories which, as Ngai reported in an interview (Costantini, 2019), “went on to become the underpinnings of Nazi ideology, and its social and racial policies, in Germany” (para. 23).

There were, however, so-called class privilege exceptions: merchants, teachers and students, diplomats, and travelers (Chan, 1991a; E. Lee, 2003; The Chinese Historical Society of America, n.d.; Yung, 1995). Women could come as family members—wives or daughters—of

one of the exempt classes (Chan, 1991a; E. Lee, 2003; The Chinese Historical Society of America, n.d.; Yung, 1995), based on the bias that upper- and middle-class women were supposed to have "moral integrity" (Yung, 1995). They were thought to be better suited to reproduce themselves biologically and socially (Chan, 1991a).

The exclusion laws, highly gendered in their interpretation and implementation, prompted Chinese women to adapt and play to the stereotyped definition of a "proper" Chinese woman, such as providing affidavits from white acquaintances, showing first-class steamship tickets, and highlighting "physical markers" (such as "fine clothes," "a respectable manner," and "bound feet"; E. Lee, 2003). While these strategies facilitated their admission, Erica Lee (2003) claimed, they perpetuated class and gendered stereotypes among U.S. immigration officials. In addition, the exclusion laws "reinforced the gender inequalities in both American and Chinese communities and explicitly positioned most Chinese female immigrants as dependents of their male husbands and fathers" (E. Lee, 2003, p. 78). Although theoretically Chinese women could immigrate either independently or as dependents, in reality, most entered as dependents, as few Chinese women engaged in the exempted professions specified in the exclusion laws (E. Lee, 2003). During 1910–1924, out of all Chinese women admitted into the U.S., 73% came as dependent immigrants and 27% independent ones (E. Lee, 2003). After being admitted, Chinese immigrant women's dependent status made them vulnerable to any adverse changes related to their male counterparts' legal and social standings (E. Lee, 2003).

Notably, Chinese resisted or developed ways to circumvent the restriction laws under extreme conditions during the exclusion era (Burns & Yu, 2018a; Chan, 1991b; Ngai, 2004; Pfaelzer, 2008; Yung, 1995). As any restriction of legal admission inevitably creates illegal immigration, some Chinese managed to emigrate to the U.S. by crossing the Mexican or

Canadian borders as undocumented immigrants (Ngai, 2004). Some Chinese immigrants used fraudulent papers, by claiming to be someone who was legally admissible—either a merchant, an American-born citizen, or the foreign-born son (or daughter) of a U.S. citizen (Ngai, 2004). Most common in the Chinese case was the "paper son" and the much fewer "paper daughter," the practice of which was further encouraged by the earthquake and fire in San Francisco in 1906 which destroyed all the birth records (Ngai, 2004; Yung, 1995). During the 1906 earthquake disaster and Chinatown fires, Chinese immigrants resisted permanent ethnic relocation from the burned areas to a remote location (Burns & Yu, 2018a). Chinese immigrants also used legal means to seek equal protection for themselves under the Fourteenth Amendment, claiming it aimed to protect each person rather than each citizen (Chan, 1991a), such as the high-profile Tape v. Hurley (1885, as cited in Ngai, 2010) case that became a watershed in Chinese community's claim for their equal rights in education.

The distinct significance of resistance, as Chan (1994a) stressed, lies not in how many strikes and legal cases were won, but more so that Chinese immigrants, along with immigrants from other Asian countries, used Western institutions—unfamiliar to them before migrating to the U.S.—to redress their grievances. It demonstrated their desire to settle in the U.S. and challenged the stereotypical images of them as "docile cheap labor" and "unassimilable aliens" (Chan, 1994a, p. 366).

The impacts of the exclusion laws on Chinese communities and beyond are multifaceted, profound, and long-lasting, a comprehensive discussion of which exceeds the purposes of this dissertation. In the context of this dissertation, it is relevant to mention that it created among Chinese families the phenomenon of silence about their past out of a fear of deportation, which continues even today (Burns & Yu, 2018a). The family immigration history related to "paper

son" for instance, would be kept a secret in the family, never be talked about; therefore, even many of the family descendants do not know about their particular history, the legacy of the exclusion, the taboo topics or their identity (Burns & Yu, 2018a; Yung, 1995). On the broader social level, "[T]he premises of exclusion—the alleged racial unassimilability of Chinese—powerfully influenced Americans' perceptions of Chinese Americans as permanent foreigners" (Ngai, 2004, p. 202), the impact of which is still present today (Chang, 2003; The New York Times, 1994). This painful history is not just about Chinese immigrants. Burns and Yu (2018a, 2018b) suggested that the exclusion questions each and every person in the U.S. about what America means, about its founding principles, about the national history, about memory and past. This holds true, in particular, for racialized groups in the U.S.

The gendered racism (Essed, 1990) Chinese women experienced also had implications for men. Asian immigrant men, due to the racial and gendered immigration policies and class exploitation, were "emasculated" by being forced into "'bachelor' communities" (though many of them had wives in their home country) and "'feminized' jobs" (Espiritu, 1997, p. 40), such as domestic service, laundry work, and food preparation, usually filled by women; on the other hand, Asian women in the U.S. labored with Asian men in agricultural and service sectors—as farm women, cooks, laundresses, seamstresses, prostitutes—whereas women left behind in Asia were "denied access to 'normative family'" (p. 40). Thus, the gender dynamics within Asian immigrant communities during pre-World War II "contradicted the traditional constructions of 'men' and 'women'" (Espiritu, 1997, pp. 39–40). Given that Asian men's social power was limited by the racial hierarchy in the broad society, full transplantation of Asian patriarchy was difficult (Espiritu, 1997; Kim, 1990). Asian immigrant women were exploited economically and socially by Asian men (Espiritu, 1997); however, their small numbers and economic

contributions helped raise their social status by offering them unusual opportunities as marriage partners and income producers (Espiritu, 1997).

Flipped Fate During the Hot War and Cold War (1941–1965)

World War II dramatically changed the fate of Asians in the U.S. In contrast to the Japanese Americans whose lives were torn apart by their relocation in concentration camps, lives of other Asian ethnic groups—Chinese, Korean, Filipino, and Indian—improved because their ancestral nations became the allies of the U.S. (Espiritu, 1997).

Among the Chinese communities in the U.S., a strong patriotic sentiment was stimulated by the Sino-Japanese conflict in the 1930s, which led to Chinese women's active participation in various ways to support China, from fund-raising and mass rallies to joining the army service and working in defense factories (Yung, 1986, 1995). It is estimated that between 15,000 to 20,000 Chinese men and women served in the armed forces across America (Chan, 1991b; Espiritu, 1997; Yung, 1986, 1995). In 1943, U.S. Congress repealed all Chinese Exclusion laws, granted Chinese Americans the right of naturalization, and established a quota system of 105 for Chinese immigration per year, a token gesture to include any person of Chinese ancestry, not just people from P. R. China (Burns & Yu, 2018a; Chan, 1991b; Espiritu, 1997; Ngai, 2004; Yung, 1986, 1995).

During the wartime, the general public view among Americans about Chinese turned more favorable (Chan, 1991b; Yung, 1986, 1995), which is reflected in the changing images from "heathen Chinese" and "mice-eater" to "hardworking, honest, brave, religious, intelligent, and practical" (Chan, 1991b, p. 121). Benefiting from the employment opportunities created by the war economy, the improved public view, and their eligibility for naturalization, many young U.S.-born Chinese women and men were able to find high-paying jobs in defense industries,

their first opportunity to move away from the occupational choices beyond hand-laundries and restaurants within their ethnic communities (Ngai, 2004; Yung, 1986, 1995).

Different from Yung's "triumphalist approach" (Chan & Hsu, 2008, p. 40), Karen Leong and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu (2008) offered a critical analysis of the transformation of the status of China and Chinese Americans in the imagination of mainstream America during the 1930s and 1940s. To strategically "'sell' China as an object of compassion" (Leong & J. T.-C. Wu, 2008, p. 133) and gain humanitarian relief for it, images portraying desperate mothers and suffering orphans in China were circulated in the U.S. Chinese American women were involved in staged performances, which fulfilled "Orientalist fantasies" (p. 148) in the American popular imagination. In this process, Chinese women became "gendered and racialized 'Others'" (Chan, 2008). Also distant from a "triumphalist" stance, K. S. Wong (2008) examined how the status of Chinese Americans during World War II improved from "social pariahs" (p. 153) to "paragons" (p. 153). The improved status conferred on Chinese the "good Asians in good war"—an image portrayed by white Americans as well as Chinese Americans themselves, which, as K. S. Wong (2008) stated, laid a foundation for the "model minority" stereotype that would emerge in the 1960s.

The immediate postwar loosening of U.S. immigration policies for Asians in general and for Chinese in particular created an immigration flow dominated by females (Chan, 1991b; Espiritu, 1997; Yung, 1986). The 1945 War Brides Act (which expired in December 1948) and the 1946 Act allowed Asian spouses and dependents of U.S. citizens and war brides of veterans of Asian ancestry to reunite with or form families in the U.S. (Chan, 1991b). Out of over 12,000 Chinese immigrants who entered the U.S. between 1945 and 1953, 89% were female (E. Lee, as cited in Espiritu, 1997). New families had to struggle to meet their material needs in the face of

the already scarce resources in housing, underemployment, poor health conditions, and inadequate social services, and to "renegotiate their gender roles—a process that led at times to a more egalitarian division of labor" (Espiritu, 1997, p. 60).

The political wind shifted, however, when the Chinese Communist Party assumed power in China in 1949 and China became the enemy of America during the Korean War in 1950 (K. S. Wong & Chan, 1998; Ngai, 2004). Ngai (2004) highlighted how the dominant image of Chinese lurched from despised oriental "other" to wartime ally, and then to dangerous Communist threat.

The new political climate brought around 23,000 Chinese, often highly educated, political refugees, throughout the 1950s and early 1960s (on an ad hoc basis), including those who entered the U.S. under a few new Acts designed as anti-communist measures, and about 5,000 Chinese college and graduate students studying in the U.S. were allowed to stay (Chan, 1991b). Since women constituted 50–90% out of all the Chinese entries during the 1950s, the sex ratio reached 1.3:1 by 1960 (Chan, 1991b).

The Cold War "red scare," fear of communist infiltration, propelled the U.S. government to deal with the issue of illegal immigration—a legacy from the exclusion era—when many Chinese were prompted to emigrate via alternatives to the limited quota system (Ngai, 2004). It culminated in the Chinese Confession Program that started in 1956, promising Chinese Americans that the status of those who would confess their illegal entries— mostly by "paper sons"—would be legalized without punishing confessors and their families (Ngai, 2004). With 30,000 Chinese involved, the program legalized the vast majority of them into legal resident aliens or naturalized citizens (Ngai, 2004). However, some individuals were spied on, lost their citizenship, suffered imprisonment or deportation, had to cut off their affective ties from China or switch their political standings (Ngai, 2004; Yung, 1986). Leftists were punished and some

families felt humiliated and anguished while having to testify against each other (Ngai, 2004; Yung, 1986). The entire community was criminalized because the line between voluntary confession and criminal proceedings was blurred, and consequently, the community was "intimidated into silence and political inaction" (Chan, 1991b, p. 141; Ngai, 2004). Ngai (2004) offered incisive insights:

> Cold War politics and the sensationalized investigations against fraud reproduced racialized perceptions that all Chinese immigrants were illegal and dangerous. Confession legalized Chinese paper immigrants, but it did not necessarily bring them social legitimacy. The official history that racialized Chinese as unalterably foreign and unassimilable remains unchallenged. (p. 223)

Large Influx (1965–Present)

Contemporary Chinese immigration has been shaped by both the changes of U.S. immigration policy and the political, economic, and social ties forged between the U.S. and China (Chan, 1991b; Chang, 2003). The 1965 Immigration Act and its amendments abolished the discriminatory national origins quota system that had restricted, since 1920s, immigration from Asia as well as southern and eastern Europe, replaced it with an equally distributed global quota (with 20,000 from each country), and set up a set of preferences that favored family reunion and highly skilled workers needed by the U.S. economy (Chan, 1991b; Ngai, 2004). It was also the time when the U.S. Congress issued the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which, as historic civil rights laws, respectively combatted racial segregation and discrimination and took certain measures to ensure racial minority groups' fair voting rights and representations (Ngai, 2010).

The achievements in the area of immigration, however, are merely the "inclusionary side" of the reform, Ngai (2004) cautioned. It also has an exclusionary side (Ngai, 2004): by continuing and extending its numerical restriction, it reproduced the problem of illegal

immigration and reinforced the primacy of "national interest, both economic and geopolitical" (p. 264) in immigration policy.

Along with the renewed immigration policy in the U.S., significant changes in China—the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the loosened restriction of emigration in the late 1970s, and particularly the normalized relationship between China and the U.S. (1979)—enabled a large-scale Chinese emigration (Bao, 2001; Chan, 1991b). It is interesting that during the three-decade long period when Chinese from Mainland China were not allowed by their government to emigrate to the U.S., some of them—including Red Guards, young students, and victims of the Cultural Revolution—managed to move, or more accurately, escape to Hong Kong first, and then emigrated as refugees to the U.S. as their final destination (Bao, 2001; B. Chen, 2016b). Those immigrants often avoid talking about their past because of fears around the fact that they left P. R. China illegally (Anonymous, personal communication, March 8, 2020). Discretion around the details of their flight stories is a more common phenomenon among refugees (Essed et al., 2004).

Unlike earlier immigrants who mostly came from Guangdong Province—the very southeast China, speaking Cantonese, concentrating in Chinatowns, and doing long-hour low-paying manual jobs—post-1965 Chinese immigrants have come from all different areas of Mainland China, speaking Mandarin and regional dialects (that bear great diversity to the point of being unintelligible to each other), consisting not only of low-skilled wage workers, but also highly educated and skilled professionals (Bao, 2001; Zhou, 2009). Many Chinese immigrants arrived in the U.S. as families, intending to stay permanently rather than as sojourning single men (Espiritu, 1997). In 1980, family reunification accounted for 85% of all Chinese immigration in the U.S.; 65% of Chinese women who entered the U.S were of working age,

between 20 and 59 (Zhou, 2009). A large number of Chinese women and men arrived in the U.S. in the mid-1980s (Zhou, 2009). In the early 1990s, an influx of highly educated and skilled Chinese from Mainland China occurred after the Tiananmen protest of June 4, 1989, in Mainland China; as a result, the U.S. granted permanent residency to over 60,000 Chinese, including students, scholars, and others who were staying in the U.S. (Zhou, 2009). The number of Chinese immigrants from P. R. China during the past several decades increased dramatically from 299,000 in 1980 to 536,000 in 1990, and again to 989,000 in 2000, reaching 2.1 million in 2016 (Zong & Batalova, 2017). By 2016, Chinese immigrants (including those from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macao) made up 5% of the approximately 44 million immigrant population in the U.S. (Zong & Batalova, 2017).

Heterogeneity of Chinese Immigration

Contemporary Chinese immigrants are a diverse group, differing in age, time of and reason for immigration, prior educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, linguistic and cultural practices, political inclination (Bao, 2001), settlement patterns, and trajectories of social mobility (Zhou, 2009). A set of statistics in 2013 shows the heterogeneity of immigrant women from China (Status of Women in the States, 2013). Among those aged 18–64, 20.3% have no health insurance in contrast to 33.7% among all immigrant women and 15.4% U.S.-born women (Status of Women in the States, 2013). Among the population aged 25 and older, 26.3% have no high school diploma in contrast to 29.6% among all immigrant women and 9.3% U.S.-born women, 40.3% have bachelor's degree in contrast to 27.9% among all immigrant women and 30.0% U.S.-born women (Status of Women in the States, 2013). Among the population aged 18 and above, 20.1% are below poverty in contrast to 19.7% among all immigrant women and 14.7% U.S.-born women (Status of Women in the States, 2013).

One example of the heterogeneity of Chinese immigrant women is a large pool of them concentrating in the ethnic economy, working as garment workers (Bao, 2001; Dong, 1982; Zhou & Nordquist, 1994). Thus, the overall seemingly high job market participation rate of Chinese immigrant women should not obscure the reality (Zhou & Nordquist, 1994).

Meanwhile, since the 1965 act also favored professionals, highly educated and skilled Chinese men and women, alongside other Asians, have been allowed to enter the U.S. as occupational workers, gaining opportunities in the primary sector of the workforce (E. N.-L. Chow, 1994; Espiritu, 1997). Another consideration is the lack of reliable data at the time (Espiritu, 1997), and today still, about the numbers of single Asian women who came to the U.S. as students and continued to live and work in the U.S. after they completed their studies.

One thing to point out is that the class line is not easy to draw, because it is permeable and in some instances individuals can cross the lines by moving upward or downward (Chan, 2004; Sennett & Cobb, 1973). One such example is the downward mobility many Chinese immigrant men and women experienced. After immigration, some of them with professional backgrounds would end up in low-income and semi-skilled jobs in the host society, due to various reasons—language barrier, discriminatory job market, and/or the difficulty of translating their prior credentials into marketable skills in the host society (Bao, 2001; Mazumdar, 1989; D. Qin, 2012; Shih, 2005).

The occurrence of social leveling merits a few more words. Downward social mobility is not an unusual experience among immigrants, not only in the U.S., but also in some other western countries, such as Canada. Guida Man's (2004) examination of the employment experience, particularly the "deskilling," of formerly professional Chinese immigrant women in Canada from Mainland China and Hong Kong provides implications for understanding the

similar experience of their counterparts in the U.S. In his study, the majority of the total 50 Chinese immigrant women entered as dependents of their husbands (Man, 2004). The gendered immigration process, Man (2004) maintained, indicates a structural gender difference between male and female in their place of origin and Canada, both placing more value on the male's education and skill than on the women's, with a consequence that Chinese immigrant women were "treated as being 'not destined for the labor market'" (p. 140). The process of "deskilling," as Man (2004) acknowledged, is compounded by "the contradictory processes of globalization and economic restructuring, with its polarizing effects along axis of gender, race, ethnicity, class and citizenship" (p. 135). With the neoliberal climate in Canada as with the U.S. and Australia, it is argued that professional Chinese immigrant women are marginalized by "gendered and racialized institutional processes in the form of state policies and practices, professional accreditation systems, employers' requirement for 'Canadian experience' and labor market conditions" (Man, 2004, p. 135). The gendered and racialized institutional processes and practices have a "homogenizing" effect on new Chinese immigrant women, Man (2004) claimed, making their prior work experiences and credentials "obsolete." Consequently, as Man (2004) reported, the majority of the formerly professional Chinese immigrant women in his study became unemployed or underemployed—being channeled into part-time, flexible, and insecure labor force in Canada. Although Man's work (2004) is focused on Chinese immigrant women in Canada, the same explanation can be applied to understanding downward mobility of their counterparts in the U.S. It is reported that among those Asian immigrant women in the U.S. who experienced downward mobility, middle-class aspiration is still held by some (Mazumdar, 1989).

A comparative research on the diverse strategies of economic adaptation by a group of working age Asian immigrant women from several different ethnic backgrounds (including

Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Indian and Vietnamese) concluded that those who achieve relatively high income make it only by working longer and harder than comparable white counterparts (Yamanaka & McClelland, 1994). After examining the economic incorporation of post-1965 Asian immigrant women during 1970s–1990s (mainly using examples of Chinese, Filipino, and Korean), Parreñas (2003) reported that the shared experience among three groups of women workers—low-wage workers, small-business entrepreneurs, and professional women—is that they all provide the U.S economy "cheap labor," some under below-standard employment conditions.

The Visibility of Asian Americans

The category of "Asian Americans" has gained its visibility since the late 1960s when the Asian American movement provoked various ethnic Asian groups to unite with each other, given their shared history of racial oppression in the U.S. (Chan, 1991b). Such efforts included building pan-Asian organizations or establishing Asian American studies as a branch of ethnic studies (Chan, 1991b, 2005).

As part of the Asian American Movement, a small scale Asian American Women's Movement emerged when a group of young educated Asian American women "strove to understand themselves as Asians and as women" (Ling, 1999, p. 20). Ling (1999) traced the development of the movement (1968–1976) in Los Angeles and identified "two seemingly contradictory trends" of the movement: (a) a rebellion against male chauvinism in the Asian American Movement and within Asian culture, and (b) a strong allegiance and identity with the same Asian American Movement. Factors of oppression—sexism, racism, capitalism, and imperialism—were emphasized, similar to other American Third World feminists. Ling (1999) noted the distance between Asian American Women's Movement and Women's Liberation

Movement: while the former borrowed ideas from the latter, it perceived the latter as a white middle-class feminist movement, bearing an "anti-male" trend, being accused of being "racist," and "not very sensitive to the issues of racial minorities and lower class women" (p. 30). Feeling "alienated and at times exploited" (Ling, 1999, p. 30), Asian American women viewed themselves as integral components of the Asian American Movement and community. Reflecting on the legacy of Asian American Women's Movement, Ling (1999) highlighted that it served young Asian American women as a "training ground for women who had previously been in background" (p. 33) to demand "sexual equality" in "all the aspects of their lives" (p. 33), and to fulfill the need for bridging Asian American women's movement with middle-class white feminism.

The Asian American Movement also presented a variety of creative writing and artworks—such as plays, films, music groups, and dances—accomplished by Asian Americans that emerged during the late 1960s and 1980s, which portrayed the Asian American experiences (Chan, 1991b). As recognized by Chan (1991b), those artworks played roles in "capturing, reconstructing, and preserving the past," "breaking silence," "shattering the negative stereotypes that have dominated the wider public's view of their people"—such as "quiet, unassertive, and foreign," and "forging a pan-Asian American consciousness that cuts across national origin and class background" (p. 533). Among those artistic works, Chan (1991b) called for attention to gender differences between men and women artists in the ways in which they dealt with their subjects: women artists transformed the difficult and complex life of their mothers, sisters, and daughters into art works, in contrast to the men artists, most of whom did not depict women sympathetically. This dissertation draws, among others, from the example and achievements of

these early Asian American Women's Movement's efforts to reinterpret the lives of mothers in new, empowering, ways.

The reference of "Asian" to identify U.S. immigrants is, however, complex and not uncontested. Today, one can easily encounter the widely used umbrella term of "Asian or Pacific Islander." This category, as Pascoe (1996) tracked its origins, has been widely used since the United States Office of Management and Budget issued a "Statistical Directive" in 1977, which, given the lack of statutory definition of race, divided Americans into five major groups—American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, White, and Hispanic. The concept of "Asian American" itself has met criticisms for suggesting of pan-Asianism as homogeneously masking intra-group diversity (Yamanaka & McClelland, 1994; Zhou, 2009), while it has been upheld by others to emphasize and sustain the legacy of the Asian American Movement for social justice and racial equality (J. Y.-W. S. Wu & Chen, 2010). An excellent example of the necessity and efforts of uniting Asians across political and ethnic boundaries is the Vincent Chin case in 1982 (ArtsEmerson, 2020; Chan, 1991b; Choy & Tajima-Peña, 1987; Yung et al., 2006), the first Asian American civil rights case against a hate crime that, unfortunately, has remained unknown to many Asian Americans and the public in general. In this case, Vincent Chin, a 27-year-old Chinese American man, was beaten to death with a baseball bat by two unemployed white autoworkers in Detroit, Michigan, who mistook him for Japanese, blaming him for their layoffs caused by the success of Japan's auto industry, and who ultimately received only probation and a fine (ArtsEmerson, 2020; Chan, 1991b; Choy & Tajima-Peña, 1987; Yung et al., 2006). The murder and the unjust handling of the case awakened a sense of solidarity and ignited a national campaign for justice among Asian American communities, which has implications for today (ArtsEmerson, 2020).

Chan (1991b) and Espiritu (1997) set good models for integrating both the specificities of different Asian immigrant groups and their common patterns, given the diversity among Asian populations and the fact that Asian immigrants' lives have been and are still influenced by racism. For the purpose of this study, I will not expand on the former, but will pay more attention to the framing of Chinese immigrants as part of the larger Asian American experience. The attention of the larger Asian American experience probably also compensates for the lack of studies focusing on Chinese only.

Gender Relationships Between Chinese/Asian Immigrant Women and Men

Mass female immigration caused "both greater gender equality and the persistence of male privilege" (Espiritu, 1997, p. 11). Espiritu (1997) explicated the renegotiated gender relations among three important groups: the highly educated, the disadvantaged, and the self-employed, while she also considered how Asian immigrant men and women, as racialized and gendered individuals, experience the work world.

The Highly Educated. As for the highly educated Asian immigrant women, while their earnings afford them a bargaining power for male's involvement in housework, in certain cases, it is achieved through conflict and confrontation, and some have to perform both full-time work and child care and housework responsibilities, like many other women throughout the world (Espiritu, 1997; W. P.-W. Ma & Shea, 2015).

In a study on the career development of the professional Chinese immigrant women, Shih (2005) reported the impacts of immigration on gender relations and family responsibility: four out of the eight had originally come to the U.S. on student visa, but six obtained permanent residency as dependents of their husbands; some women's careers became secondary to their husbands' careers after immigration even though they had had well established careers in China.

This could lead to resentment about the sacrifice of their careers, while getting stuck in traditional gender roles (Shih, 2005). Although there are "variations along the continuum between patriarchy and equality in the couples' partnership" (Shih, 2005, p. 103), the majority adheres to the traditional gender expectations of male income provider and female home caretaker. Also, the existence of "astronaut family" (meaning with the husbands living and working in China and wives and children in the U.S.) forced some women to assume multiple roles alone (Shih, 2005).

Meanwhile, in the public domain, racism and sexism have affected professional Asian immigrant women in the measure of marginalization, glass ceiling, underemployment, earning gap from white men, Asian American men, and white women with comparable educational levels (Espiritu, 1997). Cases of racial discrimination were reported by professional Chinese immigrant women (Isbister, 2009; Shih, 2005).

The Disadvantaged. As for the disadvantaged Asian immigrant group, men's social and economic status in the public domain went through dramatic decline due to immigration and racism, which necessitated women to become wage workers out of the need for the survival of the family (Espiritu, 1997; Grahame, 2003). It is reported that Asian immigrant women, like other immigrant women, are "more employable than men due to the patriarchal and racist assumptions that women can afford to work for less, do not mind dead-end jobs, and are more suited physiologically to certain kinds of detailed and routine work" (Espiritu, 1997, p. 75). They see their paid work as an extension of their familial responsibilities, a necessity rather than a free choice (Espiritu, 1997; Grahame, 2003; W. P.-W. Ma & Shea, 2015), which challenges the discourse of "work/family balance" (Grahame, 2003) or the notion, criticized by Collins (1994) and Glenn (2008), that work and family are separate spheres. Thus, it is to a degree different

from white professional or college educated women's view of work as a path to self-fulfillment or upward mobility (Espiritu, 1997). But one has to keep in mind that gender income inequality and discrimination of women workers has been and is still rampant across the U.S., even worse for most women of color than for white women in comparable jobs (Catalyst, 2020, 2022; Washington & Roberts, 2019).

The impacts of wage earning on Asian immigrant women, as on other women of color or female immigrant workers, are not even: for some, it has enhanced their status and egalitarianism within domestic sphere; for others, it has created a "double day" juggling work and housework and childcare, which sometimes comes with tensions due to men's loss of power in both public and the domestic arenas (Bao, 2001; Espiritu, 1997). It is interesting to note the role of family in disadvantaged Asian Americans: it becomes simultaneously a source of support for resistance to race and class oppression and an instrument for traditional patriarchy (Espiritu, 1997; Glenn, 1986).

The Self-Employed. Regarding the self-employed Asian immigrants, what stood out is that the business' functioning usually cannot be separated from the unpaid or low paid labor of women, children, or other co-ethnic workers, especially women (Espiritu, 1997). Meanwhile, while women work for themselves and for the family, the isolation of the ethnic business contributes to slow change of the rigid gender-role division due to the limited exposure to outside influences (Espiritu, 1997; Min, 1992). Working long hours, women have limited time for self-development or friendship (Espiritu, 1997).

Above shows the material aspect of life of the Asian immigrant communities, attentive to how race and class affect gender relations between Asian immigrant men and women, which explains how structural discrimination worked to keep them in "an assigned, subordinate place"

(Espiritu, 1997, p. 86). Like other people of color, Asian immigrant men and women have been "subjected to ideological assaults" (Espiritu, 1997, p. 12), which function to justify the structural oppressions of them. In the next section that follows, I will explore the "ideological assaults" Asian immigrants went and go through and how they work to portray the Asian immigrants as the racialized "other."

Asian Immigrants as the Racialized "Other"

Espiritu (1997) stated that "ideological assaults" (p. 86), or what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) called "controlling images" (p. 69), naturalize and justify social injustice—such as racism, sexism, or poverty—by objectifying minority members' "otherness," be they deviant, inferior, exotic, threatening, or praiseworthy.

One thing worth noting about contemporary Asian immigrants is the emerging "model minority" image along with the new influx of the professionals, a stereotype presenting them under the light of unanimous success (Asian Women of United of California, 1989; Chan, 1991b; Chang, 2003; Ngai, 2004; Zhou, 2009). The stereotype, according to Chan (1991b), first surfaced in the mid-1960s, and served a political purpose during the civil rights movement, urging Black and Chicano activists to follow the example of Asian Americans to work hard, but not to fight for rights via militant protests. The recent arrival of elites from Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea reinforced the model minority myth (Ngai, 2004), which has even been accepted unquestioningly by some Asian Americans themselves (Yip, 2006).

To challenge the success myth, many different criticisms have been made, which can be found in various works—to name a few, works by Asian Women of United of California (1989), Chan (1991b), Ngai (2004), and Zhou (2009). Chan (1991b) questioned the validity of the measure itself, such as the measure of median family income—the result of which is different

from that of per capita income—or the measure of educational level that is not equivalent to returns to education. Ngai (2004) stressed the existence of large numbers of working-class immigrants, undocumented workers, and refugees. Chan (1991b) and Zhou (2009) reminded us that the high-profile has something to do with the selectiveness in and of the immigration policy itself.

The model minority stereotype, Ngai (2004) maintained, "reproduced Asian Americans' foreignness" (p. 267); even those with naturalized or birthright citizenship are subject to "cultural denial" (p. 170) by the mainstream society of America. Some scholars (Hing et al., as cited in Ngai, 2004) view the model minority idea as "a new, pernicious form of 'yellow peril' that rests on essentialized notions of Asian culture and breeds new forms of racial discrimination (occupational segregation and glass ceilings, reverse quotas against Asians in college admissions)" (p. 267).

The impacts of the stereotype go beyond Asian American communities: by setting Asian Americans as the exemplars bearing positive cultural characteristics such as "hard work, thrift, and self-reliance" (Ngai, 2004, p. 268), it was used against the so-called "culture of poverty" (p. 268), the latter of which has been applied to explain the persistent poverty and unemployment among multiple generations of U.S.-born racial minorities, in particular African Americans (Ngai, 2004). In a twisted but not irrelevant message to Chinese immigrants, immigrants, in general, are blamed for "undercutting native-born workers' wages and for displacing African Americans from jobs in the lower strata of the workforce" (Ngai, 2004, p. 268).

Chan (1991b) noted already in the early 1990s that Asian Americans "live in a state of ambivalence—lauded as a 'successful' or 'model minority' on the one hand, but subject to continuing unfair treatment, including occasional outbursts of racially motivated violence, on the

other" (p. 188). It has seemed to continue to ring true to the present, if we link Chan's words either to the emergent hate crime cases during post-911 targeting Asian communities (A. Chow, 2020; Chan, 1991b) or to today's situation in which, while we all going through the pandemic of COVID-19, anti-Asian racism in general and anti-Chinese racism in particular is on the rise (AAPI Equity Alliance, 2020; A. Chow, 2020; Kamal & Zerkel, 2022).

Espiritu (1997) identified how the stereotypical images, from the past to the present, about Asian immigrant men and women—such as the "Yellow Peril," the "Dragon Lady," the "China Doll," and the "model minority"—involve the racial construction of Asian manhood and womanhood, which "collapse gender and sexuality" (p. 88). During this process, both Asian immigrant men and women have been viewed as "simultaneously masculine and feminine but also as neither masculine or feminine" (Espiritu, 1997, p. 88): in the image of the "Yellow Peril," they were depicted as "a masculine threat that needs to be contained" on one hand and, in the image of the compliant "model minority," "skewed toward the feminine side" on the other hand (p. 88). Asian immigrant men are often represented stereotypically as "asexual" and women "hypersexual" (Espiritu, 1997; Kim, 1990) The images of Asian men and women, though different, "are in fact bound together as part of the same racist and sexist objectification" (Kim, 1990, p. 70) and serve the same purpose—to "define the white man's virility and the white race's superiority" (p. 70).

Espiritu (1997) also challenged the dualism of black and white with the racial experiences of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans who, "because of their racial ambiguity," "have been constructed historically to be *both* 'like black' *and* 'like white,' as well as *neither* black *nor* white" (p. 108, original emphasis). That Asian immigrants have been presented as "unassimilable alien" put them in a position as "almost blacks but not blacks" (Espiritu, 1997, p.

109). Their contemporary image as the "model minority" "renders them as 'almost whites but not whites'" (Espiritu, 1997, p. 109). These two images are in fact linked in a way that render Asian immigrant as exploited and exploitable (Espiritu, 1997). "It is their exploitability, rather than their cultural superiority, that explains employers' supposed preference to hire Asians" (Espiritu, 1997, p. 110). Asian immigrants' racial experience provides an example about how the meaning of "race" as social relation goes beyond black and white.

Intergenerational Dynamics

It has to be noted that generational tension in gendered cultural expectations is found between immigrant parents and their adult daughters. A New York Times (1994) article titled *Asian American Women Struggling to Move Past Cultural Expectation*s discussed young Asian American women's struggles with gendered cultural expectations from their parents. They are expected by their parents to "be very quiet and not express your opinions" (The New York Times, 1994, para. 4), "stop being so independent, so outgoing" (para. 4), "subsuming your own ambitions and career for the family good" (para. 9). They reported "feeling torn" (The New York Times, 1994, para. 10): while being reluctant to subject themselves to their parents' cultural values and expectations, they also experienced a sense of "guilt over rejecting them" (para. 10); with a sense of independence offered by the American society, they also felt excluded by being viewed as "forever foreigners" when often being asked "Were you born here?" or "Do you speak English?" (para. 6).

It was also reported that the cultural tensions of this nature show more presence among first- and second-generation Asian Americans and tend to diminish as a family's residence length in the U.S. becomes longer and the income level increases (The New York Times, 1994).

Summary

This section reviewed historical and contemporary experiences of Chinese immigrant women, embedded in the political, historical, and societal changes in both the U.S. and Mainland China. To my study, it provides a context along with a historical lens. Along the Chinese (women's) immigration history, we can contemplate, "What has changed and what has not?" and, "What is the legacy of the past?" Without intending to provide definite answers, I would like to stress one positive aspect of the legacy, that is, using the tools of the American system to change the system, which is applicable to all the people in the American society. What is also significant over the historical course is the awakening of Asian American (women's) consciousness, which will be used as a frame of reference for understanding the lived experiences of older Chinese immigrant women. The overview of the experiences of contemporary Chinese/Asian immigrant women in the U.S. explored their experiences as women, as ethnic minority, and as immigrants through the interweaving of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, generation, and immigration. It reveals the complexity of the lived experiences of Chinese immigrant women in the U.S. and suggests integrating multiple analytical lenses into the understanding of their lives.

The next section will proceed to explore the literature on older Chinese immigrant women.

Older Chinese Immigrant Women

As the U.S. today witnesses 10,000 people turn 65 years old every day, which, as a trend, is said to continue for the next fifteen years (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2017), Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) is the fastest-aging ethnic group among the aging population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). It was reported that the AAPI older adult population will

increase by 145% between 2010–2030 and, out of all the AAPI older adults, 80% are immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

This section will primarily focus on the existing literature about the experiences of older Chinese immigrant women in the U.S. Occasionally it will also go beyond the U.S. to Canada, with a hope that it can help expand, shed light on, or even provide transferable understanding of older Chinese immigrant women's experiences in the U.S. Before I dive into the literature on the experiences of older Chinese immigrant women, I will first explore a working definition of the term "old age," as age is one of the major parameters of this study.

Working Definition of Old Age

For the purpose of this study, 60 years and above is defined as old age. The definition has a lot to do with an understanding of the aging process. Aging is a biological reality, but "old" is a socially constructed concept (Kowal & Dowd, 2001). Differences about defining old age as suggested in a publication by the World Health Organization exist between developed countries and developing countries, between different social classes, between men and women, and over different times (Kowal & Dowd, 2001). For instance, 60 or 65 as the chronological age to define an elderly or older person is commonly used in most developed countries, whereas in many developing countries old age "is seen to begin at the point when active contribution is no longer possible" (Gorman, 2000, as cited in Kowal & Dowd, 2001, 2001, para. 6). The retirement age for women in some countries is lower than that of men (Kowal & Dowd, 2001). As of particular note, in Mainland China, the state mandatory retirement age between women and men—which started in 1978 and is still in place—has a 5 to10 year gap: 50–55 for women, 60–65 for men (State Council of China, 1978).

In addition, the same publication emphasizes a combination of factors related to imagining old age and the aging process, including social class difference, one's functional ability at workplace, the political and economic situation, the newly assigned or lost roles of older people, declining health, and retirement age (Kowal & Dowd, 2001, 2001).

In this study, 60 is used as the cutoff age to define older adults because it captures a cohort of Chinese who were born in or before 1960 in China and who experienced the Cultural Revolution (if they were in China at that time), and who were old enough or soon to be old enough to understand the historical event. In this study, selecting older Chinese immigrant women age 60 and above (and those who emigrated as adults) probably means that the majority of the potential participants in this study had the experience with the Cultural Revolution in China, considering that as for the post-1965 immigration, most Chinese immigrants from China did not flux until the 1980s.

Literature Exploration

This section presents selective literature on older Chinese immigrant women, predominantly in the U.S. and, occasionally, in Canada. It will be organized into various focus areas: aging (including different meanings of old age in different cultures, menopause as "a marker of aging," the myth of independence, differences of age expectations among different racial/ethnic minority groups); impacts of immigration on aging; older Chinese working-class immigrant women's experiences with their community; grandparenting; health-related issues; and challenges and resilience. Mindful of space limitations to dissertation proposal, research on living arrangements, late-life immigration, mental health, elder abuse, and widowhood are not included at this point. If relevant to the findings of this study, the literature on these themes can be revisited later.

Aging

Different Meanings of Old Age in Different Cultures. Andrews (1991), a professor of political psychology, challenged ageism in western capitalist societies in general, cautioning about its impacts not only on the elderly, but on everyone. She insisted on not seeing the elderly as a homogeneous group, but rather paying attention to how aging is influenced by other factors, particularly class, gender, and ethnicity (Andrews, 1991). Old age is seen differently in different cultures, as Andrews (1991) argued: in western capitalist societies, the older people, often seen as taker, dependent, even miserable, experience isolation, alienation, and depression; by contrast, in some other cultures, old age is linked to wisdom and experience. In China, old age was linked to more power and high status within families and in the broad society. Based on my life experience with living there, my sense is that the old scene has changed and is still changing, especially in cities, partly because of the on-going rapid change in the "modern" society that has contributed to the fact that the old way of knowledge transmission from old generation to young generation seems not to work anymore. This change automatically diminishes the authority of older people. It is also in part because nuclear families are more common, thus young couples seem to assume more autonomy without the presence of older people.

The implications for this study warrant: (a) a critical view about ageism; (b) attention to different understandings of old age in different cultural contexts; (c) a changing rather than a static view about "Chinese culture," particularly about old age in "Chinese culture."

Menopause—"a Marker of Aging." In a research on conceptualizing menopause and midlife among Chinese Americans and Chinese women in the U.S., Adler et al. (2000) studied four focus groups (all foreign-born, with two pre-menopause groups of women aged between 43–46 and two post menopause groups of women aged between 54–56 respectively). It was

reported that “menopause is seen as a marker of aging” (Adler et al., 2000, p. 17), “signaling the end of fertility and virtually synonymous with old age” (p. 11), “associated with fears of aging and mortality” (p. 17); it is seen as “a natural phase in the human life cycle” (p. 15), which is distinct from “the strictly medical view of menopause as a discrete, biological entity” (p.11)—a common view in western countries. The research also found lack of advanced information about menopause and the discrepancy between the anticipated symptoms of menopause from the pre-menopause group and the lived experiences of post-menopausal women (Adler et al., 2000).

Among lower-class women, as remaining employed is their key midlife concern, they had “fear and concern” towards aging in view of job security, linking it to feeling “useless,” and “non-competitive” (in employment compared to the young generation; Adler et al., 2000, p. 17). In other words, one’s social class status impacts one’s attitudes towards aging. There is also a view that links menopause to “losing attraction, not being liked anymore” (Adler et al., 2000, p. 17).

Meanwhile, there emerged a positive perspective about aging that is associated with “a new opportunity and a second chance at life” (Adler et al., 2000, p.11), being “more knowledgeable and experienced” (p. 18), a life phase with “diminishing familial tasks and an increasing emphasis on personal needs and goals” (p. 20). Given that some older Chinese immigrant women expressed a desire of “achieving a good menopause,” Adler et al. (2000) considered it a sense of self-agency. It is not clear what led these Chinese immigrant women to the liberating view about aging, or if they experienced any transformation on it. It seems the positive view about aging found among older Chinese immigrant women is consistent with a phenomenon in cultures all over the world which was named as “pmz”—post menopausal zest—by anthropologist Margaret Mead (as cited in Pipher, 2005): “[M]any women regain their

preadolescent authenticity with menopause. Because they are no longer beautiful objects occupied primarily with caring for others, they are free once again to become the subjects of their own lives. They become more confident, self-directed and energetic" (p. 26).

The implications the above research provides for my study are: (a) It would be interesting to know how the liberating view about menopause/aging was reached and what new roles/lives, if any, older Chinese immigrant women feel free to assume after they reach menopause. (b) The divergent views about aging present a case where we identify how "culture" has shaped women by its ageism, lookism, misogyny, etc., and take a feminist view along the journey of aging. (c) The discrepancy of the knowledge about menopause between pre-menopause and post-menopause groups suggests a need for cross-age conversations, which may help dispel fears about aging, break age barriers, and build collective actions among women with different ages.

The Myth of Independence. One thing that stood out from the literature is that older Chinese immigrants value independence and autonomy, and they have a fear of being a burden to their families (Kong & Hsieh, 2012; Mackinnon et al., 1996; Tsai & Lopez, 1998; S. T. Wong et al., 2006). While each older individual's life reality might be more complicated than imagined, it is of help to identify the myth of independence. Bateson (2011) argues that independence is actually an illusion: "The choice is not between dependence and independence. The reality of all life is interdependence" (p. 7). She continues, "We need to compose our lives in such a way that we both give and receive, learning to do both with grace, seeing both as parts of a single pattern rather than as antithetical alternatives" (Bateson, 2011, p. 7).

Differences in Age Expectations Among Different Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups. Menkin et al. (2017) identified differences in age-expectations between older adults—age 60 years and above—from Korean (all foreign-born), Chinese (all foreign-born), Latino (only three

US-born), and African American (all but three born in the U.S.) backgrounds living in the U.S. Among 229 racial/ethnic minority seniors, they reported that "older adults' age expectations differ by race/ethnicity" (Menkin et al., 2017, p. S138), Chinese immigrant participants expected the most age-related functional decline, and expectation-health associations were not found among older Chinese immigrants (Menkin et al., 2017). As for implications for policy and practice, the researchers concluded as follow (Menkin et al., 2017):

> If there is a causal relationship between perceptions of aging and healthy aging (such as hypothesized by Levy, 2009), racial/ethnic differences in age-expectations may help identify at-risk groups for interventions to improve perceptions of aging and subsequently improve health (e.g., targeting Latino age-expectations to reduce depression). Conversely, unrealistically high expectations can backfire, and Korean and Chinese American older adults' lower expectations may actually be adaptive for future wellbeing (e.g., Cheng, Fung, & Chan, 2009). Thus programs promoting positive views of aging must be sensitive to cultural context. (p. S147)

Consistent with the perspective that "lower expectations may actually be adaptive for future wellbeing" as quoted above is a research cited in the section on "links from perceptions of aging to health" which "highlights that while optimism is related to better health in Western samples, having more negative expectations about one's future was beneficial for older Chinese adults' wellbeing over time" (Fung, 2013, as cited in Menkin et al., 2017, p. S141). The research seems to be untenable, because "expectation" itself is not purely subjective, but closely related to the social circumstances in which one lives, so the research on age expectations is invalid without identifying the factors that contribute to the older adults' age expectations. For the same reason, it is hard to tell if certain expectations are "unrealistically high" or not. It is concerning to learn about the perspective that one's lower expectations are helpful for one's well-being, which can justify injustice. A basic just society, as stressed by Nussbaum (2011), is a society in which all its members "get above a certain threshold level of combined capabilities" in the sense of

"substantial freedom to choose and act" (p. 24). This criterion should be "the same political goal for all human beings in a nation" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 24).

Also, I would be careful not to label "fatalism" as one's "culture" (as the researchers did), since "culture" is invariably intertwined with politics, and one's "fatalism" might have something to do with a system in which one lives(d) and which de-capacitates its individuals' sense of agency. An example of such system is the Chinese society which is authoritarian by nature. Hence, to simply see fatalism as one's "culture" shows ignorance about context, which often has political implications. Stereotyping of older Chinese women's potential can limit their access to life and wellbeing options.

Impacts of Immigration on Aging

Many older Chinese immigrants (with cutoff ages 50, 60, and 65 years old) were found to immigrate to Western countries—such as the U.S., United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—at a relatively old age (greater than 50 years; X. Lin et al., 2015). The most common reasons for their immigration are family reunion and helping look after their grandchildren (X. Lin et al., 2015).

Age at immigration is an important factor to consider. Phua et al. (2007) pointed out that (a) age at immigration indicates the extent of one's socialization in his/her country of origin, which impacts one's ability to adjust to the new environment, and (b) age at immigration can also suggest one's potential motivation for immigration, such as labor force, family reunification, or education, which is related to one's willingness to adapt to the new culture. These insights as shown in the methodological chapter to follow, also co-determined the limitation to potential participants who emigrated as adults.

Charpentier and Quéniart (2017) conducted a research on aging experiences of older immigrant women in Québec, Canada. The researchers used an intersectional approach—in focus groups of 83 older women between 58 and 88 years of age who are from different ethnocultural backgrounds (Arab, African, Haitian, Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, Romanian, etc.) and who emigrated at different periods in their lives (Charpentier & Quéniart, 2017). They found that most older immigrant women experienced a deskilling process and impoverishment regardless of their high social background and level of schooling (Charpentier & Quéniart, 2017). However, it is reported that regardless of their background and hardships experienced, older immigrant women's status as women improved because of the possibilities for self-realization and personal development and their liberation from social and family norms (Charpentier & Quéniart, 2017). Participants also reported a sense of economic independence as well as social isolation due to the limited language capability and the absence of the extended family (Charpentier & Quéniart, 2017).

The research by Charpentier and Quéniart (2017) offers the current study an insightful source of reference in terms of its methodology and conclusion. Focusing on the effects of immigration on older immigrant women, the research integrated race/ethnicity, class, gender, immigration, age, and schooling in addressing the complexity of older immigrant women's lives, thus, its methodology resonates with the current study. Its report about deskilling resulting from immigration (Charpentier & Quéniart, 2017) seems to be consistent with findings about professional Chinese/Asian immigrants in the U.S. (Bao, 2001; Espiritu, 1997; Mazumdar, 1989; D. Qin, 2012; Shih, 2005) and Chinese immigrant women in Canada (Man, 2004). The gender dimension of minority experience about liberation from the research is quite interesting; however, it is not totally consistent with the experience of Chinese/Asian immigrant women

(Espiritu, 1997) or that of older Chinese immigrant women (Eyler et al., 1998; Ho & Card, 2002), who face male privilege and traditionally expected gender roles within Chinese/Asian communities in the U.S. I wonder if the finding about gender by the research has something to do with the marital status of the participants; in this case, over half of them were either divorced, separated, widowed, or single.

It is not clear if/how the two main findings from the research—the deskilling and liberation—are related to each other.

The accounts of the older immigrant women seem to have emerged primarily from a comparative lens; in other words, the way they perceived their life was largely drawn from comparing their experience in the home society with that in the host society. It would be interesting to know how these women would understand their situation in relation to other groups in the host society, or, given the obstacle of the social and economic integration they face in the host society, to what extent they are able to understand their positions. These questions are relevant and interesting to the current study.

Older Chinese Working-Class Immigrant Women and Their Chinatown Community

Hsin-I Cheng (2013) made an interesting case for how older Chinese working-class immigrant women make sense of their Chinatown community and adjustment to the life in the U.S. She conducted a phenomenological research on the experiences of eight women—aged between 52 and 65—in San Francisco Bay area, who came from Guangdong Province of Mainland China (Cheng, 2013). Based on her hermeneutic interpretation of in-depth interviews, Cheng (2013) reported the factors that constrained the mobilities of Chinese working-class immigrant women: older age at immigration, long wait before admission (approximately 10 years), loneliness, inability to function fully in the U.S. due to the lack of preferred skills

required by American mainstream society and even by the Chinese community, and the scarcity of social participation in the community. She found that Chinatown became a place where these women found affordable apartments and available (most often exploitative) jobs (such as nannies, house keepers and factory workers), as well as a place in which they felt confined (Cheng, 2013). Their lived version of the American Dream, from an idealized "heaven-like dream of liberation," turned into "a jail-like experience of isolation and suffering," "marked by the psychical hardship of working for meager wages" (Cheng, 2013, p. 12). Chinese immigrant women's lives were "epitomized in the metaphor of sleeping on a 'wobbly bed'" (Cheng, 2013, p. 15), due to unequal structures in the U.S., such as their ineligibility for certain aid programs because of their noncitizen status, the clashing arrangements of the ESL that made them have to choose work over learning English, and welfare-to-work programs that, though designed with good intention, created further hurdles for their lives. Interwoven into the daily life of Chinese working-class immigrant women were their concern over their safety for the racial compositions in the neighborhood and their realization of the imperative of addressing racial tensions (Cheng, 2013). While some women acknowledged the presence of good Black neighbors, fear of Black people, unfortunately, was found common, which is reminiscent of the racist images of African American men being violent and aggressive (Cheng, 2013).

In short, Cheng (2013) offered a critical view to look closely at the experiences of Chinese working-class immigrant women and the role in which Chinatowns as the ethnic community played in their lives, which is complicated and cannot be simply captured as either "adversarial" or "supportive." To this study, Cheng's research serves an example to counter the "model minority" myth that homogenizes older Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans, which will be addressed later. The research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the

existential reality of the disadvantaged older Chinese immigrant women. The revealed intergroup racial tension—imagined and real—between the Chinese immigrant women and their African American neighbors expands the understanding of the former. It is a good reminder that racial prejudice and discrimination does not merely exist in the white population against peoples of color, but also between members from different minority groups.

Grandparenting

Nagata et al. (2010) explored the grandparenting experiences of 17 Chinese immigrant women from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, aged between 55 and 84, who lived in the U.S. They found that Chinese cultural values—filial piety and respect for elders—have influences on the grandparenting experiences (Nagata et al., 2010). It produced high contact and more formal hierarchically based grandparenting style (Nagata et al., 2010). Since immigrant grandmothers often rely on their adult children for financial and other support, maintenance of harmonious relationships was especially important for them, and they were reluctant to actively intervene with their grandchildren (Nagata et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the immigration-related grandparenting challenges include isolation (caused by limited English proficiency and lack of mobility), intergenerational culture gaps, and language difficulties (Nagata et al., 2010).

While grandmothers expressed that it was rewarding to be a grandparent, there was a gap between the self-perception of the grandmothers as "a source of wisdom regarding Chinese manners and values" (Nagata et al., 2010, p. 158) and their experienced reality about a sense of diminished power and authority within the family, which can be difficult for the grandmothers.

This research helps the understanding of the grandparenting experience of older Chinese immigrant women within their families, and the reported intergenerational cultural gaps is consistent with the phenomenon not unusual to immigrant families in general. Interested in

learning about older Chinese immigrant women's grandparenting experience, the current study aims to go beyond their singular role as grandmothers to their life journeys as women, seen as a whole, with different phases and multiple roles, while considering how other structural factors have influenced their experiences as women.

Health

Much of the attention of the literature about older Chinese immigrants focuses on health issues. The selective literature in this section will touch on topics about the underutilization of and/or access barriers to healthcare service, and physical activities and leisure experiences. Then a comprehensive review on older Chinese immigrant women in Canada will be brought in so as to provide implications for this study.

Underutilization of and/or Inaccessibility to Healthcare Services. One finding that stood out from the healthcare-related literature on older Chinese immigrant women in the U.S. is their underutilization of healthcare services (Liang et al., 2004; National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2017; Trang, 2009), which is consistent with their counterparts in Canada (Guruge et al., 2015).

A qualitative research identified factors that affect how older Chinese immigrant women in the U.S. view and use cancer screening (Liang et al., 2004). According to the report, "none of the participants mentioned routine screening or checkup as a means of health maintenance. On the contrary, women tended to avoid visiting doctors or going to hospitals whenever possible, unless they felt sick" (Liang et al., 2004, p. 299). However, this does not necessarily imply healthcare underutilization. Income and health insurance play a role as well as can be inferred from quotes such as: "[I]t costs a lot of money to see doctors;" "I cannot afford the examinations because I don't have any income;" or "[T]he problem is we don't have health insurance" and

"[I]n our home country, we have National Health Insurance to cover our expenses on healthcare. But it's expensive here" (Liang et al., 2004, p. 296). These two enabling factors, having to do with structural (in)accessibility to healthcare, however, are not discussed in the research. Instead, a cultural factor, language ability, is highlighted.

National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (2017) also reported in general about Asian American and Pacific Islander older adults' foremost cultural rather than societal aspects, including lack of adequate knowledge, stigma and misperceptions about certain diseases, such as Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD) and cancer. In the case of dementia, for instance, it may be considered by Asian families as "normal" for old age or being "crazy catatonic" or "clown disease," thus they do not seek professional help (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2017).

The above research is helpful in understanding with empathy certain structural and cultural challenges confronted by older Chinese immigrant women in particular and older AAPIs in general.

Health Promotion—Physical Activities and Leisure Experiences. A research explored patterns of physical activity among minority women including Chinese American women aged 40 years and above in the U.S. (Eyler et al., 1998). The participants, while not identifying themselves as "exercisers," believed that "caregiving, housekeeping, and workday activities" (Eyler et al., 1998, p. 640) gave them enough physical activities. Personal barriers to increasing physical activities/exercise included "lack of time, health concerns, and lack of motivation" (Eyler et al., 1998, p. 640). Environmental barriers included "safety, availability, and cost" (Eyler et al., 1998, p. 640). Women's lack of time has much to do with their "caregiving responsibilities rooted in cultural and gender roles" (Eyler et al., 1998, p. 649).

A phenomenological research among nine women immigrants from Taiwan and Mainland China, aged between 60–76, reveals how older Chinese immigrant women interpreted leisure (Ho & Card, 2002). According to the research, most commonly reported leisure activities after emigration included "watching television, walking, shopping, exercising (e.g., morning exercises), attending church and gardening" (Ho & Card, 2002, p. 293), activities different from the leisure experiences from before immigration, which included activities such as Tai Chi, chess, older adults' disco, etc. However, the way older Chinese immigrant women perceived leisure remained the same—as long as the activity could bring them a sense of "satisfaction, fulfillment and enjoyment" (Ho & Card, 2002, p. 296).

By presenting the expected traditional gender roles of women as caregivers as constraining their opportunities for leisure, the research adopted a gender lens to a certain degree. It could go further, however; for instance, regarding older Chinese immigrant women's reported sense of life satisfaction, while taking care of other family members can be fulfilling, it is hard to tell to what extent some women have internalized the expected gender roles of women as main caregivers without self-care and self-love, or, if these women really actively pursued their traditional roles when they did not have other options in their lives. Thus, similar to "life expectation," "life satisfaction" is an indeterminate concept. There are reasons to believe that women from different class backgrounds may have distinctly different leisure experiences; however, this research fails to take the class factor into account. Also, while the research showed how women's leisure experiences were profoundly affected by "traditional Chinese values" (such as prioritizing family over oneself), one would want to be alert to the suggestion that these are fundamentally different from U.S. gender expectations about women, which also prioritize their roles as mother and wife.

A Comprehensive Review in Canada. A comprehensive review of health-related literature on older Chinese immigrant women in Canada (Guruge et al., 2015) confirms the kind of findings in the U.S. concerning their health status. In addition to "disadvantages due to intersecting factors such as social isolation, poverty, gender- and generational-specific roles" (Guruge et al., 2015, para. 1), and underutilizing "preventive services, such as cancer screening, and experience more difficulties in accessing healthcare services" (para. 1), the authors highlighted that "the socioeconomic and political context have the strongest influence on the health and wellbeing of individuals" (para. 21). This research provides the current study implications on how to understand health issues of older Chinese immigrant women from the intersectional perspective that goes beyond a narrow attention to health.

Challenges and Resilience

There is literature that pays attention to the challenges that confront older Chinese immigrants in particular and AAPIs in general. Although the challenges are not gender specific, they can shed light on older Chinese immigrant women's life experiences in the American society, so they will be identified as below.

The "Model Minority" Myth. Among the challenges is the pervasive "model minority" stereotype that presents older adults of AAPIs as being well-off and highly educated (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2017). Due to the homogenizing impact of the myth, AAPI older adults' unique needs are often ignored or invisible to those outside their communities (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2017). Even if they have issues, it is assumed that their families will take good care of them (J. Li et al., 2018). Given the "model minority" myth, multiple issues may be masked: (a) On health care: five of the top ten highest uninsured groups are Asian Americans (National Council of Asian Pacific Islander Physicians, 2015); many AAPI older

adults have no other insurance except Medicare or Medicaid (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2013). (b) On poverty: attention to poverty issues among AAPI older adults is insufficient (Phua et al., 2007), though out of AAPI older adults, 28% are reported to live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Benefits account for 90% or more of income for 26% married couples and 52% unmarried among AAPI older adults (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2013). (c) On cultural and linguistic services: culturally and linguistically appropriate resources are underinvested, thus are largely lacking (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2017). (d) On service providers: cultural awareness of AAPI subgroups is reported lacking in service providers and in the general public, thus the lack of community and cultural connections in providers to reach and engage AAPI older adults (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2017). All this contributes to the invisibility and vulnerability of AAPI older adults (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2017).

Discrimination Caused by Immigration Status and Limited Language Proficiency. Another challenge confronting older AAPIs is the discrimination caused by their immigration status and limited language proficiency (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2017). Nativity status is often used as a factor to determine one's eligibility for many things, such as benefits from government programs, (such as public housing and health insurance,) and quality care, which means foreign-born individuals—undocumented, non-U.S. citizens, or those with limited English Proficiency (LEP)—may not be eligible (National Council Asian Pacific Islander Physicians, 2015). LEP poses a significant barrier to AAPI older adults' access to various resources (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2017). Thus, given that 80% of Asian Americans are foreign born and 60% have LEP (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), AAPI older adults

are excluded from "long-term services and supports, health care, benefits, housing, and transportation" (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2017, p. 6).

Culture-Related Challenges. Culturally related challenges are also identified to account for the invisibility and underreporting of AAPI older adults' needs (National Asian Pacific Center on Aging, 2017): their unwillingness to speak up the challenges or to complain, unwillingness to be a burden, their pride in "self-managing," and avoidance of "family shame"—born out of filial piety and prevalent in family caregiving—meaning that to ask for help from outside would imply their inability to handle issues independently.

Having the challenges identified above, National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (2017) calls for further disaggregated data so that we can better identify the unique needs of AAPI older adults and provide services that are "culturally appropriate and linguistically accessible" (p. 6). To a certain extent, the current study, by focusing on older Chinese immigrant women, responds to such a call.

Resilience. J. Li et al. (2018) addressed resilience in spite of challenges in their research based on interviews with 24 Chinese immigrants in Los Angeles (13 female, 11 male), with ages ranging from 65 to 92. They found "resilience protective factors" at different levels: "acceptance and optimism" (J. Li et al., 2018, p. 1551) and "self-efficacy" (p. 1551) at individual level, "use and availability of intraethnic social support and network" (p. 1552) at community/relational level, and "availability of formal social welfare system" (p. 1552) at societal level. "Acceptance and optimism" is mentioned by participants as acceptance of one's external environments and "fate," "suppressing individual desires," and "be[ing] easy to satisfy and not ask[ing] for much" (J. Li et al., 2018, p. 1551). "Independence and autonomy" (J. Li et al., 2018, p. 1551) was reported by participants as believing that they should "rely on themselves and put no extra

burdens on their children" (p. 1551), and "voluntarily seek out potential resources, such as going to a senior center to participate in social activities" (p. 1552). Spending time with co-ethnics in Chinese senior centers was considered to be helpful in dealing with loneliness (J. Li et al., 2018). Appreciation of the formal social welfare system in the U.S. is expressed by older Chinese immigrants, as it not only provides them tangible benefits and a sense of security, but also makes them feel they are valued as older people (J. Li et al., 2018).

The two protective factors for resilience at the individual level—"acceptance and optimism" and "independence and autonomy"—are questionable. As for the former, a distinction needs to be made between embracing adversities and being satisfied with life and accepting the status quo in the society without a sense of change agency. The difference is not clear in the research. In terms of the latter, as critiqued earlier, the prevalent independence myth should be questioned rather than further encouraged. As the researchers mentioned, gender perspective was not taken into account (J. Li et al., 2018).

It would be interesting for this study to explore how older Chinese immigrant women developed their resilience, if any, while they navigated the Chinese and American societies.

Conclusion

To summarize, the reviewed selective literature on older Chinese immigrant women in the U.S. reveals several significant issues. First, the group of older Chinese immigrant women in the U.S. is understudied in feminist/gender study, gerontology, and immigrant/ethnic studies. This seems to be consistent with the observation of Charpentier and Quéniart (2017) that the population of older immigrant women in western countries is "underrepresented in feminist, gerontological, and intercultural research" (p. 437).

Second, among the reviewed literature, it appears that (a) There is a risk that "Chinese culture" or what is called "Chinese cultural values" are used either in an essentialist way or uncritically, as presented in certain research reviewed earlier (see Mention et al., 2017; Nagata et al., 2010). (b) The presence of Chinese patriarchy has shaped and is still shaping contemporary older Chinese immigrant women's lives (see Eyler et al., 1998; Ferguson 2000; Ho & Card, 2002;), whose gendered experience seems to bear similarity to that of their female predecessors throughout female Chinese immigration history.

The division of life between pre-immigration and post-immigration, similar to what Chan (2004) critically pointed out in her book *Survivors*, that in some writings Cambodian refugees' lives are divided into "pre-escape" and "post-arrival" segments, seems to emphasize ruptures rather than continuities. The past at the collective level, that is, the history of (female) Chinese/Asian immigration is absent, as is its legacy.

The examination into the literature on older Chinese immigrant women, on historical and contemporary female Chinese immigrants in general, and on gender in China informs this study in two ways: (a) It calls for a research that studies older Chinese immigrant women's lives as a whole; (b) More research is needed not only to integrate multiple analytical frames of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, generation, immigration, and age, but to link the past and present in understanding life stories of older Chinese immigrant women as immigrants, as women, as ethnic minority, and as the older generation.

With all the above considerations, this study chooses to explore life stories of older Chinese immigrant women as a whole, taking into account their past and present in the context of contemporary Chinese society and Chinese immigration history in the American society. It asks, "What can we learn from life stories of older Chinese immigrant women about the ways in

which each experienced being a woman in different societal systems?" Focusing on their experiences as women, this study, as introduced in Chapter I, intends to apply an intersectional approach to understand their life stories.

The next chapter will proceed towards the research methodology that will be adopted in this study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Seeking to explore, understand, and learn from the life stories of the older Chinese immigrant women as women based on their lived experiences across time and space, this study adopts life story inquiry as a research method. This chapter will address in detail why and how I used the life story approach.

Rationale: Why Life Story Inquiry?

In this study, life story inquiry can find its justification from four different perspectives: (a) the methodological fit between the qualitative research approach, research question and purpose, and the researcher's temperament; (b) the implications drawn from the critical review of the literature in Chapter II; (c) storytelling related to different societal systems, in this case, China and the U.S.; (d) storytelling and the research participants—older Chinese immigrant women. The first angle is the basic understanding of the research method. The other three angles, expanded respectively, will intensify an understanding of the research method by linking it closely to the present study.

The Methodological Fit Between Qualitative Approach, Research Question and Purpose, and Researcher's Temperament

As a research methodology, a qualitative approach is interpretative, interested in exploring and understanding human experiences (Clandinin, 2007). As a researcher, my natural curiosity and temperament almost always draw my attention to the depth and complexity of human beings and the societies in which we live. This research seeks to explore, understand, and learn from detailed life stories of a small number of older Chinese immigrant women.

My methodological stance is that the more specific and subtle the description of a single case, the more likely it is to evoke resonance and identification in readers, which can eventually lead readers to discover the universal (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

To understand the individual life as a whole, a researcher needs to take into account the continuum between one's "old" experiences and "new" ones, each gaining new meaning if seen in light of each other (Andrews, 2007; Mead, 1970). Furthermore, the experience of human agency is at the center of the inquiry, as "experience is a necessary middle term between social being and social consciousness" (Thompson, as cited in Scott, 1985, p. 42). Since behavior itself is not self-explanatory, an inquiry into the lived experiences can offer us an understanding of the individuals and their actions (Scott, 1985).

The power of stories can be understood in light of how it engages the reader. Different from the logic that "will never change perception or emotion" (Bono, as cited in Bogart, 2014, p. 97), stories, as other aesthetic experiences, "engage people on multiple levels at the same time—sensory, cognitive, emotional, and often spiritual—so that all of these dimensions are involved simultaneously in constructing meanings and framing questions" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 6). By engaging all senses, eliciting whole brain/body responses, and evoking emotions, stories have the power to make people "attend, remember, and be transformed" (Pipher, 2006, p. 11).

It is worth briefly noting a few issues, among others, related to life story inquiry. One is about the nature of data. What people remember, and how, speaks their significance for the teller (Andrews, 1991). Over time, not only are individuals constructed by their pasts, but their pasts are reconstructed, reinterpreted, and remembered (Andrews, 1991). In other words, the recollections "are not stored in pure form, and instead what the listener hears is how the speaker, in her present life, makes sense of her past" (Andrews, 1991, p. 65). That way, people make sense of their lives as a whole with a sense of continuity (Andrews, 1991). During the process, the relationship between remembering and forgetting, rather than seen as opposites, are

"complementary" in "constituting the imaginative process of the reconstruction" (Andrews, 1991, p. 66).

Researchers are reminded that what motivates one to tell stories and how the storyteller perceives the audience have a role in coloring personal recollections (Andrews, 2007; M. P. Lee, 1990). It is important to keep in mind that there are multiple versions of a life story and different ways of telling a story (Bateson, 2004). A distinction has to be made clear between the personal truth and so called "objective" truth (Andrews, 1991; Josselson, 2014): different individuals perceive reality differently; what is important for researchers is to accept the story as it is told, as it is true to the storyteller. The search for understanding agency in the context of a life story involving the participant as a whole person warrants an in-depth approach involving a limited number of participants. Each of the life stories will represent a case study in themselves.

What Implications Can Be Drawn from the Critical Literature Review?

To employ life story inquiry is also informed by my engagement in Chapter II with the literature on older Chinese immigrant women. The critical review indicates that (a) Most existing research diagnoses life by dissecting it into separate parts rather than seeing it as a whole; (b) Most literature focus on older Chinese immigrant women's lives in the U.S., which creates an artificial division between pre-immigration and post-immigration; (c) Older Chinese immigrant women's existential life reality is complex, thus a comprehensive reading of their lives requires a research method that is interdisciplinary. With all these factors taken into account, I am led to life story inquiry, which can address the limitations of most existing literature, allowing me to see each individual life as a whole (Atkinson, 1998), to chart the course of each life in different societies, and to capture human life's richness and complexity.

Life Stories Related to Different Societal Systems in China and the U.S.

Stories do something with a purpose (Andrews, personal communication, January 25, 2018). There are various answers to "Why stories?" from different scholars and intellectuals, probably more than I can name, such as Clandinin (2006, 2007), Josselson (2014), Atkinson (1998, 2007), and Andrews (n.d.). The significance of storytelling becomes more distinct when linked to the societal systems in China and in the U.S, which the research participants—older Chinese immigrant women—have lived through.

It has been my experience that stories were—and are still—rarely used either in the daily-life setting or the academic world in the Chinese society, which is in striking contrast to storytelling in the American society, especially to the myriad stories used in daily life or to storytelling as a research method employed in the academic world. The phenomenon of the substantial lack of stories in China is related to the system itself: it is under and due to such an authoritarian system that numerous possibilities and uncertainties of life—thus stories accordingly—have been killed and, that way, individuals become a faceless mass. Like some other systems in the world, it functions "by frightening and isolating people, by minimizing gatherings and public space, by preventing civil and public discussion" (Pipher, 2006, p. 7). Thus, building connections by storytelling, as Pipher (2006) urged in her book *Writing to Change the World*, is to promote a more just society by cultivating ferment for social change, encouraging truth-telling, and engaging people into civil and public discussions.

In her chapter titled *Narrating Moments of Political Change*, Andrews (2014a) quoted Hannah Arendt's insights that "storytelling is the bridge by which we transform that which is private and individual into that which is public, and in this capacity, it is one of the key components of social life" (para. 9). Arendt's words bring to light the significance of storytelling

if we link it to another layer of the authoritarianism in China—its attitudes towards the past: By intentionally and purposefully denying, avoiding, distorting, and suppressing the past, especially public discussions about certain historical events, a pronounced silence about the past has been created in both the public and personal discourses. Seen in this light, life story inquiry is an avenue to allow the past to emerge, if possible, and can contribute to building a collective memory, which otherwise would be not possible.

In addition, the racist violence of the immigration history of Chinese Americans too has been silenced or ignored in many curricula. And in light of historical and contemporary U.S. barriers and biases against Chinese immigrants, they repressed or buried stories holding painful family memories or community secrets. Especially in these times of COVID-19 upheaval, demonstrations against police violence and for racial justice, it is equally important to note the significance of life stories in a democratic society. Nussbaum (1997, 2010) coined the concept of "narrative imagination"—a key capability for human beings to have for imagining a life different from oneself, a capability for empathy. As with other art forms, life stories can and should play a crucial role in citizenship and therefore enhance a democratic society by cultivating such a capability (Nussbaum, 1997, 2010).

Storytelling Related to Older Chinese Immigrant Women

While seeing storytelling as a platform providing space for lived experiences across the national, historical, and cultural boundaries between China and the U.S., the action of telling itself should not be taken for granted. Chan's (2005) insight quoted below also applies to the older Chinese immigrant women, even though she was writing it primarily out of her experiences as the role of a teacher in the Asian American studies program designed for young Asian American students:

> If speech—as an activity of externalization of one's experiences—is a means through which many hitherto quiet Asian American students can learn to become agents of history, they can acquire such agency only when one overcomes double repression: Asian traditions that train the young (especially the female) to be quiet, submissive, and obedient and American racism that threatens members of minority groups with harm unless they 'stay in their place.' (p. 129)

Echoing Chan's words, this study maintains that revisiting, reinterpreting, reflecting and re-reflecting on one's life experiences is an action of courage and an act of (re)claiming one's agency. Thus, adopting life story inquiry is of great importance in providing a platform for crafting life stories of such kind.

To reiterate, using life story inquiry, the stories, which I hope will be shared by the potential participants, would not only bring to light the invisible individual and the buried past, but, as Pipher (2006) argued, serve to de-objectify, humanize, personalize, and connect.

How was the Study Conducted?

The Initial Research Plan and Its Adjustments

The research plan has undergone certain necessary adjustments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally the plan had been conducting in-person interviews with five older Chinese immigrant women in the Boston area whom I can reach by public transportation. What is most special in face-to-face interaction, as in theater-making, is the inarticulate and irreplaceable energy it generates within a limited space, by the physical presence of another person, the felt humanity from the coexistence, the indescribable contagious vibe between one another, the liberty of seeing and feeling the whole space and the whole body of another person, greeting or interacting with each other by body touch, or even sharing refreshments, all of which energize and shape the dynamic, quality, and outcome of the interaction. With the health crisis followed by the social distance order, however, in-person interaction, so much the old norm in our daily social life, was not feasible. This presented challenges for this study, especially challenges

related to how to find potential interviewees and how to conduct interviews. For instance, the original plan of visiting certain Boston-based organizations where older Chinese immigrants reside or socialize as one option of finding interviewee candidates seemed unpractical, as were face-to-face interviews. While technology-mediated communication seems not only common but necessary for many cases, it should not be assumed that everyone has access to technology and/or has the same capabilities for using it. With careful consideration of the changed situation and its implications for the study, the research had to reconsider its practicability.

As the replacement of the original research design, the new plan in place was to conduct interviews with older Chinese immigrant women through on-line, phone, email, or any combination of two of them. In that way, it could create as many options as possible to allow the interviews to happen, given the new circumstance while embracing potentially varying comfort levels with screen technology. This method could actually bring new freedom, because the potential participants would not be confined to the Boston area anymore, but could reside anywhere in the U.S. It would mean reaching lives that would not have been accessible under the original plan. For an older Chinese immigrant woman, it could mean expanding her social circle and countering social isolation. The unfortunate situation of a health crisis brought also unexpected openings for the interview itself. Asking the women how they had experienced the challenges of COVID-19 situation could be a good start of a conversation. The genuine, widely- shared concern about older people during this time could be a way of indicating that it is appropriate to talk about feelings and challenges in a situation where everybody was living with the threat of contamination.

With the research plan adjusted, the point was not to compare to what could have been in the original plan, but to meet the challenge, embrace it as an ally, work with whatever resources

would become available, and start from there. This was a basic but valuable rule I recalled from theater classes I had taken in the past, as well as from Anne Bogart (2001), a theater director and educator.

An unchanged component of the research plan remained: to supplement the interviews with other secondary sources of information revealing the stories of older Chinese immigrant women, if available and relevant, such as journals, photographs, (auto) biographies, written letters, etc. The various secondary sources, produced in different forms, under distinct conditions, with varied temporalities and locations, and for divergent audiences and purposes, could enrich the life story interviews by potentially revealing women's lives at different moments in their lives courses or representing their multi-dimensional lives. Together, they could be used to serve the purpose of understanding older Chinese immigrant women's lives as a whole. Along with the primary data, I could consider all the informal interactions—including my thoughts I will note—as relevant data.

With all these new challenges and adaptations, I imagined that this study would present a small mirror for the future, a mirror of the present—and would-be-historical—moment when the American society is going through health, economic, and racial crises, while the pandemic is worldwide.

Participants' Selection Criteria

The criteria for selecting potential participants were: (a) Chinese immigrant women, age 60 and above; (b) those who were born and grew up in Mainland China and then emigrated as adults either directly to the U.S. or first to Hong Kong and then to the U.S.; (c) those who have lived in the U.S. for at least five years.

Focusing on those who emigrated as adults left space to consider their socialization in the Chinese society and its impacts on them, such as their choices of emigration, their adaptation to the American society, their transition and transformation, if any, and their identity development. It also offers one method to discern "a complementarity of life history and history" (Erikson, as cited in K. S. Wong & Chan, 1998, p. 130).

Why at least five-year-long residence length? The main consideration is that it is presumably a period of time that would allow immigrants to take roots and navigate well (in a relative sense) in a new society. This process varies, depending upon multiple factors, such as whether one speaks the language of the host society, whether one moves before or after the globalization, at what age one migrated, to what extent one's attitude is open to a new culture, etc. The five-year period would allow for charting the arc of a life course, to capture learnings and unlearning during the transition, including the transformative experiences that are very likely to take a relatively long time to happen, (such as one's political, societal, or spiritual awakening, the redefinition of one's self-image), and to come to understand how an adult who functions well in the Chinese society—which is dominated by institutional authoritarianism—can become a competent social member in the American society, which is relatively freer. Five years or longer would probably leave enough space for the complexities of life stories to emerge, while I do not deny that newcomers' perspectives of a new society could be fresh and sharp.

The Recruiting Process

In principle, the plan was to study five life stories altogether, beginning with a few women from my network; from there, I hoped the snowball effect would help to identify more women. As it turned out, the recruiting process was much more challenging and frustrating than I thought, and, more important, there are lessons I learned from the successes and failures, lessons

about trust-building, about the concerns that potential participants had, about the sensitivity and complexity of the consent form, etc. This I will discuss later in this chapter.

Through my network, the first step in trust-building, I originally became connected with three potential participants. Before agreeing to participate, two of them wanted to know me first, which is also part of trust-building and which I felt is what Andrews (2007) experienced in her study: They wanted to "interview" me first to see if I were qualified for the job of interviewer, and I readily agreed. Following one woman's suggestion, we had a preliminary conversation via Zoom, where I introduced myself and the study, answered any questions she raised, and she also introduced herself. She thought my study was a bit too broad. The other woman wanted us to begin from communication first—mainly through email—to see if I were the right person for her to share her story. Looking back, there was not a clear point to me to tell whether she felt I am qualified or not until she signed the consent form; my sense about our interaction on my part is that listening, respect, and genuine interest in others are key to establishing relationship.

Although the third woman eventually chose not to participate, it is worth noting what I have learned from our interactions. One question she wanted answered in advance pertained to my political standing. She asked, "Some part of my story will inevitably be critical of China's political regime as well as America's current anti-Democracy Trumpism. Would you be comfortable with content like that?" She also shared one of her published essays to let me see what she meant by it. I answered her question with transparency, shared how much I enjoyed her essay, and also explained that "I am open to anyone who would like to share her story with me, regardless of one's background, such as one's gender orientation, political or religious position, or whatever. A good challenge in doing this study is seeing myself grow into it by being

stretched by others." As a researcher, I wanted myself to be able to embrace differences in political ideology.

Another issue that emerged from my interaction with the same woman later was related to the consent form. After she reviewed the form, she said she found the terms somewhat "binding," given that the way of interview she prefers is writing and that her compromised health situation would not allow her to do extensive writing. From this interaction I learned to have more sensitivity about what the terms might mean for others and to adjust the terms to accommodate different situations. In this case, this woman then kindly offered to direct me to her writings if I have particular questions. With gratitude, I sent her my questions noting that she could ignore some of them if it were too much; unfortunately, I never heard anything back, and I did not feel comfortable pursuing it. In my reflection, this experience made me consider if my questions might have overwhelmed her and that I might have approached it differently.

My writing teacher, with whom I had a conversation about that experience, suggested the idea of using five umbrella interview questions. This technique turned out to be useful during the rest of the recruiting process when some potential participants had interest in knowing in advance what questions I would ask.

Mentioning my interest in people's past seemed to have intimidated some potential participants who declined, despite my having direct and indirect connections and who I had assumed would trust me. Messages from my network proved similar: "[S]he said she doesn't like to talk much about her personal life." "[S]he doesn't want to talk about the past in the Mainland." Without any intention of further pushing or persuading any potential participant, I explained to people in my network that, in fact, each interviewee would have total control of what to share, how much to share, and is welcomed to talk only about her life in the U.S. if she

prefers. I also explained about anonymity. Apparently, in some cases these explanations were not enough to address and clear some people's concerns, as no further interaction followed.

I found myself wishing I could have found a chance to address the potential participants' concerns through direct communication before they would make a final decision, regardless of what the outcome would be. If so, what strategy would that be? Practically, this experience made me more cautious about how to present the five umbrella interview questions to potential participants. I made it explicit that those questions would serve merely as a reference point, and I reiterated I would respect the way one wants to share her story, including choosing not to answer questions one feels uncomfortable with, which of course was also included in the consent form.

Since the snowball method did not work within my circle, and I almost exhausted my network resources, I asked almost anyone I know to help me spread a bilingual participant recruitment blurb to include those who met the criteria and who had turned me down, since their social circle would have the age group I needed. Finally, this strategy brought me two more participants. I wonder if I should have done this from the very beginning, and whether I had overestimated the possibility of recruiting participants from my network. Apparently, "trust building"—a topic too complex to address as such in this dissertation—took on a very sensitive turn in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, in a context of increasing anti-Asian hatred in the U.S., complex political tensions between the U.S. and China and reinforced "monitoring" of citizen political thoughts and everyday movements by the authoritarian regime in China. This issue will be discussed later in more detail.

My interaction with another potential participant helped me learn what and how the consent form concerned her in particular and understand more the challenge of building trust in general. This woman came through a friend's connection, and she had originally said she wanted

to “help” in the study. After reviewing the consent form, she emphatically stated that she would not agree to share secondary materials, that I should add “but not [no] any publication for profit,” and she asked me to share my identification information—copies of my passport with the front page that shows my passport number, my photo, the page that shows my visa status, and my social security card. Her last request made me feel uncomfortable; after consulting with my dissertation chair and a friend, I replied, “If you wanted to make sure I am a legitimate student at my school, please feel free to contact the IRB chair whose information is included in the consent form.” Regarding her request that the publication should not be pursued for the sake of profit, I explained (also after consulting with my dissertation chair), “The dissertation is written for educational purposes. It is a university graduation requirement that every dissertation can be publicly available for educational purposes.” Regarding her not wanting to share secondary materials, I told her that her participation is totally voluntary, she is free to choose NOT to share what she does not want to share, and thus should not sign at the related section. I wondered if sharing secondary materials might put her—or someone else—under potential risks. A while later when I reflected on my experience with this woman, I found myself wondering if this woman had been worried that I might work as a security agent for the Chinese government. I recalled how several years ago I was asked if I were a Chinese spy by an American undergraduate who was having theater class with me at that time. The question had shocked and confused me at that time, and I only gradually came to understand after I learned more about American history and later on Chinese/Asian immigration history.

There is no way to tell if and how much the surge in physical violence against Asian residents and Asian Americans in the broad society affected any potential participant’s decision-making. One potential participant who had originally wanted to participate opted out a few days

after I had sent her the consent form; it happened to be the same time as the assassination of eight people, most of whom were Asian in Georgia, in mid-March 2021, referred to as "The Atlanta Spa shootings" (Knowles et al., 2021).

It did not occur to me until a conversation much later with my dissertation chair that signing a copy of the consent form might be intimidating, in particular for people who feel vulnerable, and that I could have merely asked for oral consent, especially if anyone had a safety concern. But again, sometimes it was not easy to tell what really concerned the potential participant if not expressed explicitly. In general, the Chinese way to say no is less straightforward than the American way, and sometimes people would give that which is not the "real" reason.

In the very late recruiting process, I made an effort to reach out virtually to several organizations that work with older Chinese/Asian immigrant men and women (including one in the Boston area I had physically visited before the pandemic, and several others I found online), hoping they could help me find more potential participants. I did not, however, receive any response. By the end of March 2021, I decided to stop searching for more potential participants; therefore, this study would cover life stories of four women in total.

Interviewing

Because the focus is on stories, this study used semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted between late December 2020 and February 2021, all digitally recorded (by two devices). The interviews with three women were in Mandarin by phone, decided by their preference. One of them indicated that a phone interview can afford more anonymity, a benefit of collecting data by phone which Knox and Burkard (2009) mentioned. Another woman is bilingual and was flexible with the interview language. Since the

language we used in check-in via Zoom was in Mandarin, I felt it would be natural for me to continue with Mandarin; most of her account was in Mandarin, though occasionally she would switch to English.

Each participant was interviewed two or three times, which in total varied from two and a half hours to four hours, six hours, and nine hours respectively. Each interview time varied, ranging from one hour to three-and-a-half hours. The interviews with three women went through all the probing questions; I did not have enough time to do so with one woman, given the relatively limited time she offered. There were additional questions that came up spontaneously during the interviews. After interviewing with the second person, I realized that three hours is probably the time in total that would allow me to go through all the interview questions; thus in requesting interviews, it might have been clearer had I said how much time in total—rather than how many interviews—would be expected.

After each interview, I would take notes and write down reflections. Before the next interview of the same person, I would re-listen to the prior interview to see if there were anything I could have done better or anything I should improve on in the coming interview, or, if there were any question I want to know more about or to ask for clarification during the next interview.

While there is a general structure of the interview, each interview structure was different in individual cases, depending on—and mostly following—where their telling led me. In other words, although I went through all the same interview questions in three cases (without including the spontaneous questions), the order of the interview questions in each case was different.

A general feeling I had about interviewing with all the women is they had great interest in sharing their stories; after the first interview, they seemed to become more open and speak more

freely. Their physical capability amazed me, and, with my occasional check-ins during the interview to ask if they were tired, made several long conversations possible.

At the very beginning of the interview, I encouraged the interviewee to tell her story in the way she wanted and tell what she felt was important to her; soon they wanted me to ask them questions instead, which I readily undertook. In my reflection, this seems to be similar to what Hershatter (2011) wondered: "if by not imposing categories we were, in fact, imposing a very large categorical requirement: asking women to create a narrative structure out of their lives when they were not in the habit of doing so" (p. 21). There might be also occasions where I did not know enough to ask or occasions where interviewees did not share because the researcher did not ask, which occurred in Hershatter's (2011) experience. Unfortunately, the issue about the interval time between one interview and the next with the same person did not come to my attention until later, when all the interviews had already been done. Usually I let the participant decide the time for the next interview based on the availabilities on both sides. There were three times when the interviews were conducted two days in a row. It might have been better to leave a couple of days before proceeding to the next interview so that it would have offered the interviewee more time to think and reflect on what had been shared, what else to share, etc.

As for listening, occasionally, it became demanding when an interviewee's narrative of a specific experience was somewhat overwhelming or when the style of an interviewee' speech was characteristically marked by incomplete sentences. Sometimes silence was present during communications; as a researcher, I consciously listened for silence, inconsistency, hesitation, suppression, and rupture, as Andrews (2007), Mouton & Pohlandt-McCormick (1999), and Maynes et al. (2008) urged.

There are characteristics of temporality I learned during and after the interviews. Provoked by Hershatter's (2011) work, I realized after the interviews that the calendar year is not the only reference for temporality. There were occasions in which one woman used her daughter's age to refer to a particular time. Sometimes women could not recall the exact year(s) when I wanted to get a sense of the context in their accounts. In one case, it was after my multiple rounds of reading and rereading of the story that I realized at some places this woman was telling her story backward. In another case, a woman did not use a chronological frame in her account, leaving me confused and lost during the interview, and for which I asked for clarification. It was much later when I encountered Hershatter's (2011) work that helped me reflect on my experience, questioning my assumption that a neat chronological order would be automatically in place in one's account of her story.

Transcription and Translation

Given that most interviews were in Mandarin, transcription in Chinese followed by the extensive work of translation into English was necessary. The interviews were transcribed nearly completely and slightly edited for clarity and length in Chinese. One participant opted out from double-checking the transcript, two women received a copy of the full transcript in Chinese, and the woman who is bilingual reviewed and approved the English version of her story.

In reflection, the final stories presented in the study have been filtered three times. The first time was during the transcription process when the original vocal words were converted to written text. In this process, there was loss in "pacing, emphasis, and tonality," to borrow Hershatter's (2011) words, "none of which survives the conversion to textual form intact" (p. 267).

The second round of filtering occurred during the translation process when the text was translated from Chinese into English. Perhaps the most challenging task of translation is finding the counterparts in English for certain Chinese expressions. Not everything is translatable; furthermore, it is questionable whether standard English is able enough to capture Chinese experiences. Morrison (2019) questioned the ability of the standard English in capturing African Americans' experiences and pointed out one of Baldwin's gifts in reshaping it "until it was truly modern, dialogic, representative, humane" (p. 230). With these considerations, as a compromise, I juxtaposed at certain places the English translation with the *pinyin* (without tone marks) of the Chinese counterparts. (*Pinyin* is the official romanization system for standard Mandarin Chinese widely used in Mainland China.)

The third round of filtering of the text happened during the editing. In her book *Hmong means free: Life in Laos and America*, Chan (1994b) explained why she edited her students' English translations of the interviews they conducted in Hmong:

> I have no doubt that, like most people speaking in their native language, the speech of the Hmong is *not 'broken.'* Therefore, it would be an insult to them to translate their stories into an English script that contains grammatical and spelling errors, under the misguided notion that such a rendering would be more 'authentic.' My students made errors because they had to learn English as a second language. They very much wanted me to 'clean up' their translations and their own writings, so that they read as smoothly as possible. They know, and I know, that one distinct form that racism in America has taken is the singsong pidgin English that many writers have used to depict the speech of Asian immigrants. As young immigrants, they have been taunted repeatedly for looking different and for not speaking English like 'real Americans.' Such humiliation is something that I myself also experienced when I arrived in the US at the age of fifteen. For these reasons, we do not want to present the life stories in poor English. (viii)

Interestingly, a documentary titled *Pidgin: The Voice of Hawaii* (Booth & Young, 2009) maintains that pidgin, rather than standard English, represents Asian American and Pacific Islanders' experiences in Hawaii.

Considering all these factors, I became more aware of the ways I work with the English version of these women's stories in my study, and the "how" question has lived with me. In this study, editing was done for the purpose of clarity, while not everything was made standard English.

Secondary Materials

In this study, two woman shared secondary materials. One woman shared her letters (with her daughter, friend, and ex-husband), writings (with photographs), self-made videos, and her Facebook account. The other woman offered her space via WeChat—a social media widely used among Chinese and a space where she has shared posts. I used them selectively in the presented stories, while they all helped me better understand the individual women.

Interpretation and Analysis

Stories were first read and interpreted individually to capture the whole person in context, and then were looked at thematically.

As for each individual story, attention was paid to (a) categories of difference in place, such as generation, region, location, race/ethnicity, gender, class, educational level, age; (b) the presence of "multiplicity of narrative" (Maynes et al., 2008, p. 44) which involves personal narrative, public narrative, and the narrative of the analyst; (c) the intersecting of an individual narrative with a historical context and of the individual with the society; (d) the relationship between the past and the present.

The year when each exited from the home society is worth comment, as it would serve a moment against which they would compare their "old" experiences with "new" ones, the "new" society with the "old," the current home society in contrast to that before they had left, and today's host society with that when they just arrived.

There are moments when I need to make decisions about what not to write. As an example, I tend to read life stories primarily focusing on the structural factors that play(ed) a role in these women's development while also taking cultural factors into account; comparatively speaking, the latter is less emphasized and much left to the reader. Another example is that while interpreting lives of women in this study, I read them in light of each other, in light of myself, in light of my mom, (whom I was prompted by this study to interview, using some questions prepared for this study), and in light of written materials (about history, about their counterparts in China—urban dwellers and rural residents—and in the U.S., other older Chinese/Asian immigrant women and men). These all became present, sometimes converging, when it came to my understanding of the life stories of women in this study. However, not every part of them made its explicit presence in the writing, given the limited space and the purpose of this study. Sometimes the decisions were not easy to make. For instance, there are many moments women's stories offered me access to my own inner world by provoking old memories or creating new connections, and I sometimes struggled with how much to disclose of myself. On one hand, I recognize the importance of revealing who I am as a researcher; on the other hand, I keep in mind that the center of this study is the women participants, therefore, I have tried to strike a balance between these two aspects.

These women told their present in reference to their past, and they told their past from the vantage point of the present. From a different perspective, women's narratives about their past can be seen as a way to evaluate the present—either about Mainland China, about Hong Kong, or about the U.S.

To ensure credibility of the research, I used "thick" descriptions. The many conversations I had with my writing teacher throughout the whole research process served to function as peer

debriefing, which also contributed to the credibility of the research. It should be noted that my interpretation, as any others', is provisional and can gain new meanings as time and the researcher change. Thus, there is no ultimate version of a story (Andrews, 2007).

Here, I would like to step back and clarify a little about the epistemology. While preparing the study, I had considered certain potential frames for future interpretation and analysis that might prove useful. These had helped guide the development of the semi-structured list of topics/questions and areas for probing. During and after the interviews, I listened to the women's stories carefully, paid attention to what emerged (and did not emerge) from the stories and the ways in which they told their own stories, which I sought to respect. Then, in the interpretation and analysis process, I applied frames that would respond to their individual stories. Put differently, life stories inquiry is atheoretical (Atkinson, 2007), thus theoretical frames are not used as ready-planned lens to impose on women's life stories before or during data collection. Rather, they merely appear after data collection, a process in which I had to rethink the potential frames I had initially considered and decide if I would need to adjust, to change, or to add frames accordingly. Similarly, while working on themes, I did not begin with concepts or frames; rather, I brought in women's stories first, then selected what I thought was responsive to, able to capture, understand, and interpret the stories. In a word, the analysis draws from an interpretative, constructivist approach (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011).

Presentation

To ensure confidentiality, all participants' real names were replaced with pseudonyms. In three cases, as one will see, I followed the traditional way to address older people in our communication—by putting "aunt" in front of one's last name. Among the three, one woman used an English name at the very beginning of our communication via email, therefore I replaced

it with another English name in presenting her story, though through the rest of our communication I followed the traditional way of addressing her.

CHAPTER IV: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT[1]

To contextualize the women's stories in the wider post-1949 historical and political context, this section introduces three drastic periods of national mobilization and one historical event to which the women referred in their accounts, separately or together: the Anti-Rightist Movement (1957–1958), the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) and the consequential famine (usually referred to in China as "three-year difficulty" or "three-year natural disaster"), and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). These campaigns and event have remained nationally as silenced histories and politically sensitive subjects for decades.

I must say that given the limited space and the purpose of this study, the review of the historical context in this chapter is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. Also, the focus of the review is predominantly on Han Chinese history, which differs from that of ethnic minority groups, especially those residing in border regions.

The Anti-Rightist Movement (1957–1958)

In February 2012, I visited the Laogai Museum in Washington D.C. out of curiosity and met Harry Wu (1937–2016), the founder of the museum and director of the Laogai Research Foundation. (The term "laogai," widely known in China, literally refers to reform through labor, a term that Wu (2003; personal conversation, Feb. 23, 2012,) contends is equivalent to Gulag.) A survivor of the Anti-Rightist Movement (1957) with 19-year-long camp life as a result of accusations and persecutions, Wu later became a human rights activist, dedicated his life to disclosing the nature of China's prison system. Visiting the museum for three days in a row accompanied by Mr. Wu's stories led me for the first time to this untold history, and, since then,

[1] To find Chinese women's images during these historical periods (and beyond), see Hershatter, G. (2007). *Women in China's long twentieth century*. University of California Press.

compelled me to explore it, a silenced history which had happened over half a century earlier, and of which I had known little. While the number of its survivors shrinks more and more each year, the unspoken history still remains largely unknown to many Chinese people.

An understanding of China decades ago cannot be separated from an understanding of its relationship with the then Soviet Union, and, broadly, of cold war background. Mao Zedong, the communist leader in China, had emulated Stalin and modeled Communist China on the Soviet Union, the former dependent on the latter's financial aid and political guidance (Dikötter, 2019a, 2019b; Maben, 2006b). In 1950, China began a massive land reform in the countryside: Through class violence, almost two million landlords were executed and peasants were assigned land (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2013; Maben, 2006b). In 1953 (the year Stalin passed away), however, Mao was worried that the redistribution of land would allow small landowners to appear again, so he initiated the agricultural collectivization campaign—peasants had to return their land to the collective and work in the communes (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012). Despite the fact that this policy was met with distrust, Mao was decisive about following Stalin's model—the ideal in his eyes (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012).

Two international events in 1956 had influences on China and Mao's policy at that time. One was Khrushchev's denouncement of the horrors of Stalin's rule, the cult of personality, and the disastrous collectivization campaigns, which shocked the socialist world (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2013, 2016a; Hu, 2005; Maben, 2006b). Consequently, the agricultural collectivization campaign in China was suspended, and Mao's ideas lost their popularity (Dikötter, 2013). The other event was Hungarian Revolution, a civil revolt mainly by the intellectuals and college students to oppose the Soviet model and Soviet control, which eventually was crushed by the military force of the Soviet Union (Dikötter, 2013; Hu, 2005;

Maben, 2006b). This made Mao become alert, wondering how to prevent China from repeating what had happened in Hungary (Dikötter, 2013; Hu, 2005; Maben, 2006b).

To regain power, Mao turned to "the people" as his strategy, encouraging them to express their views freely in order to improve the party's leadership, which was named by Mao the Hundred Flowers' Campaign (Ai, 2017; Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2013; Hu, 2005, 2010, 2013, 2017; Maben, 2006b). It turned out that some criticisms even pointed to the very nature of the Communist regime (Hu, 2005, 2010, 2013, 2017; Maben, 2006b). One year later Mao labeled those who were against the regime as the "class enemies" and ordered violent repression (Ai, 2017; Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2013; Hu, 2005, 2010, 2013, 2017; Maben, 2006b). This was called the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957–58. To punish the rightists, the regulation of indoctrination through labor was put in practice in 1957 (Ai, 2017; Hu, 2005, 2010, 2013, 2017; Xie, 2013), a system originally borrowed from the Soviet Union (Xie, 2013) and abolished by the end of 2013 (Xiao, 2013; Xin Hua News Agency, 2013), after its implementation for over five decades.

During the Anti-Rightist movement, intellectuals, accomplished professionals, college students, party members (for instance, for "sympathizing with the rightists"), even innocent peasants were categorized as "rightists" and banished to remote areas to perform hard labor (Ai, 2017; Hu, 2005, 2010, 2013, 2017; Maben, 2006b). Many "rightists" were labeled merely because of a carelessly uttered word (Ai, 2017; Hu, 2010; H. Wu, 2003). There were also cases in which people were randomly picked out as "rightists" to meet a set quota, though they had not spoken out (Ai, 2017; Hu, 2010, 2017). According to a documentary, 4–5000 children of age 10–17 were accidentally taken in and became juvenile laborers (Xie, 2013). In the following years, many rightists (and the juvenile laborers) died of hunger, exhaustion, torture, disease,

cold, or suicide (Ai, 2017; Hu, 2005, 2010, 2013, 2017; Xie, 2013; X. Yang, 2019). Their families were punished, as well; many families fell apart (Ai, 2017; Hu, 2010, 2017).

According to the official statistics, 552,877 men and women, mostly intellectuals, were labeled "rightists" (Hu, 2010), which constituted over a tenth of all the intellectuals in China (Hu, 2005). According to the declassified dossier of the Central Committee of the Party, the number was 3,178,470 (Hu, 2010). In addition, 1,437,562 people were labeled as "middle-Rightists" (Hu, 2010). "By silencing his enemies, Mao regained total control of the party" (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012). The documentary *In Search of Lin Zhao's Soul* reveals, "[A]fter the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957, the entire Mainland China stopped thinking, and people lived with lies and terror" (Hu, 2005).

As history evolved, during the Cultural Revolution that would begin nine years later, some "rightists" were persecuted again, though they had been released; the length of imprisonment for some was lengthened, and the sentence for some changed arbitrarily from imprisonment to death (Hu, 2010, 2013). For most of the rightists who survived, their labels were not removed until the late 1970s or early 1980s, after the central government approved removing the political labels for all rightists in 1978 (Hu, 2010, 2013; D. Lin, 2011). It turned out that many, if not most, cases were found wronged; among those cases, there was a claim that they were rehabilitated and thus were restored their status, rather than that they were wronged and thus deserved their status as citizens (D. Lin, 2011). When interviewed in a documentary decades later, a survivor asserted: "What we want is not just a monument, but a lesson that our people can learn from the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957, improve our civilization, and truly implement the freedom of speech sanctioned by our constitution; no more prisoner of thought and no more prisoner of speech" (Hu, 2010).

The Anti-Rightist Movement is argued to be an important turning point in China's modern history because it sparked a series of violent policies that created a more totalitarian government and accounted for the happening of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) (Laogai Research Foundation & Chinese Information Center, 2008). Chinese historian and journalist Yang Jisheng remarked in a documentary (see in Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012) that the movement "cleared the way for the Great Leap Forward" because "[I]t removed any obstacles. That means people were too afraid to speak up." Historian Gao Hua (2006) maintains that the intellectuals having been labeled "bourgeoisie" during the Anti-Rightist Movement has a connection to the Cultural Revolution when they, due to the anti-intellectual sentiment, were classified in the same way.

The Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) and The Great Famine

A massive national campaign launched by Mao in 1958, the Great Leap Forward aimed to overtake Britain in economic production within fifteen years, as a response to the Soviet Union's goal of exceeding the United States in the same period (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2011; Maben, 2006b; J. Yang, 2012). Ambitiously oriented towards building a communist society through industrialization and agricultural collectivization, with "a promise of plenty" and "a profoundly different everyday future" everyone wanted, the experimental utopian pursuit created tremendous disruptions and, eventually, evolved into a catastrophic famine (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2011, 2019a, 2019b; Hu, 2005, 2010, 2013, 2017; Maben, 2006b; J. Yang, 2012).

The Great Leap Forward started between winter 1957 and spring 1958 with recruiting hundreds of millions of villagers—men and some women—to work on irrigation projects across the country, often at sites far away from home and without sufficient food and rest (Cabouat &

Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2010a; J. Yang, 2012). This created labor shortages in the fields in the countryside (Hershatter, 2011, 2019b).

By summertime, thousands of large communes in the city and countryside were being organized to create economies of scale (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2011, 2019a, 2019b; Maben, 2006b; J. Yang, 2012). The reorganization, according to Hershatter (2019b), increased the pace of work in urban factories, but most aspects of urban life remained unaltered; in contrast, it brought fundamental change to the countryside, especially the dynamic of rural women's life. In the countryside, the collectivization was radically enforced (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2011; Hu, 2013; Maben, 2006b; J. Yang, 2012): almost everything in the household—from land to labor—had to be collectivized; people were managed in a military style (intended to be effective during peace and war times); and the family unit disappeared. Under collectivization, a work-point system was created, with a guiding principle being "[H]e who does not work shall not eat" (Dikötter, 2010a). Within this system, only strong men could reach the top, whereas women were given fewer credits than men (Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2011).

A steel-smelting campaign was launched nationally to escalate steel production; backyard furnaces were set up wildly to melt all kinds of metal objects, burning day and night (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2011; Maben, 2006b; J. Yang, 2012). Anything within households that could contribute to the goal had to be handed in or confiscated, such as pots, woks, pans, doorknobs, farming tools, etc. (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2011; Maben, 2006b; J. Yang, 2012); all trees were cut down to be used as fuels (Dikötter, 2010a; J. Yang, 2012); women and girls even cut their hair to make stoves (Hu, 2013);

more workforce in the countryside–both men and women—was diverted from the field (Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2011; J. Yang, 2012).

That men and some women were sent to work on numerous infrastructure projects or smelting steel worsened the labor shortages in the countryside (Hershatter, 2011, 2019a, 2019b).With the acute labor shortages, women were mobilized to an unprecedented extent to work in the fields (Hershatter, 2011, 2019a, 2019b) while having to look after children and relatives. They often worked with exhaustion and suffered from health issues, such as miscarriages and uterine prolapse, with local leaders ignoring the precautions that women, while menstruating, pregnant, or lactating, were supposed to be assigned light tasks (Hershatter, 2011, 2019a, 2019b).

As women's labor was badly needed in the field, a policy named "Five Changes," the first and only official effort, was put in place to liberate women from their domestic labor—cooking, caring for children, delivering newborns, and sewing—through building new local institutions and socializing housework (Hershatter, 2011, 2019a, 2019b). As an example, free and compulsory nurseries and boarding kindergartens were set up (with resources seized from the peasants) (J. Yang, 2012). They soon collapsed because of the shortages of money, equipment, and personnel; in fact, women had to go to work in the fields regardless of the availability of child care (Hershatter, 2011, 2019a, 2019b). Tales about children during this period were told—being tied to somewhere, having accidents such as being injured, drowned, bitten by animals, wandering off, or dying of disease due to the delayed treatment (Hershatter, 2011, 2019a, 2019b).

Among the Five Changes, establishing the communal kitchens was the most ambitious undertaking, starting in the summer of 1958 (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Hershatter, 2011,

2019a, 2019b; J. Yang, 2012). Household items—from furniture to poultry, firewood, and cooking utensils—were requisitioned in setting up the communal kitchens; peasants turned in their food supplies, smashed their stoves, and were not allowed to make fire at home (Dikötter, 2010a; J. Yang, 2012). In the following few months, they ate their fill, with everyone assured the promised communism was imminent (Dikötter, 2010a; J. Yang, 2012).

Expected by state authorities' frenzy to raise crop output to unprecedented levels, communes were encouraged to compete against each other, which led to the so-called "exacerbation wind": Cadres at every level felt compelled to create falsified crop figures to meet or exceed the sky-high goals set by the party and to catch attention (Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2011; Hu, 2013; Maben, 2006b; J. Yang, 2012). Based on the inflated claims about the agricultural production, state authorities increased food procurements in the countryside to feed the cities and to meet foreign obligations (including repaying debts to the Soviet Union, which broke off the brotherhood relation with China in 1960) (Dikötter, 2010a; Hu, 2013; J. Yang, 2012). In some rural areas, all the grain production was taken away (Hu, 2013; J. Yang, 2012).

The year 1958, it has to be noted, is also the year when the *hukou* (household registration) system (originally introduced to the cities in 1951 and extended to the countryside in 1955) was officially instituted into law, dividing the populace into residents with an agricultural (i.e., rural) status and a non-agricultural (i.e., urban) status, and grouping them into locality (Chu, 2014; Dikötter, 2010a; Levin, 2015; Wallace, 2015). Highly tied to social programs, such as housing, schools, retirement pensions, health care, etc., urban residents enjoyed benefits inaccessible to their rural counterparts (Chu, 2014; Dikötter, 2010; Levin, 2015; Wallace, 2015). In addition, this system imposed restrictions on the transfer of *hukou* status and the movement of people from rural to urban areas (Chu, 2014; Dikötter, 2010; Wallace, 2015).

While famine began in some places in 1958 (Dikötter, 2010a), the winter in early 1959 witnessed the gravest food shortages (Becker, 1998) and the year 1960 was the worst year of the famine (Dikötter, 2010a). As the mass starvation spread nationally, food supply in cities, strictly rationed according to a carefully designed stratification, was diminished (Ai, 2017; Becker, 1998; Hu, 2013); the communal kitchens in the countryside began to provide thin gruel until they were disbanded (Hershatter, 2011, 2019a; J. Yang, 2012). In general, the situation in the countryside was far worse than the city and some provinces were hit harder than others (Dikötter, 2010a; Hu, 2013, 2017; J. Yang, 2012). Stunningly, while ordinary people were struggling to survive, party cadres at all levels, with privileges, even had access to lavish banquets (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2010a; Hu, 2013; J. Yang, 2012).

Open criticism was dangerous (Hu, 2013). During this period, around 3.6 million party members were purged and replaced for expressing reservations about the Great Leap Forward (Dikötter, 2010a; Hu, 2013); while many ordinary people who knew about the happening of deaths due to starvation dared not to speak up, a consequence of the Anti-Rightist campaign (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2010a; Hu, 2013), there were cases in which people resorted to uprisings, attacked granaries or sending letters of complaint (Ai, 2017; Dikötter, 2010a; Hu, 2013; J. Yang, 2012).

To survive, men and women scavenged for food or food substitutes and ate whatever they could find—tree leaves and bark, grass seed, mice, mud, earthworms, etc. (Ai, 2017; Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2010a; Hu, 2013, 2017; J. Yang, 2012). “As famine spread, the very survival of an ordinary person came increasingly to depend on the ability to lie, charm, hide, steal, cheat, pilfer, forage, smuggle, trick, manipulate or otherwise outwit the state” (Dikötter, 2010a, p. xiv). Almost everyone from the top to the bottom had undergone a certain measure of

moral degradations, making compromises in one way or another (Dikötter, 2010a). With few choices, people turned against each other to survive—by stealing, poisoning, robbing, abusing, etc.; thousands of cases of cannibalism were reported (Cabouat & Grangereau, 2012; Dikötter, 2010a; Hu, 2013; J. Yang, 2012; X. Yang, 2009).

Women were in a more vulnerable position than men for various reasons. In cases in which men left, women were left defenseless, subjected to local bullying, and after the famine took over, women had to manage the meager food, make hard decisions, and keep family members alive (Dikötter, 2010a). While numerous men and women suffered from oedema (Ai 2017; Hu, 2005, 2013; J. Yang, 2012), among women, the discontinuation of their menstrual periods was common, due to exhaustion and hunger, even among those in cities who were provided medical care (Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2011, 2019a, 2019b). The birth rate dropped dramatically (J. Yang, 2012). With the patriarchy prioritizing men to be fed first, women, during the famine, were "deliberately neglected in the interests of male survival, a choice that was justified on the grounds that the entire family ultimately depended on the ability of men to go out and find food" (Dikötter, 2010a, p. 216). Women resorted to trade for sex or bigamy—more common in the countryside—for goods, clothes or food for relatives (Dikötter, 2010a). There was also trafficking in women (Dikötter, 2010a).

Given the *hukou* system, most villagers were kept in place (Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2019a, 2019b). With the combination of *hukou* system and the state-controlled press, Hershatter (2019b) revealed, "[M]any farmers were unaware of the scale of the disaster outside their own locality, and most urban people remained ignorant of the suffering in the countryside" (p. 17). In fact, the *hukou* system had been in place until recent years, when certain reforms have taken place, with controversies, including a provision in 2014 for the elimination of the division of the

urban/rural status (Chu, 2014; Wallace, 2015). It is argued that the *hukou* system played a role in social stratification and huge disparity and inequality between the rural and urban areas, which accompanies stigmatization and discrimination faced by the rural residents and migrant workers (Chu, 2014; Levin, 2015).

The beginning of the end of mass starvation began at the end of 1960 when certain policies were issued, such as the restoration of the local market and private farming (Dikötter, 2010a). As the economy began to recover and the famine abated, there were still human lives being claimed in parts of the countryside until the end of 1962 (Dikötter, 2010a). The people's communes did not officially dissolve until 1982–1983 (Dikötter, 2010a).

The catastrophic loss of the Great Leap Forward goes beyond the destroyed agriculture, industry, trade, housing, and nature, to the tens of millions of human lives it claimed (Dikötter, 2010a; Hu, 2013; J. Yang, 2012). The estimated number of unnecessary deaths during 1958–1962 ranges from 15,000,000, the official version, to a high of 45,000,000, mostly in the countryside (Becker, 1996; Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2011; J. Yang, 2012).

The word "famine," or even "Great Famine," however, is inaccurate because it "fails to capture the many ways in which people died under radical collectivisation" (p. x), Dikötter (2010a) cautioned us. People not only starved to death, but were worked, starved, and beaten to death (Dikötter, 2010a). Out of his estimation of at least 45,000,000 unnecessary deaths, Dikötter (2010a) noted a rough 6–8% death toll—that is, at least 2.5 million people—who were "tortured to death or summarily killed" (p. xi). Punishments varied from the deliberate deprivation of food, eating excrement, parading or working naked, to beating, hanging, mutilation, being thrown in the pond, or, occasionally, being buried alive, often for the slightest infractions such as stealing a handful of grain, digging up a potato, or not working sufficiently hard (Dikötter, 2010a). The

most vulnerable—children, women, and the elderly—vanished because they were too old, weak, or sick to work and earn food (Dikötter, 2010a). “People were killed selectively” (Dikötter, 2010a, p. xi) by the man wielding the ladle in the canteen, for various reasons—for being rich, for dragging their feet, for speaking out, or for simply not being liked, etc. (Dikötter, 2010a). Countless deaths were caused indirectly by neglect as local cadres were pressured to focus on numbers rather than actual human lives (Dikötter, 2010a). Dikötter (2010a) declared, “Coercion, terror, and systematic violence were the foundation of the Great Leap Forward” (p. x–xi).

To this day, inside China, the Great Leap Forward has become a remote history barely mentioned by older people and unknown by younger people. Part of its profound legacy probably lies in the fact that, as Chinese historian Gao Hua (2010) concludes, compared to prior political campaigns, the Great Leap Forward, as a mass movement with a larger scale, brought the state power to its full penetration of the city and the countryside, which was established, solidified, and strengthened in all aspects of the society. The catastrophe has been—and is still—labeled the “three-year difficulty” or the “three-year natural disasters,” or a time of “serious economic difficulties,” and bad weather takes the blame (Becker, 1998; Dikötter, 2010a; Hershatter, 2011, 2019b; Tatlow, 2012; J. Yang, 2012). Like the Anti-Rightist Movement, the topic of the famine has remained silenced, with little public discussion, and with no monument (Dikötter, 2010a; J. Yang, 2012). There are people—including descendants of the survivors—reluctant to believe it happened (Ai, 2017).

Both historian Zhou Xun (as cited in Tatlow, 2012) and social activist and documentary maker Ai Xiaoming (2017) reflect on the long-lasting profound impacts of the famine on today’s China. In an interview, Zhou Xun (as cited in Tatlow, 2012) points out its legacy of violence during the Cultural Revolution and a sense of hopelessness in people today believing one has to

take things for him/herself. Ai Xiaoming (2017) points us to two phenomena that are part of the consequence of the famine: for the families within which both parents died first and then the children followed, there is no posterity to commemorate the deceased; and among those who survived, the Great Famine has fostered a firm attitude towards life—"[L]iving is above all else; no matter what, just survive; values and rights are secondary, and civic responsibility is even more negligible" (para. 9).

Linking the famine to the Cultural Revolution that would follow, Dikötter (2010b) maintains,

> Mao's Great Famine was not merely an isolated episode in the making of modern China. It was its turning point. The subsequent Cultural Revolution was the leader's attempt to take revenge on the colleagues who had dared to oppose him during the Great Leap Forward. (para. 19)

The Cultural Revolution[2] (1966–1976)

Known as "ten years of turmoil" that officially lasted from 1966 until 1976, the Cultural Revolution was a sociopolitical movement that originally aimed to reimpose Maoist thought as the dominant ideology within the party, which evolved into a movement full of violent class struggle and mass hysteria in all walks of life (A. Qin, 2019a; Baoxun. Chen, 2016; Dikötter,

---

[2] For images about the Cultural Revolution, see Li, Z. (2003). *Red-Color News Soldier Li Zhensheng: A Chinese Photographer's Odyssey through the Cultural Revolution.* Phaidon Press. Weaving photographs taken by Li Zhensheng, a former photo journalist who worked in northeast China, and his memoir, this photo book bears witness for the world to the decade-long turmoil. Also see an interview of Li Zhensheng in "A photographer's quest to reverse China's historical amnesia" (A. Qin, 2019a). *The New York Times*. https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20190104/china-cultural-revolution-photography/dual/; and Xiaozhuang (n.d.). *The years during the Cultural Revolution.* The Chinese University Service Centre for China Studies. http://mjlsh.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/Book.aspx?cid=12&tid=3501

2016a; Hinton et al., 2003; Z. Huang et al., 2016; Maben, 2006c; NHK, 2006, 2016; Xiong, 2018; X. Xu, 2014; Y. Wang, 2004; Y. Yang, 2016a).

The reasons for Mao's launch of the Cultural Revolution included two aspects (Dikötter, 2016a; H. Gao, 2006): one was Mao's theoretical understanding of socialism and revolution; the other, his concern with his status. Mao believed that the bourgeoisie had gone after the revolution in 1917 in the Soviet Union and the revolution in 1949 in China, but the culture remained threatening to the entire system (Dikötter, 2016a). Following the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution would therefore be the second stage of the international communist movement, and it would eradicate the bourgeois, capitalist, old, and feudal culture (Dikötter, 2016a). Mao had been concerned with his standing since 1956 when Stalin was denounced after his death by Khrushchev who started de-Stalinization (Dikötter, 2016a, 2019a). Mao's concern continued after the failure of the Great Leap Forward, his biggest setback, diminishing the support for him to the lowest point (Dikötter, 2016a).

During 1962–1965, Mao launched a Socialist Education Campaign, educating people about the benefits of socialism and eradicating any economic activities outside of the planned economy that emerged in the wake of the Great Leap Forward (Dikötter, 2016a). During the campaign, over 5,000,000 party members were purged (Dikötter, 2016a). Part of this campaign's emphasis fell on young people: Heirs to the revolution, students at all levels were indoctrinated about "class struggle" and "class hatred" (Dikötter, 2016a). The product of the propaganda was Lei Feng—a soldier who died in 1962 in his early twenties and who then was set as a model communist of "serving the people" with absolute loyalty to the party, a model from whom Mao exhorted the whole nation to learn (Dikötter, 2016a). Behind Lei Feng was the army that

promoted the study of Mao's thought across the nation and that produced millions of copies of Mao's quotations, known as the Little Red Book (Dikötter, 2016a; Maben, 2006c).

With groundwork being laid, the Cultural Revolution erupted in the summer of 1966 (Dikötter, 2016a; Maben, 2006c; NHK, 2006, 2016). Schools were suspended across the country; urban middle- and high-school girls and university students, excluding those from "bad" family backgrounds, joined their male peers, forming Red Guard groups vowing to protect the Chairman (Dikötter, 2016a; Maben, 2006c; NHK, 2006, 2016; Y. Wang, 2004; Xiong, 2018). They wrote big-character posters criticizing party leaders and their school administrators and teachers, denounced, harassed, humiliated, and tortured class enemies—real and imagined (Maben, 2006c; NHK, 2006, 2016; Y. Wang, 2004; Xiong, 2018). They invaded the class enemies' homes (Maben, 2006c; NHK, 2006, 2016; Y. Wang, 2004; Xiong, 2018). They attacked any sign of the old world: from books, temples, churches, mosques, public monuments, tombs, to fancy haircuts, high heels, short skirts, jeans, pointed shoes, ornamental plants, and flowers, etc. (Dikötter, 2016a; Maben, 2006c; NHK, 2006, 2016; Xiong, 2018). Millions of them traveled to Beijing to attend mass rallies to be reviewed by Mao (Dikötter, 2016a; Maben, 2006c; Xiong, 2018). Red Guard girls dressed like male soldiers and modeled their political behavior on "an imagined version of the working-class male" (Hershatter, 2019b, para. 71).

Further, Mao urged ordinary people to criticize ranking party leaders, stirring resentments and grievances they had harbored towards the party officials, resulting in a social explosion (Dikötter, 2016a; Maben, 2006c). Factional clashes occurred over who truly reflected Mao's voice and then escalated into warfare and bloody battles, claiming lives and leaving the nation on the verge of a civil war (Dikötter, 2016a; NHK, 2016; Xiong, 2018).

In March 1968 a campaign named the Three Loyalties and Four Boundless Loves was launched, requiring everyone's absolute loyalty to Mao who was regarded as the state, revolution, and the party (Dikötter, 2016a; Xiong, 2018). The cult of personality reached new heights: People worshiped Mao everywhere, chanting slogans, singing songs and dancing 'loyalty dance,' and endless monuments, statues, posters, altars, and portraits were produced and widely distributed (Dikötter, 2016a; Maben, 2006c; NHK, 2016; Xiong, 2018).

The first and most active phase of the Cultural Revolution—the Red Guards movement—came to an end in the summer of 1968 when the Revolutionary Party Committees, dominated by the army, were set up across the country, taking over the party and the state (Dikötter, 2016a; Maben, 2006c; Xiong, 2018). During the next three years, the nation was turned into a military dictatorship, with soldiers supervising schools, government units, and factories (Dikötter, 2016a; Xiong, 2018). Millions of urban young women and men, along with other undesirable elements, were banished to the countryside to be re-educated by peasants, usually referred to as "up the mountains, down to the villages" (Bonnin, 2009/2013; Dikötter, 2016a; Maben, 2006c; Xiong, 2018). Those youths lived and worked in the countryside until Mao's death in 1976 or beyond (Bonnin, 2009/2013; Dikötter, 2016a; Xiong, 2018). Purges were organized, forcing people from all walks of life to prove their loyalty to Mao and to denounce their family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors (Dikötter, 2016a; Maben, 2006c; Y. Wang, 2004; Xiong, 2018). Millions of people were persecuted in one way or another, primarily from 'bad class' backgrounds (Dikötter, 2016a; Maben, 2006c; Y. Wang, 2004; Xiong, 2018). "The point of these purges," Dikötter (2016a) explains, "was not physically to eliminate the regime's enemies, whether real or imagined, but to intimidate the greatest number of people possible." He

continues, “[T]he objective was to produce a docile population by transforming almost every act and every utterance into a potential crime” (Dikötter, 2016a, p. 241).

In September 1971, Lin Biao, Mao’s chosen successor, died in a mysterious airplane crash, bringing to an end the military’s grip on power (Dikotter, 2016a; Maben, 2006d). In the wake of the incident, the state was weakened, as was its ideological climate (Dikötter, 2016a). Having suffered from destitution, hunger, malnutrition, and exhaustion by the campaigns, one after another, people, especially those in the countryside, began to quietly find a way out by pursuing activities previously banned by the planned economy, such as opening black markets or underground factories, while gradually abandoning Maoism (Dikötter, 2016a). The “silent revolution” during 1971–1976 came to bring about what is often called the “Reform and Open” era, during which the party was forced to go along with people, challenging the official discourse that it was a top-down initiative (Dikötter, 2016a). Mao’s death in 1976 and the arrest of his wife and her allies (often called the “Gang of Four”) marked the official ending of the 10 years’ turmoil (Dikötter, 2016; Maben, 2006d; Xiong, 2018). Since then, the Cultural Revolution policies were repudiated (Xiong, 2018).

The dark heritage of the Cultural Revolution, captured by Anne Thurston’s writing and cited by Dikötter (2016a), created loss at many levels: “‘loss of culture and of spiritual values, loss of status and honour, loss of career, loss of dignity,’ and, of course, loss of trust and predictability in human relations, as people turned against each other” (p. xvi). The human cost, if narrowly measured by the number of unusual deaths, is reported to reach over 2,000,000 (Z. Huang et al., 2016). Over 550,000 people disappeared (Z. Huang et al., 2016).

The topic of the Cultural Revolution in China remains taboo, leaving the whole society in collective amnesia (A. Qin, 2019a; B. Chen, 2016; D. Lin, 2011; NHK, 2006, 2016; Xiong,

2018; Y. Wang, 2004; Y. Yang, 2016a), largely lacking trust, the older generation with suppressed memory, and my own and younger cohorts alienated and rootless. While many people have abandoned Maoism, there are still people who read and believe Mao's words today (Dikötter, 2016b; Y. Yang, 2016a). An understanding and reflection of the history of the Cultural Revolution, Lin Da (2011) claims, is far less clear, complete, and deep, given the presence of the entrenched fear in the persecuted and the government's repression of their voices. Dikötter (2016b) states that part of its legacy lies in the party's perception of "democracy," a term regarded as equivalent to "chaos."

Summary

Above I have sketched a brief review of the historical events to which the women's accounts make references in the next chapter. A caution about the way history is understood and written in terms of temporality: sometimes a different light is needed in order to question a neat temporality, and attention needs to be paid to pre- and after-history. For instance, the extreme leftist concepts and frames adopted in the decade of the Cultural Revolution, Gao Hua (2000) maintains, can date back to the Rectification Movement in Yan'an during 1942–1945, a movement which claimed to be a great Marxist educational movement, and which was rarely confronted. It is since then the idea of thought reform had been applied by and then consistent with the other following political movements, including the Cultural Revolution (Hua. Gao, 2000). Also, there were purges in 1942 after numerous intellectuals joined the revolution with enthusiasm for and sincere belief in Communism (H. Gao, 2000), so Anti-Rightist Movement was not at all the first purge of them under Mao's rule.

As one will see in the following chapter on women's individual stories, obviously the past has not been forgotten. With the historical context provided here, the attention now is turned

to the individual women's lives, with a hope that by intersecting biography and history, the historical context and the women's accounts can inform an understanding of each other.

CHAPTER V: PROFILES OF OLDER CHINESE IMMIGRANT WOMEN

This study covers four women's life stories. Despite a small size, the group is diverse in terms of their class, educational and family background, geographical locations, experiences, motivations for immigration, and levels of integration into the host society. Below provides quick snapshots of each of them.

Linda, age 66, lives with her American husband and their dog in Virginia. She came to America at age 50 with a tourist visa to visit her daughter who was studying here, and soon after, married and settled down. She has been a homemaker since 2007 after her husband, Steven, obtained a job in the federal government. While enjoying her current marriage and a materially comfortable life, it pains her that the relationship with her daughter has been estranged. A cancer survivor for 30 years, she has written a small e-book at the 19th anniversary based on her experience.

Feng is the only bilingual, most acculturated among the four women. At age 66, she has lived almost half her life in China and half in the U.S. A trained translator, she came to America in 1989, at age 35, as a visiting scholar, then was enrolled into a PhD program and became a PhD candidate. She had various teaching and researching experiences and co-authored a book about American families that adopted Chinese girls. Currently a human resource clerk at a university in Massachusetts, she lives with her partner, and has two daughters.

Aunt Li, age 66, resides with her American husband in Arizona. At the time of the interview, she has worked fulltime in a middle school preparing food for several years, while teaching folk dance to a group of 20 Chinese once a week for the past 16 years. She came to America at age 50 as a fiancé. Prior to her arrival in America, she had worked as deputy general

manager, first in entertainment center, and then in catering for over 10 years. She also had experiences as a dancer and a cultural worker.

Aunt Guo is 74 years old, residing with her young sister in an apartment for low-income older people in Massachusetts. Widowed several years ago, she is mother of two daughters—one in America and one in Hong Kong. Her life span involves 32 years in Mainland China, 25 years in Hong Kong, and 16 years in America. She came to America in 2004, at age 57, sponsored by her sister.

What follows are four individual stories, each presented as a whole. (The text appeared in [] is added by the researcher and is not the words of the interviewees. Feng's original words spoken in English are italicized.) The reader is encouraged to spend some time reflecting on each woman's story before entering another's story. What does her story reveal to you? Think about what threads, if any, ring "loud" in each woman's life, what choices each woman had or did not have, how each made decisions. Where and how did their life courses change, and why, and how did each individual interact with her environment? How have the different political, economic, and social environments shaped each woman's life? What agency do you, as a reader, see in each woman's interaction with her specific environment? And what, if any, surprises or challenges you, saddens, moves, or resonates with you as a reader?

Story 1: Linda

I was connected to Linda in early August 2020 through her daughter Nina, who is four years younger than I, whom I first got to know in my previous job and later befriended. Linda acknowledged that my study would be meaningful and suggested we start with communication first, because to her—a person who has had innumerable experiences—it is not easy to open up and to "give" herself to someone. I agreed, telling her that I understood, and that her words

deepened my own understanding of the study, an occurrence which goes beyond what is usually called “data collection” to encounter, connect, understand, and trust another life. I expressed my hope that I would be qualified to interview her. Linda wrote back, “Your letter touched my heart deeply. For so many years, finally, there’s someone who told me that she’s willing to listen to me, to share and understand my life experiences. It made me teary.” I felt the weight.

I began to interview Linda by phone a couple of days after Christmas, with the third and last interview done on New Year’s Day. The three interviews are in Mandarin and lasted nine hours altogether. In addition, she sent me written materials, including letters between her daughter and her, her letter to one of her old friends with whom she had lost contact for 30 years, her letter to her second ex-husband, and her 59-page e-book about her experience as a cancer survivor. I experienced Linda as an open, outspoken, strong, rebellious, and fearless woman, and strikingly, a risk taker and a planner of life, knowing clearly the direction in which she wants her life to be.

Life in China

Linda brought me to a distant and heavy past. Born in 1954, five years after the communist takeover in 1949, in Kunming, a city in Yunnan province in southern China, Linda is the third out of five children in her family. Being poor—like most Chinese families then—and having little education, both her parents had to do physical labor work to raise the family. Her father was from northwestern China, formerly a deserter of the nationalist party who then became a peasant, settling in Kunming, growing corn, peas and potatoes; her mother, formerly a concubine, then married to her father, worked in a local tobacco factory—which is now a powerful tobacco company in China—carrying heavy bags of tobacco, each probably with 50–60 kilograms’ weight.

Asked to talk about her childhood, Linda recalled memories of playing by herself, going swimming in the river, and digging wild vegetables in the field. However, it was a childhood with limited warmth from her mother, who beat her often without reason, despite the fact that she was a good student at school. (Similar to what Chan (2004) pointed out, as in some other Asian countries, corporal punishment is common in China when parents discipline their children, which is different from beating a child for no reason; corporal punishment, however, is regarded as unacceptable as delineated by American law.) Several decades later, Linda was recounting her vivid childhood memories in tears—a memory of her mother beating her back with a bamboo strip, with her clothes lifted up; a memory when, at times, her mother would not let her in at night; and once, when Lisa was a teenager, her mother even tore apart her clothes and pushed her outside of the house. "It is as if those things happened yesterday," Linda said. Being rebellious, she resisted, even fought back, and wanted to run away. Furthermore, her mother's preference for boys over girls affected Linda's relationships with her siblings, leaving her estranged from them, which has remained so until today.

Asked how her childhood experiences of having been beaten had influenced her, Linda told me that she had carried the hatred of her mother for several decades.

> Only when I got older, did I forgive her. I don't want to live with hatred, which otherwise would merely punish myself. My mom gave me life anyway. It was not easy for her to raise five children. She had to go to work, carrying heavy bags of tobacco. Probably because her work was hard, she had a bad temper and thus beat me to vent the pressure she felt from life.

Like most people from her cohort, Linda's education was disrupted by the Cultural Revolution. Linda was about to start her middle school; however, almost all schools throughout China were closed due to the Cultural Revolution. In 1968, at 14, Linda became a worker in the local tobacco factory where her mother had worked, while her two older siblings went to the

countryside. According to Linda, this was when she began to gain independence and separate from her family. She lived in the dorm within the factory when she did not want to go home. A couple of years later, she became a teacher, first in the elementary school affiliated with the factory, and then four years later in a middle school. Linda shared one experience when she got punished by her work unit. “While working in xx middle school, someone reported [to the school] that I spread western bourgeois thoughts, so they had a talk to me, and suspended my class for two months.”

Through her self-study, Linda, at age 26, was able to go to college in another city in southwestern China in 1979, the third cohort since the National College Entrance Examination was resumed in 1977, one year after the Cultural Revolution ended. To study and live in another city distanced Linda further from her family. Asked about her college life, Linda commented that it opened her eyes, recalling one of her teachers who was westernized and who challenged traditions, which greatly influenced her. She began to learn about the West, and, since then, had longed for western culture and lifestyle.

1979 is the year when the relationship between Mainland China and America was officially “normalized” out of the need for combating the Soviet Union together. The Sino-US relationship had been frozen for three decades because of the Cold War, the Korean War and Vietnam War, and America’s support to the nationalist party, the enemy of the Chinese Communist Party during the civil war (1945–1949).

Since the students were older, they were allowed to get married while still in college. Linda had her first marriage in 1980 with a party member, and then had her daughter the following year. Soon the marriage deteriorated, but due to their disagreement about the guardianship of their daughter, divorce had been delayed.

While in the marriage, Linda graduated from the college in the early 1980s. It was a few years after China had just begun its capitalist-style economy in the late 1970s and had gradually opened to the world. The society started regaining its vitality. Culturally, the wind from the West, especially from America, began to increasingly blow to China. Linda got a job in a vocational school upon her graduation. Soon, like some other adventurers, she decided to keep her position but to leave for the big cities in the very south coast, which then were the first few forefront cities leading other areas of China economically and which are still prosperous today. During the couple of years starting from the mid 1980s, Linda, in her early 30s, found herself moving from place to place in Shenzhen, Hainan, and Shanghai.

In response to my curiosity about her jobs, Linda shared that she worked as secretary or public relationships coordinator in foreign companies or joint ventures formed by both foreign and Chinese companies, both rare in China at that time. She made trips to many different places, including some remote areas, to handle economic contracts. She also worked in a local government, which led her to certain connections. Asked about the turning points in her life, she recalled,

> My life had always been turning; each bouncing was a turning. … Back then I felt that each spatial and temporal change brought me upwards, as if I am climbing the stairs. Unlike some people's lives that moved downwards, mine has always been like climbing upwards. This is what it is good about. … I had used to feel inferior, like the grass without root, but my experience during that time made me become self-confident and gain a sense of accomplishment. In the 1980s, I was able to buy a color TV and refrigerator already. [Many, if not most, Chinese families were still living a life of want.] Unlike some others in my generation who were *jingdizhiwa*—[a Chinese idiom depicting people with narrow views, like frogs sitting at the bottom of a well]—my whole person was opened up by that experience.

Linda was 34 when her first marriage ended in 1988—its eighth year. Divorce then was a rare and more difficult thing to acquire than today; women usually faced huge social sanction. During the interview, Linda was reluctant to talk in detail about her first marriage as it was still

too painful to her, and it had been "sealed" by her current husband. In addition, she was worried that I might judge her, so I did not persist. She used "monster" to describe her first husband and even expressed dislike for his genes in her daughter. A small story emerged, which, again, partly explains why Linda became critical about the party and the system.

> Once he wrote an anonymous letter saying I'm a dangerous person, because sometimes when my students came to my house, he overheard that I was talking to them about how good foreign systems are and how authoritarian the Chinese system is, so the police came over and warned me many times. I hated it very much. I hated the system. The way he, a party member, treated me, made me feel the party isn't good.

Two years after her divorce, Linda was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and was informed by her doctor that she had only two to three months to live. It was the most difficult time in her life, she said, "being sick, divorced, having no money, but having to raise a young child of age nine without family support." (According to Linda, she received no monetary child support from her ex-husband who was supposed to cover ¥10—roughly $1.5—alimony per month.) She had surgery and received three sessions of chemotherapy, which lasted almost a year. In a small book she wrote in 2010 when she had survived the cancer for 20 years, Linda shared her experience with combating cancer and, hoping to help others in similar situations, offered advice. Her experience with cancer, as many understand, was an ordeal both physical and psychological. In addition to enduring the side effects of the chemotherapy (losing weight and hair), worrying about her daughter, and being afraid that the cancer might return, part of her experience, I learned, was that she had to face the stigma of being a cancer patient from her neighbors, and even from her family. Linda shared in tears a story about how she was treated by her family during that time. Soon after the surgery, she made a trip by train with her daughter to visit—and bid farewell to—her parents; however, they were not welcomed by her parents and

siblings, even though it was the time when the Chinese New Year was approaching, as her family thought she brought them "bad luck."

I was moved by how strong Linda was. The process was a battle for life. In her book, Linda wrote,

> The process of recovering is not a passive process that only involves taking medicine, injections, and simply just existing. Instead, it is a process to reorganize your life, to choose a healthier lifestyle and diet, and to reshape your outlook and values. It is a process to lift up the quality of your life and also one for you to enjoy! When you roll up your sleeves and stomp on the ground roaring, 'Come, cancer, let me battle with you! Let's see who the winner is,' the opportunity to live arrives!

Linda also wrote beautifully of her understanding of life:

> The meaning, value and beauty of life does not lie in its length but in its width. One's lifetime is like a river, beginning as a small stream of water underneath the snow and ice-covered mountains. It travels through forest, meadows, and canyons, creating strong swirls and currents while encountering numerous resistances and difficulties. Finally, it gives up its life and disappears peacefully and quietly into the ocean.

Worried about her young daughter, Linda wanted to find someone to marry again to help raise her daughter in case she would die soon. Two years later, she moved back to the city where she grew up and had her second marriage with a man she had known from previous work. According to her description, her second husband was a loving person who provided her and her daughter a home. He was a businessman, thus her life was financially good. Gradually she recovered, able to exercise, no longer having to work.

> My parents, especially my mom, were not happy with my first and second marriages, and she spread the word among my siblings that I was a *lanren*—[an expression usually used to describe a morally stained woman]. They didn't see me as a good person. My siblings called me a *lanren* when we quarreled. Back then if you were divorced, society would discriminate against you.

In the city where she rebuilt her life, Linda made a couple of French friends.

> We went biking, swimming, climbing mountains, and had dinner together. I began to become westernized. From them, I learned how to have a western-style dinner. They made me feel that it would suit me more if I lived in the West. Because in the work units they always thought I'm not right, and I couldn't join the Youth League[3]. Plus the French guys are good-looking and are nice to women. One of my girl friends got married to a French guy. While visiting us, she would brainwash us by saying how good it is to live in a foreign country and to marry a foreigner.

Since her daughter was in high school, Linda said, she had wanted to send her daughter to America to study and let her marry an American: "I had thought America was like a paradise with freedom and democracy."

Coming to America

In 2003, Nina, Linda's daughter, came to America with a full scholarship for a Master's program, followed by a PhD. The next year, Linda set her feet on America with a tourist visa that allowed her to stay three months; she determined to find a way to stay. With her daughter's help, Linda met an American man from an online dating website, who proposed to her when they first met and who then, soon after, became her husband. Confused about how and why her second marriage ended, I asked Linda and learned that she did not get divorced until she went back to China to get her puppy after she had come to America. It was during her brief visit in China that she got divorced. It struck me a bit inapprehensible when she said that she wanted to divorce simply because she wanted to stay in America, that her then husband agreed, and that the process of divorce sounded so easy that it only took five minutes. She then prepared all the documents that might be needed for her future marriage in another country, such as getting proof that she was single and having all the documents translated into English and notarized. Her plan was that

[3] It has been a unanimous practice for decades that Chinese students and young adults age between 14–28 join the Youth League, run by the Communist Party, and that those under 14 become Young Pioneers.

if she could find someone to marry, that would be good; if not, she would request an extension of her stay. She concluded this story by telling me that she is a planner, as always.

Linda then came back to America with a renewed tourist visa that granted her another six months' stay. It was after this that her fate was changed by what would be her third marriage. To Linda, moving to America to begin a new life at age 50, not knowing the language, "with big and small baggage," "having no hesitation," is the bravest move she has made and, also, her "greatest opposition to the Chinese society." Curious about how she navigated changes in a new society, I was told that it was easy for her as she had Steven on whom she could count for almost everything. Given Linda's poor eyesight, she is not qualified to get a driving license, so Steven drives her.

It seems that Linda has not had many bad experiences in America. She did, however, recall one fraud she experienced in the second year of her arrival, a fraud by a fellow young Chinese woman:

> She's younger than me, married to an American husband with her son. I got to know her from my English class. One day she called me and persuaded me to go to New York to learn nail beautifying as a skill in case our American husbands are not trustworthy. I thought it would be good to have a job, so I took $5,000 Steven gave me, including some for tuition fees. I went to New York where we agreed to meet. When I went over to pay the tuition fee, $2,800, I noticed she's familiar with them, but I didn't see her pay the tuition fee. It wasn't like a school but just a house. We only learned three days. Then we were told that we should go find a job in a nail salon so as to practice more. We were in Chinatown. I couldn't find any job. But my money was soon to be used up.
>
> One day I saw a job advertisement of a position of cook in a kindergarten, so I got in. It's a kindergarten run by Taiwanese, and the job had nothing to do with nails. It's very far from where I stayed. Since I was not clear about the subway, I walked to work every day. It's more than one hour's walk. I worked there until I earned back the money I had spent and then went home.

Linda shared a long story about how her life's situation with Steven had changed and her role played in the change. (The story emerged when I asked her to compare her life with her daughter's. She used it to illustrate the striking difference of choices between her daughter and

her in terms of gender roles, especially her belief in the importance of men getting a job rather than women.)

> When we got married in North Carolina, Steven was unemployed, because he was laid-off by a tech company. He was working part-time at One Dollar, 7–8 hours per day; the money he earned was just enough to pay the rent. Then he had a job at Sony, but one year later he was unemployed again. I didn't know this before, as I had thought America was like a paradise. So I was [wondering], [H]ow come my husband was unemployed, then found a job but became unemployed again?
>
> While Steven was unemployed, I did dishwashing at a black restaurant during the day, then after 5 p.m. when my work in the restaurant was done, he would pick me up, drive me to a school to pick up two children for a family, and, once we got back to their house, I supervised them while they were doing homework. I also needed to prepare dinner. On weekends, I did house cleaning for other families. Sometimes Steven and I did it together when he had no other work to do.
>
> Once a Chinese family asked us to do house cleaning. (We advertised.) [The couple's] older parents were visiting from China. It's a big house. When the parents learned that we would earn $70 for two hours' work, they used us as if we were cows or horses. They asked us to do many things that we usually didn't need to do, such as repairing this or that, moving the couch, cleaning the window, etc. We worked a few hours until the couple came back home and, surprised to see we were still there, let us go.
>
> I also made sushi in a Japanese restaurant. Every day my schedule was full. I woke up early and came home when it was dark—doing house cleaning on weekends, babysitting in the afternoons, and washing dishes during the day. "It can't go on like this." My hands were so tired after washing lots of dishes that I wasn't even able to make fists. [The situation] must change. So I asked Steven, "You have submitted lots of resumes. What jobs have you applied for? … Computer software technician? Why don't you try to find a job in federal government? It would be secure." Steven thought it was impossible, too difficult; plus, it would take a long time for them to check your background. [But I thought] "What are you afraid of?" He's a veteran, thus would be considered with a priority. So I pestered and nagged him every day. He finally decided to try. I told him how to make his resume, such as describing himself with limited words on the first page. He submitted 40 resumes on average per day, to everywhere all over the world, as long as there was a U.S.-based government agency. When he got replies, I then helped him with exams. I noticed he was nervous and was provisional. So I removed all the photos from a whole side of the wall, so the wall was empty. We then printed out in large letters the interview questions that they might ask, classified them, and hung them up accordingly on the wall. I even put a stool by the wall. When he had phone interviews, he would just stand by the wall while answering questions.
>
> Gradually, things changed. In 2007, he had a phone interview. He was well prepared. Having learned that they were interested in dogs, I had suggested he send them some pictures of the dog I brought from China, a dog that is rare here. During the 40-minute-long interview, they almost talked the dog for 20 minutes. After Steven got this job [for the federal government], we moved to Virginia. After three years' holding up, our whole life changed. It changed him, and me as well.

As many other new Chinese immigrants, Linda had experience with Christianity. As she said, “Churches grab new faces very tightly;” they are so nice and willing to help that sometimes newcomers find it difficult to say no when invited to attend church activities. Linda’s journey is one from becoming converted to questioning and then to not believing again.

> A Taiwanese technician recruited me first when I was a janitorial at a tech company. I went to his house for the gatherings with other Chinese. … His wife was such a good person, a Taiwanese, too, and a Christian, that I decided to believe it. After a while, I was baptized. During the first two-and-a-half years in North Carolina, I was very sincere: I went to church twice a week, did volunteering, and even did door-to-door missionary work.

A turning point happened after Linda moved to Virginia in 2007. During a regular activity, it was Linda’s turn to say prayers. Not good at it, she spoke a lot about her dead puppy. What irritated Linda was that one of the sisters commented that Linda had spent so much time and energy on her puppy, so God was not happy with her and therefore let her puppy die. Linda refuted that if she had to choose between her puppy and God, she would choose her puppy. Offended, her sisters prayed to forgive Linda. Since then, Linda has distanced herself from her belief and sisters, and has chosen to read the Bible and pray at home. After she learned more about science, she did not believe in God anymore. She also mentioned that Steven grew up in a Catholic family and went to Catholic schools, but he is not a believer anymore, either.

Linda’s understanding of belief is:

> Humans need beliefs, but it doesn’t have to be religious beliefs. To believe in kindness, courage, perseverance, trust, sincerity, and compassion is a belief, too, I think. To believe them, to see them as your goal, then to approach them with your best efforts, this way, you are a person with a belief. It’s not a matter of the cross.

In 2012, eight years after she moved to America, Linda’s parents passed away on the same day due to a gas accident at home. Linda, however, did not learn the news until three months later from a friend. Her siblings had dealt with the parents’ inheritance without involving

her, nor did they put on their parents' tombstone hers, Steven's and her daughter's names. When she went back to China and had a chance to ask her younger brother why her name was not on their parents' tombstone, Linda was told, "[It's because] you didn't take care of the parents." She responded, "But I was living in America." [Not having a child's name on the parents' tombstone is unusual for Chinese families; it seems to convey a strong unspoken message that the child, being unfilial, is abandoned by the family.]

> It has been 16 years since Linda married Steven in America.
>
> At the beginning of the marriage, we quarreled a lot. Sometimes I forgot he's American and thought he's Chinese … I learned that, unlike what I did with Chinese men, crying or running away wouldn't work. Many things cannot be dealt with in the same way as that in China.

Linda told me she trusts Steven very much. She compared him with her two ex-husbands: Both her ex-husbands had affairs, but Steven is "trustworthy, responsible and filial," so she does not worry that he would find someone else. Another small example of his love and loyalty is about dealing with documents.

> Because I don't know the language, when I need to deal with the bank account, apply for this or that, or pay taxes, Steven would print out the documents, hand them over to me with one hand while holding a pen with another hand to let me sign. Since I have total trust in him, I would sign even without looking at the documents. This wouldn't be possible if in China.
>
> A question my friends in China like to ask is how I feel after having lived in America for many years.
>
> 'I changed.'
>
> 'Why?'
>
> 'Steven is like the laundry powder or soap and I was like a piece of dirty clothes; he cleansed me.'
>
> In China, people like to play tricks; since you need to protect yourself, you weigh the pros and cons and then choose the best spot to enter. As a woman, I used to feel I was in competition with men. I had to hold them down, (not to make them be afraid of me), so at least they would not mess with me easily or have affairs outside. The whole society was rotten. … Using my current American standard to assess myself, I know I wasn't a good woman while in China, because I often played tricks, told lies, cheated others. My only purpose was to protect myself so that others wouldn't hurt me. But after moving to America, [I found] Steven is so transparent from inside out, so sincere, so honest, so

> guileless, caring, kind, selfless. How would I want to hurt him? Having lived with him for 16 years, how would I not change? If Steven had not been able to change me or if I had not wanted to change, we would have parted. So I got better. I threw away all of my 'martial arts' [the tricks]; I just live my life easily, happily, simply, like an innocent child, and don't need to play any guile. Sometimes when I went back to China for a visit, I found myself falling into others' tricks.

Linda knows basic English for daily life. She had English classes for a while, but then tired of it, so, instead, she began to teach Steven Chinese. Loving learning languages, Steven is now fluent at Chinese, Linda said. Almost 80% of the time, their interaction is in Chinese. For complicated things they rely on the translation of the computer.

Asked about the challenge(s) she faced, Linda said:

> My English is not good. I feel dumb. I can't talk to people. Sometimes I'm discriminated. When I go see a doctor, I have to take Steven with me, as I can't take the questions. Sometimes the way the nurses or the doctors looked at me made me feel they were discriminating against me. I'm sensitive. Maybe they thought how come I can't speak the language, which is the very basic, or why does this guy have this Chinese woman. I might have thought too much.

Despite her limited English, Linda is not intimidated. She shared a couple of positive experiences she had, experiences that made her feel proud of herself. One story relates her interaction with a white couple in her neighborhood on an environment issue.

> They used to dump trash by a tree in the nearby woods. I wasn't happy with it because of the pollution, so I put on gloves, moved the trash, and put up a sign ['No Trash'] by the tree. But they took down the sign and kept putting trash over there again. I asked Steven to look up the law of the county and we found it's illegal. Then I asked Steven to call the police. But he refused. So I dialed the number, and when the person on the other side said, 'Hello, hello.' I handed the telephone to Steven, so he had to take the telephone and talked to the police. When the police came, Steven didn't want to go out to talk, so I just pushed him out. Later, the police told neighbors that what they did was illegal and asked them to remove the trash. A few days later, the county put up a sign there that says, 'No trash here' and that fines would be issued. This is one thing I did successfully on environment protection. It's very nice that my neighbors didn't hold this against me. In the spring they sent me flowers, and even invited me to go swimming in their pool. What I learned is do what you think is right, and don't be afraid. Steven is too shy to do so.

Linda loves animals. She and Steven have picked up dozens of various dead animals—such as foxes, possums, raccoons, and squirrels run over by cars, animals they encountered while driving—and placed them in the forest or meadows.

> At the beginning Steven was against it, because sometimes it was risky to pull up the car. He didn't understand why I insisted on doing it. So I told him that it's not that we are helping animals, but the animals are helping us; they help us become kinder and more compassionate humans. Now whenever he sees dead animals, he would stop the car without me urging him. It made me very happy, because many people here are so used to seeing dead animals that they don't do anything, but I changed Steven.

A big fan of outdoor activities, Linda loves hiking and swimming. She also likes to travel alone. Linda shared a long story about how she challenged herself to climb an active volcano on a foggy day in Ecuador. I was impressed that she was such a risk-taker. Linda tries to keep up with the world through the internet, and the topics of her interest seem all-encompassing to me.

Currently a green card holder, Linda expressed critical views about the American society in her emails and during the interviews. She criticized America's hegemony in the world and its internal operation that serves interest groups but not the majority.

> Before I actually did not really know America; now I do. Its democracy and freedom are fake. … If I had known what today's America is like back then, I would not have wanted to come over. … Without Steven, I would have left.

Differentiating America's government from its people, Linda spoke about the kindness of the latter, which moved her. When she was hospitalized after her bone was broken during a hurricane in 2012, she recalled, people would ask her if she needed any help when she was outside, or if she needed water since it was hot in summer; drivers, unlike those in China, would stop their cars almost ten meters away from the lines to let her cross the street. Also, in general, Linda believes that Americans are guileless compared to her fellow Chinese.

My question about what she misses that she does not have here elicited Linda's sense of identity.

> Here there are this or that nice things and people are nice, but it's not my country. I still miss the mountains and waters from my childhood. It's not a comparison at the physical level. This is the 17th year I've been here. I have a home with Steven. But it feels like deep in my heart I'm still a Chinese, (to say I'm Chinese is not equivalent to politics,) and my hometown is in China. It's sad that I cannot integrate into the American society … Hometown means you know where your roots are.

As Linda continued, however, she told me how she became alienated from her friends in China and thus gave up the plan of moving to and living in China after Steven retires, a plan they had had several years ago. She took Steven to China in 2009 and Steven liked China; they felt, too, it was politically a bit too leftist in America, so they thought that perhaps they would move to China after Steven retired. But then Linda's thoughts changed, not wanting to move back anymore.

> I went back again three or four times during the past few years. [Linda has a pension and social insurance to receive in China—roughly $466 per month—and thus needs to travel back for related matters every couple of years.] China had changed a lot. People are busy, but they don't know why they are busy. I don't understand it. When I was with friends, I felt more and more distant from them. They took me for Karaoke or dancing, but nobody wanted to talk that much. They were focusing on phones and showing me this or that from their phones. I wasn't interested. Especially during the recent years when China is getting rich, they wanted to know how big my house is, how much money I have. … Sometimes I wanted to take a bus for reminiscence, but they got me a taxi and offered to pay it. I felt very embarrassed; they treated me as a poor person, as if my life is not as good as theirs.

When her friends asked her to comment on China, Linda found that often her critical points about her Chinese fellows would offend her friends, so she talked less. "They like to hear me criticize America, but I don't want to. If I do, I would do it in front of Steven." Linda mentioned that many people in her generation in China still hold deeply the entrenched ideological views, believing in Chairman Mao and the Communist Party, and that they enjoy a material life, and like to show off.

Regarding where to live after Steven retires, Linda had a few talks with Nina a few years ago, expressing her hope that Nina would want Steven and her to live close by so that Nina could

take care of them when they need. Nina's response, however, greatly disappointed and saddened Linda. According to Linda, it seemed that her daughter wanted Linda to choose wherever they wanted to live without the intention of taking care of them. The new plan Linda and Steven have for the future is to move to a small town in Tennessee, where there is a lake, forest, river, biking path, library, and mountain. With financial freedom, they also plan to travel around the world, to rent a car in Europe, and then take a cruise circling the earth, spending all their money before they die. Linda even made an agreement with Steven: "If he was gone first, I would follow him, and wouldn't leave any 'work' to my daughter. I'm not even using term like 'duty' or 'responsibility' but 'work.' … Dust to dust; ashes to ashes."

Linda's relationship with Nina, apparently severely estranged, is probably the one thing that agonizes her most. Nina lives with her young daughter and her husband—a European immigrant—in another state and teaches in a university there. Linda talked often about Nina with strong emotions and negative comments. According to Linda, the tension started when Nina became "left, progressive, and against the tradition" while she was pursuing a PhD. Linda recounted a conflict when Nina was about to look for jobs upon graduation. Holding strong convictions about traditional sex roles, referring to American tradition, Linda suggested that Nina should let her then boyfriend get a job first rather than she look for jobs for herself. It turned out that Nina got a good job first, whereas her boyfriend remained unemployed for a while and, at times, did odd jobs. Linda believed with certainty that Nina made wrong choices. Linda was also worried, seeing that Nina was "the boss" within her nuclear family and that her husband listened to her. She said emphatically that women should demonstrate softness instead of strength, which does not mean being weak, and that otherwise it would undermine men's self-esteem.

To Linda, another layer of the tension lies in Nina's unexpected attitudes towards her. Linda felt strongly that "[C]hildren should at least respect their parents. But Nina is different; she wants to be equal to me … She looks down upon me."

Part of their relationship seems also to have something related to Nina's childhood. According to Linda, Nina "hated" her because of what Nina remembers—being punished by Linda when she was young, and Nina won support from her husband. Linda, however, believed that Nina mistook some of Linda's childhood experience as her own. Linda seemed to be aware that corporal punishment is viewed differently here, and that, due to the language barrier, she could not communicate to Nina's husband on this matter. "Our relationship might have been different if she had married to Chinese." Linda was imagining a different scenario.

Linda felt hurt that she and Steven were not even invited to attend Nina's graduation and wedding ceremonies, usually regarded as two milestones in one's life.

> Before, I had felt that she's my whole life, I was even willing to die for her, but now I feel I can still live without her. I'm a strong person, I've been to many places, and can deal with everything, but I feel *shushouwuce* or powerless when I face her.

I asked Linda if there had been any time when she enjoyed her relationship with Nina. She mentioned the time Nina accompanied her when she had cancer and the time right after she came to America. "The times when we shared sweetness and bitterness are still in me; I'm worried that if someday they were gone, she and I would be finished."

Asked about 10 people who are closest to her, Linda only listed three—Steven, her dog, and her deceased parents: "My home is my world." Linda expressed a wish that her daughter were on her list. "To look back (you may find this contradictory), my biggest regret is having sent her to America. I would rather she's a bus conductor or sanitation worker in China, as long

as she's nice to me." If so, how could it have been possible that Linda had met Steven and had a new life in America? Linda's vulnerability and powerlessness saddened me.

(I could not help linking Linda's story to mine. I felt I saw myself in her when she was sharing her life in China as a rebellious daughter and woman. I then sensed my father in Linda and myself in her daughter; the tension between my father and me has also involved our differences in age and gender roles, which greatly resembles what Linda experienced. I shared with her my experiences as a daughter and a mom, in hopes that it could be helpful to her: As a daughter, especially after I have studied and lived in America for almost 10 years, I have had a strong sense of alienation about the relationship with my family in China; meanwhile, as a mom raising a daughter in a society that is not where I grew up, I realized the need for my change in parenting towards a more democratic style, which includes many seemingly small strategies. Realizing that it is almost impossible to change my old parents, I have wondered if I, or someone else, could transition smoothly between what can be simplified as "cultures," between the role as a respectful Chinese daughter and the role as an independent individual, especially when the two roles are very different.)

Linda's Reflection

> I'm good at grabbing opportunities. From the late 1960s to the 1980s, I became a teenager and then a young adult, which are the formative years for one's personality development. I knew what was popular and I would go look for it. [For instance], during the Cultural Revolution, workers, peasants and soldiers were *chixiang* or popular, especially soldiers. Each work unit had representatives of soldiers. Since they had the most power, people would *bajie* or fawn over them. (The Chinese society is a society that people fawn over [those who have power].) So I made friends with soldiers. Then intellectuals became *chixiang* when the Reform-and-Open began after Deng came back to power [after Mao's death in 1976], so I went for them. In later period of the Reform-and-Open, after Deng's Southern Tour [to Shenzhen in 1992], technicians became *chixiang*, so I went for them and for businessmen. My whole life was dynamic, like a grasshopper on a hot pan, constantly jumping around so as to find a comfortable spot.

As for what hindered her becoming the person she wanted to be, Linda said without hesitation,

> The whole [Chinese] society hinders one's growth. It represses you, so you don't dare to speak the truth. You can't shape yourself as you want. It's always the collectivism—you, me, and everyone should be the same, otherwise they would rule out or distance you.

Wondering about where her political sensitivities about the system and the party come from, I asked Linda. She said,

> When I was little, there were many campaigns. I saw the wealthy were tied up with thick ropes, hung up and beaten. Not to mention the Cultural Revolution. Once I saw an iron board hanging from the neck of the 'rightist' or the 'capitalist roader;' the board was heavy, having two holes [on each side] and a thin iron wire through the holes, and the neck was bleeding. The Communist Party could beat you at will … I saw many things during the Cultural Revolution—people were persecuted, detained in bullpens, and beaten. The living environment was frightening.
>
> After I worked, I was always being *zheng* or attacked. I was seen as *linglei* or 'alien,' not a member of the Youth League or the Party. No matter which unit I worked in, I was not pleasing to others' eyes. I wasn't the kind of person who was cautious, prudent, observant, compliant, succumbing to the system. I didn't know how to flatter or please officials. I liked to do things alone. I would hate my colleagues who joined the Communist Party; even those who had a good relationship with me, I would alienate them.
>
> In 1990s after I married to my second husband, once he was detained for reasons related to his business, so I went to the detention center to see him. To my surprise, his nice-looking black hair was gone and he's bald. He told me that all the people who came in should have the same hair style. I felt it's very cruel: How could they have the right to push down your head and cut your hair? Although it's a trivial matter, it led me to see the horror under the communist regime, its disrespect for people, and its arbitrary trampling on you. It could arbitrarily put a 'cap' on you, such as 'bourgeois thought,' 'liberalism,' or 'messing up with the relationship between men and women,' etc. … All these made me feel that it's not a good country, because I lived without dignity—they could send me to the office at their will, questioning what I did yesterday, what I did today, etc. There's no dignity.

In response to what or whom she feared or felt anxious about while in China, Linda laughed and said:

> Too many. The Communist Party [used] people to watch each other, report on each other; maybe the police would knock on your door. … Since I grew up, I had always felt that the shadow of the Communist Party and the high pressure on people had been lingering. I'm not stupid. If you know it [the system], you would be afraid.

As for how important education is for her, Linda mentioned two levels of education: "One is from the external—others, books, and forebears; the other lies in oneself—one's reflection, change, and transcendence. One must have a goal, then consciously push oneself to approach and attain your ideal." She also commented that the education in China is a failure, as its training of the students are closed, driven by tests.

Linda is pretty sure that she has a control of choices in her life. "I'm fearless. I feel I'm capable to do anything. I'm not afraid of obstacles or challenges. I feel quite confident and am even proud of myself." She describes herself as a person "competent, ambitious, having a clear goal and a plan to reach and realize my goal."

In response to my curiosity about her understanding of age and how she deals with aging, Linda shared her philosophy:

> Everyone will get old and die, but the terms 'middle-age' and 'old-age' are imposed by society. Whether you feel old or not is up to you. However your heart feels, however old you feel. When I am swimming, I feel like I'm only 17 or 18. As long as you can control your life, be healthy, keep learning, maintain your curiosity like a child, keep up with the world, you will never be old. Don't be afraid. As your age increases, your eyes may not be able to see clearly, your knees may hurt, and, physically, your body is definitely getting old, day after day, year after year. It's natural, and no one can change it. But the purpose of life lies in how you really live your life.

From her vantage point as a 66-year-old woman, Linda described what life is like:

> Without considering politics, life is like a painting, tranquil and warm; in the forest, wild flowers and trees are swaying, animals are jumping around. Every day is a new day, and I ask myself what I can give to my beloved. Another picture is a picture of politics that would probably ruin our moods, so we'd better not add more to it, but focus on the first painting. I'm in between, as politics are relevant to our daily life—taxes, pollution, etc.
>
> If I only had two weeks left before I die and I had to deliver a speech to the world, I would be saying '[L]life is great. I love you.' Don't be afraid of the sufferings: With them, you can make a wonderful life; without them, your life is like a piece of blank paper, and is shallow.

Asked to think of the chapters of life, Linda summarized slowly: “an unforgettable childhood,” “an ignorant and regrettable youth,” “a difficult but transcending time,” and “a success of 16 years in America.”

> All in all, it’s like having struggled with swimming in the wind and waves and having gone through the test of the hardships, I finally crawled ashore and walked into a garden of happiness. Because I had suffered a lot, had lots of regrets, I cherish all I have today, cherish what Steven offers me every day, the change he brought to my fate. I thank him very much. Without him, I wouldn’t know what I’d be doing … I’m just a normal person, trying to pursue what I believe is beautiful. Step by step, it’s been 66 years. Finally, I came to America and have Steven, like a gift from heaven. I told myself to be thankful … I felt lucky. All my sufferings, except my strained relationship with Nina, have been written off by him.

Story 2: Feng[4]

Having lived almost half her life in Mainland China and half in America, Feng, at age 66, lives with her partner in west Massachusetts, working full time remotely at home during the pandemic when the interviews were conducted. According to Feng, the neighborhood where she has settled for three decades is culturally diverse and is the home of a few colleges.

Life in China

As the first-born out of four in far northeast China, Feng’s birthday fell on the day which, using the then common Chinese reference, was “one day before Chairman Mao’s birthday”—and which is also Christmas, if using a more well-known reference under today’s globalization. Coming from a mixed-ethnic family, her father being Han, the dominant and mainstream ethnicity, and her mother, half Han and half Manchu, an ethnic minority, Feng says that her maternal grandmother was a Manchu and she did not feel any negative impact of this ethnic

[4] Feng is the pseudonym of the interviewee’s first name. In our first communication a few months before the interview, I asked about her preference on how I should address her. “Once in Rome, do as the Romans do,” she wrote back. Following that, I called her first name throughout the interviews and our email exchanges.

background as a child. She was told Manchuria liked to be clean, they sent their children to school, and as dominant class in Qing dynasty, most of the Manchuria were well off. Feng's grandmother fit those descriptions and she always dressed neatly and knew how to read. Feng's mother also attained a high school diploma, which was rare in her generation. Meanwhile, Feng's father had to drop out of middle school to support his family after her grandfather passed away. Both her parents worked in a state-run factory.

Feng admired her father all her life:

> Since I can remember, my dad always had a book in hand. After five years of night school, he got a bachelor's degree through self-study and adult education and was promoted from an electrician to a technician, and then an electrical engineer. For my father, it seemed there's no such thing as entertainment in life; it was just study hard and work hard. Thus, he taught me regardless you are a boy or a girl, you have to study hard and work hard to achieve what you want to achieve. My father has influenced me a lot, and I tried to excel at school and at workplace. Whatever I have achieved, either as a person or as a woman, couldn't be separated from the influence of my family.

To this day, Feng says that she cherishes time in the way her father taught her: "Use your brain when your body feels tired; use your physical strength when your brain feels tired." In Feng's memory, her father also shared much of the housework and child rearing. He even braided her hair when she was little.

Feng emphasizes that she did not experience gender inequality when she grew up. At home her parents did not treat her siblings differently. All her siblings went to college. At school, she did not notice any gender discrimination. "Women Support Half of the Sky" was one of the dominant doctrines. Feng has always believed she is as capable as boys and she can do anything the other half can do. Decades later, Feng, in retrospection, points out that her own understanding of gender inequality in China, such as One-Child policy or "the abandoned girls," seems still more at the intellectual level, rather than personal level. She realized those problems only when she turned her academic focus on studying sociology of family in the U.S.

As for her schooling during the Cultural Revolution, Feng recalls:

> School was suspended in 1967 for a while, and then resumed again; what we did every day in middle school was to study and recite quotations from Mao or to attend rallies denunciating 'capitalist roaders.' Later, we were given some school subjects: English, math, physics and chemistry, but all accompanied by revolutionary contents and social events.
>
> In March 1969, there was the Zhenbao Island incident[5] [a Sino-Soviet border conflict], so we were taught Russian. Till today I can still recite the Russian I learned then, which often makes my Russian friends laugh, such as '[S]urrender!' '[L]ay down your gun and you'll be spared!' or a long one, '[O]ur party is a great party, a glorious party, and a correct party.' We knew nothing, however, about everyday life expressions [in Russian]. Later on, we switched to English when China wanted more presentation on the international stage. Of course, what we learned was closely imbedded in politics and '[L]ong live Chairman Mao!' was the first English phrase we learned.

Feng regards herself quite fortunate among her generation. To my surprise, she was able to go to college in 1972 at age 17. I learned from her that this change in her life had something to do with the status of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the United Nations (U.N.). Feng was told that as the PRC got admitted into the U.N. in October of 1971, the Chinese government felt the urgent need of translators and interpreters. As a special case, she and a group of youths were selected to attend college to learn foreign language without re-education, while the on-going policy for college admission then was selecting students only from workers, farmers and soldiers—*gong nong bing xue yuan*[6]. Comparatively, she and her peers were three or four years younger, on average than other students.

---

[5] To learn more about the Zhenbao Island incident, see Radchenko, S. (2019, March 4). The island that changed history. *The New York Times.* https://cn.nytimes.com/opinion/20190304/soviet-russia-china-war/dual/

[6] While the National College Entrance Examination was cancelled, colleges since 1970 could accept students selected from among workers, peasants, and soldiers (including high school graduates who had gone to the countryside for two or more years) on the basis of their class origin and political behavior in the Cultural Revolution (Anonymous, n.d.). During 1970–1976, it is reported, there were 940,000 college students of that kind (Anonymous, n.d.). A product of a given history and circumstances, the group was regarded as *tianzhijiaozi* or "the proud son of the heaven" (Anonymous, n.d.).

After graduation, Feng was assigned to work in a central government agency in Beijing, translating works by Marx and Engels, a job considered as intellectual work. At that time, according to Feng, the social status of intellectuals was still relatively low, often called *chou lao jiu*[7]—a derogatory label literally meaning "stinking ninth." (This discrimination did not last long, because, as it turned out, the Cultural Revolution would soon end.) Knowing that Feng had not gone to countryside like other urban youths and had no re-education experience, the agency immediately sent her and her young co-workers in the same situation to *Wu Qi Gan Xiao*[8] or the May Seventh Cadre School in Jiangxi province, where all their intellectual employees had been sent.

Feng and her peers stayed at *Wu Qi Gan Xiao* for almost two years during 1976–1977, doing pure physical work, growing rice and raising pigs. The various manual works, such as shoveling dirt, cleaning the pig tiles, or planting rice seedlings in freezing water were supposed to teach them the hard life of the working classes, so that they could serve them well as intellectuals. Meanwhile, they also had to learn how to become revolutionary combatants. One tactic, Feng says, was to draw a clear line with *niu gui she shen* or cow demons and snake spirited villains—a term used to demonize perceived enemies during the Cultural Revolution.

---

[7] In 1958, Mao labeled intellectuals "bourgeoisie" (H. Gao, 2006). There were nine categories of class enemies during the Cultural Revolution: landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, rightists, traitors, spies, capitalist roaders, and intellectuals—the ninth and worst category (Ding, 2004).

[8] *Wu Qi Gan Xiao* were farms set up throughout China during the Cultural Revolution, where cadres and intellectuals were "re-educated" in proper socialist thought, combining hard agricultural work with the study of Mao Zedong's writings. To learn more about *Wu Qi Gan Xiao*, see Dikötter, F. (2016a). *The Cultural Revolution: A people's history, 1962–1976* (Bloomsbury Press), pp. 202–205; Ma, W. (2016). *Wu qi gan xiao li de renqing lengnuan* [The human feelings in Wu Qi Gan Xiao]. *The New York Times.* https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20161228/may-7-cadre-schools/; and Seven May Cadre Schools (1968). (n.d.). Chineseseposter.net. https://chineseposters.net/themes/seven-may-cadre-schools

"That experience is unforgettable." Feng recounts an internal conflict with which she struggled, "a conflict between humanity and party character."

> We were taught since very young to fight against feudalism, capitalism and revisionism and to build a society for the proletarians. My upbringing was also filled with living examples of caring and kind people both at home and in the society. There in *Wu Qi Gan Xiao*, when I worked side by side with 'class enemies' who were there to get their punishment, I experienced, for the first time, the conflictions of these two [teachings]. I remember a so-called 'capitalist roader,' who was in his sixties then, on the same shift with me raising pigs. On the one hand, I felt as a youngster I should take up the heavier manual task, but I also knew this enemy should be punished, and our team leader never failed to remind me that I should draw a clear line from this 'class enemy.' No matter what, I always felt sympathy for this old man doing hard manual work and could not help but jump ahead to do more work while feeling guilty about myself not being able to stand firm on the class ground. I promised to act differently every time my superior scolded me for my gentle manner or nice tone when interacting with the 'class enemy.'

A small example Feng shares occurred when she spared the old man from jumping into the pigpen to sweep it and he told her to go to eat first, the team leader warned, "[D]on't corrode the revolutionary teenager!" This, Feng said, "was hard to process and had relatively large impact on me at the time."

Feng also mentions that while doing the manual labor, she and several other women wanted to show that they could do what men could do, such as slaughtering pigs, though they were not physically as strong as men.

Following Mao's death, the Cultural Revolution ended, and *Wu Qi Gan Xiao* was closed. Feng and her peers returned to Beijing, and many of the "class enemies" were rehabilitated. The old man with whom Feng had worked with resumed his high-ranking position at the central government and, at a later occasion, praised Feng for her humane treatments in *Wu Qi Gan Xiao*.

One of the impacts of the Cultural Revolution, explains Feng, was the "lingering fears" of political movement: "Many people wanted to shun away from politics." There was an opportunity for Feng, which would probably lead her to a promising career in the government,

but Feng took her father's advice, turned down this opportunity. She focused on working hard to become an excellent translator.

Feng shares her thoughts about her own dating and marriage:

> In my twenties, for a progressive youth, revolution and career always came first. Personal issues were trivial matters. When I was reminded to consider marriage by elders, I often felt annoyed and always excused myself by telling people that I need more time to establish my career.

Regarding herself as "romantic," Feng told me that she was resentful of the idea of match making or being introduced to a man. Feng heard people calling her "a Marxist girl," but she knew, at heart, she was longing for a romance in real life, like the story of Zhuo Ya and Shua La (a Russian novel translated and introduced into China in the 1950s). She eventually married the father of her daughter, whom she met by the lakeside in Beijing while joining an amateur morning swimming team.

At age 29, Feng went back to graduate school as a married and pregnant woman. Though academic curiosity and professional advancement were still very important in her life, "[T]he birth of my daughter," she emphasizes, "definitely brought a big change in me—the awakening of the motherhood in me. Before my daughter was born, I would have to force a smile when I saw a small child. But after it, I could barely tear my eyes away from any baby or toddler." Feng started to believe nothing is more important than the happiness of her daughter; creating a better life for her daughter is her utmost important goal. She wants her daughter to live a happy and healthy life, able to enjoy all the beauty and intellectual freedom.

Feng recalls the time when she returned to school after becoming a mother:

> I tried to show my love for life as a mother and a woman graduate student, dressed neat and fashionable. It's the Reform-and-Open. People were more open in terms of the clothes they wore. I remember wearing my jean pants and woolen suit and showed up in the classroom when most of my fellow students were still in blue and grey. People told me that I took the lead in fashion … I realized then doing a good job in my career should not prevent me from pursuing romance and beauty. The Reform-and-Open opened me up in this aspect, the *natural* aspect. Unlike feeling guilty when working with the old 'revolutionary revisionist' at the cadre school, after the Reform-and-Open, I felt the parts in me that are beauty-loving, kind-hearted to all people were relieved. Instead of always repressing my natural feelings, I began to enjoy what life presents me, especially the love for my daughter.

Feng shares a couple of small stories to shed light on the time in the 1980s. One day, she had dinner with her American friends, taking her two-year-old daughter with her. The next day she was called in and warned to give notice to the work unit in advance. Another time after she had invited foreign friends to her home for the Spring Festival (that is, the Lunar New Year), she was told not to do it again.

Feng worked for another three years in the same translation agency after graduation and then got the opportunity to go to America as a visiting scholar in 1989. It was a time when "the relation between the work unit and the individual was still very tight; unlike today, one couldn't quit one's job first, and then go abroad." Also, at the time, "ordinary people didn't have passports." The process of getting a passport and visa was complicated by the specificity of the year of 1989:

> In April, while I was getting my passport, the students in Beijing started to protest, and Hu Yaobang, [a popular reformist leader,] died. The process of obtaining a passport dragged on for a long time. When I finally got the passport, there happened the 'June 4th'[9]. The U.S. consulate was closed. I worried about whether I would to be able to go to

[9] Also called Tiananmen event or Tiananmen massacre, led by university students, the June 4th is regarded by some as a pro-democracy movement but was cracked down by the government. See Kristof, N. (1989, June 4). Crackdown in Beijing: Troops crack and crush Beijing protest; thousands fight back, scores are killed. *The New York Times*.

> America … Anyway, when people started to work on resuming their normal life and the American Embassy finally opened, I immediately went there to apply for my visa. My colleagues suggested that I leave as soon as I get the visa, because there would come an investigation team to check everyone's performance during the 'June 4th' riot. Not knowing what the situation would be like in the future, I left for America six weeks before the fall semester began.

Life in America

Feng recalls the difficulties of her transition from China to America:

> At that time my spirit was very high. I didn't feel a *big shock* when I first came. Of course, there were lots and lots of difficulties. Originally, I had a colleague who would board the same flight with me to JFK—I'd board from Beijing and he from Shanghai, we would stay in a place in New York City where his wife was working. But somehow, he wasn't on the plane. So I arrived in New York alone, at midnight. It's scary. *It was not today, the international travel.*

She continues,

> In the end, I thought about a solution: I asked someone to bring me to the Chinese consulate, hoping they would host me for one night. But when we got there, the embassy staff told me the police outside forbid them hosting guests (After June 4th, the U.S. made things difficult for the Chinese consulate and didn't allow it to take in people.) But they took sympathy on me being a young woman alone, calling a nearby hotel to take me in. I dragged my luggage and walked to 42nd Street.
>
> The next morning, when I tried to find my way to Port Authority to purchase bus tickets to my school, all I had was excitement among those skyscrapers. Later when I thought about those experiences, I felt quite scared. I arrived at the school and got to the International Office, but there was no one to receive me. The staff there were all on vacation for a few weeks. The fall semester was supposed to begin after Labor Day in September, and I came in July.

The second day of Feng's arrival is memorable to her and turned out to be a day that had "a big influence" on her. Feng remembers encountering an American woman of the same age at a pond, who took her two daughters swimming there, and who later became her good friend. Her friend's older daughter was the same age as hers, which made her miss her own terribly.

> Until today, my friend still remembers my question to her, 'Do you think you have enough love for more than one child?' after I told her that I felt I had given all my love to

---

https://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/04/world/crackdown-beijing-troops-attack-crush-beijing-protest-thousands-fight-back.html

> my daughter and that it was impossible for anyone else to share the love. 'Yes, they are equally deep, but different.' was her answer. These words about love for one's children being 'equally deep but different' struck me. Ever since I heard that, I had wanted to have another child and to discover that love in me.

That conversation seemed to, Feng says, "emanate more of my feminine aspects. Later, I became a mother again and I chose a research topic on adoptive families. All these were derived from this." Feng continues to reflect, "Indeed, a mother's love is *abundant*. Even if you have ten children, you love them all equally. Too bad, I didn't have such an opportunity to have that many and my personal condition didn't allow me to do so."

While a visiting scholar, Feng took different classes, which led her to depart from her original focus on social movements and turn to a new interest in sociology—family. Finding herself wanting to study further, she began to apply for a PhD program at the same university. Meanwhile, she managed to bring her then husband and her five-year-old daughter to America, within half a year of her own arrival.

Part of her student experience was participating in the research of adopted (Chinese) children. In addition, the adopting families—mostly White American families—would ask her for help. She remained friends with many of them, participated in the activities at FCC (Families with Children from China), and celebrated the New Year with a few local adoptive families. Her own children grew up together with these adoptive girls. Her interaction with these American adoptive families, says Feng, was at the personal, intellectual and academic levels. Based on her research, she also co-authored a book on Americans adopting Chinese Children.

While a student, Feng had done various part-time jobs to help support the family. Ten years after becoming a student, she took a fulltime job in Boston. Since then she has worked as data analyst, researcher, teacher (for courses of sociology, Chinese language, and Chinese history), and international student and scholar advisor.

The reasons for her employment changes, Feng explains, have something to do with her "overall idea" about life. She found herself valuing family more and more. When changing jobs, she would consider whether it would allow her to take good care of her children and whether her children would get a good education. For instance, when she noticed that her daughters did not like Boston and learned her daughter was very much attached to the area in which they lived, she quit the job in Boston and moved back to the valley. Meanwhile, she was also very clear that having a full-time job so that she could have health insurance and afford to raise her children was a survival necessity. Feng explains that, although she enjoys teaching, it was impossible for her to find a benefitted full-time teaching position since she did not complete her dissertation.

Life is "always up and down." One thing Feng did not expect was the divorce. She was in her 50s when she divorced her husband. Even before the formal divorce, she says, she had often felt like a single mother in raising her children and was often asked if she were a single mom. Elaborating on the marital change, she gives me examples of the issues about which she and her ex-husband fought. He would not take time reading books for the children, hated to sit in the children's swimming game, refused to show affections to the children, as he believed those were things women should do, and defended himself that he did not grow up with those love expressions and that he seemed fine. When Feng suggested that they see a marriage therapist, her ex-husband felt insulted; he considered that kind of help seeking as "American junk." "He's not a bad guy but was reluctant to change. He believed he's inherently right. However, for me, not just myself, but many other women from Mainland China, we tend to accept and adapt to the host country's culture faster."

The divorce was not just an "epiphany," Feng says, but "surely has something to do with what I studied." With an intensive interest in acculturation, Feng shares her understanding of the gender difference in acculturation.

> Immigrant women tend to learn the host country's language faster because they often interact more with the society. In their immigrant lives, they are the ones who often cope with many issues: besides food and roof, they help their children with school and social life—arranging birthday parties, sleepovers, taking the children to sports, music and other cultural activities. If a mother's *acculturational level* is higher than that of the father's, it may *lead a couple to go apart. If one side refuses to change, the gap would be bigger, and may eventually result in a divorce*. I actually *ended up here*.

Feng talks about her understanding of marriage among her generation:

> Back then [in China] there was no free space for young people to *date*; there was no such thing as a *dating concept*. If you wanted to play, you'd play with a group of people, men and women; if you go out with someone once, you would self-censor, making yourself feel there's something between yourself and that person, otherwise you'd be gossiped about as 'frivolous.' Even if you are politically unprogressive or professionally backward, it'd be better than being called "frivolous," so everyone was afraid of being labelled as having a so-called 'life-style issue,' although this is far from the life-style issue.

Bringing in a generational lens, Feng continues with why she studied family and marriage after coming to America:

> There're too many couples among our generation whose marriage is '*tong chuang yi meng*' [sharing the same bed but dreaming different dreams], disharmonious, or who are divorced. Our generation is different from our parents' generation. More of them believed in '[F]ollow the man you marry, be he a cock or dog,' and the concept of 'divorce' wasn't *popular.* But for our generation, when we got married, we were *nan nü shou shou bu qin* or traditionally confined. However, soon after our generation passed marriage age, China's reform trend [brought about] such huge change, and so many foreign thoughts flew in, [therefore] many people were not content with their marriage, which contributed to a high divorce rate. It started with our generation. Social changes happened to be between talking about marriage and having children, so it's natural for these people to have turmoil in their marriage. I think this is an interesting phenomenon.

Feng has felt a little more relaxed about taking care of her children after she put her younger daughter through college. But aging has become more of an issue for her.

> It's really not easy for an older woman to find a job. I used to say that I could get any job as long as I was given the opportunity to be interviewed. I could almost guarantee it. But I began to realize things are different for me now and *I am old*. (Laughs.)

Feng tells me that she began to feel the negative impact of aging when she was approaching her 60s and she received more rejections when she applied for jobs.

Two years ago, Feng became an administrator in a university, working as a department head's assistant head after being laid down off from a professional position. To her, this is "the biggest *transition*" she had in her life.

> I'd been working as a *professional* all my life; and now I could only get a *clerical job*. My daughter and friend asked me, 'Why do you take it?' My answer to them was: 'I am an immigrant, the time I live here is too short and my employment time is too short. I have to earn enough points for getting my *social security benefit*. I need work. *That's it*.' I have to say this transition is one of the most difficult adjustments in my life.

However, Feng continues, "I've lived through life and know *what I'm doing doesn't define who I am.* I can handle it." Feng told me she was clear that in her old age she would need health insurance and she does not "count on anyone else for help." "It's not about seeking for 'more,' it's about 'have or not have." Even when Feng's daughters offered to support her in her old age, she turned it down. "Both of my daughters are doing pretty well. But I've been independent all my life and I want to earn enough for my own retirement."

Speaking of her feelings about her work status as an immigrant in the American society, Feng explains,

> I understand if I had not immigrated to America, I would have been in a different situation. Do you know what my current job requires? It merely requires a *high school diploma, which I was qualified 40 years ago.* (Laughs.) As for the often-discussed social problems of American society, such as *racism*, *sexism, agism and etc*., *among all these discriminations and inequalities, I think, age discrimination is the least discussed and underrated*. As a PhD candidate in sociology, I've been paying attention to all these issues all along.

She fills me in with some details about the workload of her current job: “I work for one of the largest departments on campus with a lot more faculty searching, hiring and promotion work to do than many other departments. But there is no compensation for these more works.” Asked if it is a well-paid job according to her own standards, Feng explains that state employees could get pension from the state, and many of them go for the late life pension.

Reflections

Feng makes it clear that gender is often not her lens in understanding her experiences or other issues, nor does she relate her experiences to being a Chinese woman.

> As a woman, I personally don’t feel the *inferiority*, but I do feel so as an older person and as a foreigner. Some people say that there are not so many *discriminations* in America, but I think there are still *discriminations* and *biases* in this society, and in the *workplace*, at a deeper level … However, for me personally, the discriminations I’ve experienced were not a *gender* issue, but an immigrant or age issue.

Still optimistic, Feng believes that “the society is progressing.”

> *In general*, my life in America has given me a lot of thinking space, allowing me to think about social issues and to observe many different lives around me. I don’t feel my life is miserable or painful. Sometimes I’d ask, ‘Why does my boss treat me with no respect?’ Then I’d tell myself, ‘Well, we are all human beings and humans make mistakes. Once in this world, I must experience things that should be experienced.’

As for the question of different social and economic status between her present and past, Feng pauses a bit, then articulates,

> There is definitely a difference. With today’s *communication*, I’m *constantly reminded by my counterparts in China of these differences*. Even yesterday a friend of mine in China made a comment to me, ‘Even if you hadn’t accomplished a lot, you’d still have already been promoted to senior researcher level by staying in your position and enjoyed a fat pension by now.’ My Chinese counterparts are all enjoying their retirement life, holding their grandchildren, travelling domestic and abroad, indulging in their new hobbies. *Constantly being reminded* [by them], *I have to remind myself: What am I here for in this world?* I want to experience more in life.

Feng talks about her pride of parenting her daughters. “They grow up here and are more self-confident than I am. They don’t think girls are inferior to boys either.” To give me an

example, Feng tells a story about how her China-born daughter, after transferring from a public school to a private one in 10th grade, caught up on her Latin class. By the time of her graduation from the high school, she won the prize of *English writing composition*. "While educating them, I worked hard to make them feel that they are not inferior to boys and *as long as she works hard, she will achieve*."

As for any wisdom or insights for other young women, Feng talks about her students and her younger daughter:

> I have had many smart female students, besides my own daughters. I believe that the fact there're so many smart, intellectual and brave young women who dare to speak up for social justice is not only the result of personal efforts, but also has something to do with the social environment that allows them. I feel our society is making progress. Through the little and small progress made by each of us, even if it is just a *millimeter*, it will increase a lot if hundreds of millions of people are there and a *millimeter* per person.

Feng talks emphatically about the importance of having multiple roles for women.

> If a woman has a job, children and family, and many friends, she would be able to choose among these different roles. This is good for her *mental health*: when one aspect does not go well, she can think of another; but if a woman merely has one *role*, it would be *decisive* when it fails.

Highlighting the importance of friendship and a social circle for women, Feng explains:

> I often tell my daughters that family and friends are the important *supporting system* that maintains one's *mental health*. Especially for women, if we say they often stay *tough and perseverant,* that largely comes from having a good and solid friends circle. It can *provide you the kind of support* … You can't totally rely on *professional psychologists* to help you solve your problems.

To describe herself at my request, Feng rises from her chair to get a birthday card from the bookshelf behind her, a card from a friend whom Feng got to know while in China. Showing me the card, Feng reads, '*more than three decades' friendship … Words we would use to describe you: 'kind, generous, intelligent, open, and steady.*' She continues to explain,

> My daughter felt everyone in the world should be as willing to lend a helping hand as her mom. One of my friends, at my daughter's high school graduation party, said, '*I'm one of*

> *the hundreds of homeless people Feng takes to her house.'* Indeed, *whoever told me that* he/she has no place to live, I would remember the help I have got, whether it's here in America or there in China, and I would provide help.

In good health situation, Feng takes delight in biking and, to practice her balance, riding a scooter. "I know I'm already approaching the age of retirement, though I don't feel that old." Feng continues,

> I need to continue to work for two more years. After retirement, I hope to sort through my thoughts, especially how a young woman viewed marriage, family, and intimate relationships, especially during the Cultural Revolution. I want to sort them out, maybe write them down … I still feel there're many things to do in the future. Rather than feeling *it's the end of life*, *I look forward to the next phase of life.*

Story 3: Aunt Li

In February 2021, when the Lunar New Year was forthcoming, Aunt Li, at age 66, was working full-time at a local middle school in Arizona, a job she has had for several years, preparing food for students, though unusual since the past year—amid the pandemic. With the school remaining closed, she works from 6:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. every weekday, packing food for the whole week and, on each Wednesday, getting it outside the school, so that families can pick it up. Despite living and working in a state struck hard by Corona virus, Aunt Li says she is not scared, as she has not heard any news about death from her circle; in addition, she and her colleagues have been taking strict precautions. She also teaches a dance group once a week, as she has done during the past 16 years.

Settled in a predominantly white neighborhood, specifically for people 65 and older, Aunt Li has lived in a mobile home with her husband for 14 years. She spent two afternoons after coming back from work, sharing her life stories via phone. Her stories were punctuated with many laughs, sometimes hers, sometimes both of ours, as if the sunny weather in Arizona

penetrated our talks. Through her voice, story, and the way she speaks, she reveals a woman who is open-hearted, uninhibited, cheerful, and persistent.

The following will present her story in the way that Aunt Li divides her life into chapters—four stages according to the thread of her career changes.

A Dancer—The Start of Her Career

Aunt Li was born the second of four in 1954 in a town near Nanjing, a city well known for the massive slaughter of Chinese of 1937–1938 during the second Sino-Japanese War. Her father worked as a technical inspector in a factory that makes railway vehicles, a factory run by the Central Ministry of Railways. Her mother, like many other women from her generation, uneducated, stayed home, taking care of the children. In Aunt Li's recount, her father's image was a little frightening to her and her siblings, whereas her mother was "very kind, reasonable" and "easy-going," so the children liked to talk to her about everything.

Aunt Li's earliest memory goes back to the time of the Great Leap Forward in 1958 when "everyone smashed pots and irons, had no food to eat. There were a few grains of rice in a pot of water. That was the day." Remembering that her mother would go to the field to pick up soybeans, Aunt Li shares an anecdote of the family.

> Back then I was still little, and we were happy. My mom put the soybeans she picked up in the attic. They were all asleep. I then got up at midnight, climbed up to the attic to fetch the soybeans. It proved that I was a little hungry at that time. I was probably four. "Pa la." The soybeans fell down and woke up my family. They all remember this. Even until I grew up, they still laughed at me that I stole the soybeans to eat, and never forgot it.

In a time when "everybody was the same," Aunt Li remembers,

> At that time, my mom would make clothes for us; when we went out, we were clean. And I was one that loved being pretty. No family was rich, some might be poorer, but because my father was a technician, probably his wage was higher than workers', so I don't recall that life was extremely hard when I was little.

In 1965, when Aunt Li was 11, the family moved to Liuzhou in Guangxi province, far south China, because her father was among the group—half of the whole factory's staff—to help start another factory there in support of Guangxi, which was "liberated" by the communist party relatively later than other places.

Aunt Li recollects the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.

> While my parents went out for meetings at night, we would stay home. The factory was divided into two factions, wearing red armbands. We danced 'the loyalty dance' at home; before dinner, our parents and we children would line up and dance, facing Mao's picture.

Hearing me laughing, Aunt Li follows:

> You think that is funny? It wasn't funny at all back then. It was really not funny then. We thought it was what we were supposed to do, [to show] the loyalty. After the dance, we would call out a few quotations from Chairman Mao, such as '[B]e determined and not to be afraid of sacrifices.' When the fights were bad, schools were suspended. The two sides in the factory would make spears or shields. One night, after the two sides started fighting, one person was stabbed to death. I had those memories. But our parents never let us out, as it was risky: there were stray bullets from someone's cold shoots that might shoot you. So we all stayed home. It was quiet at night. There was no one outside.

In 1969/70, Aunt Li experienced what she would see as the first turning point in her life. A girl who had loved singing and dancing since a child and who had stood out, she was selected into a singing and dancing troupe of the province that was recruiting students nationally.

> This had a big impact on my life. [Originally] my parents (especially my father) didn't agree with me to do this job, because they (especially my father) were still [holding] old thoughts, believing that [people who do] singing, dancing and playing drama were xizi—a derogatory term for actors—in the old society, whose occupation was not that [good or respected] … But I liked it, plus only four people were recruited among many throughout Liuzhou, so my parents said, 'You have this talent, then go.'

So Aunt Li, in her early teens, left her middle school—where she was in her first year—and family, and went to Nanning, another city within the province. This was "the first step" in her life, says Aunt Li.

After three years' training in dance, Aunt Li, probably age 18, began to work for the troupe. Among the group of over 40 people, she was one of the top three.

A Cultural Worker

Six years later, unexpectedly, Aunt Li had an accident in which her waist was injured, so she had to leave the troupe and was designated to work in a theater company. While in charge of a department within the theater company, Aunt Li did cultural work, such as receptions of troupes, arranging performances or selling tickets. During her time in the theater company, she also spent three years studying and attaining a college degree.

Aunt Li shares her reflections on her work experience at the theater company when asked about obstacles in her life.

> When I was little, I had wanted to be a dancer. Because I had to quit in the middle, I got this job. But it's not what I really wanted. At that time, it was still that you did whatever the state designated you to do, as though your life planning was just that way; if you changed your career, then you were sent here to work. That's it. There were no choices back then.

The nature of the job in the theater company, as it turned out, affected Aunt Li's marriage in an unpredictable way. According to Aunt Li, for 10 years her relationship with her husband had been "pretty good." Since she often needed to work at night for the shows, she arranged one of her girlfriends to invite her husband to dance. Hoping her girlfriend's companionship could help her husband avoid solitude, Aunt Li had no idea that it would be destructive to her marriage. The new companionship, concealed from her at the beginning, evolved into an affair in the end, and, sadly, led to a divorce two years later, when Aunt Li was 36. It was also at a time when

Aunt Li and her husband had been planning to adopt a child within half a year, when she would finish college. According to Aunt Li, she, like some others in the art field, had not wanted a child, and her husband was fine with that decision. Then her parents-in-law wanted them to have a boy, especially after her husband's brother had a daughter. But somehow there was an issue with her body, so she and her husband had wanted to adopt a child.

Her sadness still active in her voice three decades later, Aunt Li recounts,

> Others said even if one hundred couples had divorced, they could not have imagined that this would happen to us. … After the divorce, I felt bitter. It surely would take time, right? I no longer associated with our old friends; I didn't want them to trigger the sadness. Not long after the divorce, I became the deputy general manager, busy every day, so, slowly, this matter passed. But in my heart, still, it affected me a lot. Whenever I talked about him, I couldn't help shedding tears … Pain is pain, but life has to go on.

A Leap from ¥81 to ¥2,500

The change in Aunt Li's career life was brought about by the Reform-and-Open, and it was significant. One may not be able to imagine that even today, Aunt Li, while in America, can still remember that ¥81—roughly $12—is how much she earned per month when she was working in the theater company, and that sometimes she and her former colleagues would need to discuss at a meeting if someone should get ¥5 more for his/her wage. There was a reason why Aunt Li's memory was so vivid, as she would disclose. Having worked in the state-run theater company for several years, an opportunity was presented to her to work in an entertainment center, where there are Karaoke, dance hall, bar and swimming pool, one of the largest and earliest entertainment centers in the city. She was recommended to be a manager and would be earning about ¥2,500 (per month). "It was an almost phenomenal number, so I told my work

unit, without any hesitation, that I would be leaving while keeping my old position." When asked about the choices she made, Aunt Li explains why she did not have any hesitation while making the decision. "Think about the contrast between 81 and 2,500. Also, I was very self-confident. I was a capable person. To take the position I'd be worthy of the salary. I wasn't timid, not timid at all."

To satisfy my curiosity about where her capabilities came from, Aunt Li tells me that she had always been a leader since she was young—either at school, in the dance troupe, or in the treater company—dealing with people.

> The self-confidence comes from the accumulation of life. Little by little, you feel that you understand the content and know the knowledge from the bottom of your heart, so when you do something, you are not worried at all, and you are not afraid.

Only a couple of months later, after she had taken the new position, Aunt Li was then promoted to be a deputy general manager, replacing the old one, earning ¥3,500. Having a good sense of people, a dance background and a college degree became Aunt Li's multiple advantages. Later on, she switched to catering when business in the entertainment center diminished. With the same position in both places, managing over 3,000 staff members, Aunt Li had worked for over 10 years until 2004, when she left for America.

These experiences brought Aunt Li "a great sense of accomplishment."

> Everyone would call you Chief Peng. Do you know that feeling? Every day I would be dealing with problems among guests *yourenyouyu* or competently. But this was just your occupation, right? If you didn't have the title, you would be nobody. That I had a sense of accomplishment was because I had the capabilities to do the job and I was proud of it. As for how many people I knew and what I would get from them, I didn't think about those.

Looking back on her life course, Aunt Li considers it another major changing point when she decided to leave the theater company, a moment when she had a "choice," different from

working in the singing and dancing troupe and then being designated by the state to work in the theater company.

> Single again, Aunt Li wanted a new potential relationship.
>
> Others say that after the divorce, they would not look for a new boyfriend. I don't think so. Why not? I thought. Life needs a companion; why would I want to be alone until death? So I had been seeking a *duixiang* or boyfriend actively. But it seemed that there wasn't one in China that would suit me.

In 2000, 10 years since Aunt Li's divorce and searching, life was different.

> One day, I ran into a friend who said, '[W]hy do you look down?' At that time I had just broken up with my boyfriend. She said, 'It's ok. It's ok. How about introducing you to a foreign boyfriend?' At that time, she was dating a foreigner. I said, 'I have never thought about this, but I would like to try, if possible.' You should try anything, otherwise you wouldn't grab the opportunity. So I said, 'Ok, if you have a chance, help me with it.' In China, Nanning is the city that has the largest number of women who go abroad; there are people who work from home as translators to help the international dating, so it is quite 'popular' there. Later, she introduced me to a translator who worked from home. How does it work? She [the translator] would find the male foreigners who had left short messages on the websites, select some, download and show their information to you, such as how old one person is. If you wanted to chat with him, the translator would help us with the translation, since we don't understand English. She would charge a few dollars for each letter. So I began to do it.

Aunt Li continues with the process.

> It wasn't easy at all … I chatted with one who left, then another one who also left. Later, I almost lost confidence. At that time, I had busy days at work, because I was the deputy general manager, so I would write the letter during my two-hour break in the afternoon and give it to the translator who, in turn, would translate the letter and then send it to 'him.' Next day I would have to get the letter and then write again. I persisted for seven or eight months; finally, it brought me my husband. (Laughs.) [Later in emails] we would say he loves me and I love him, all day.

While listening to Aunt Li's telling, I overheard her checking in with her husband in English, "*Laogong* [an informal Chinese term for 'husband'], are you hungry?"

In fact, there was a small, rather funny episode during the process. According to Aunt Li, after they had "chatted" for about 10 emails, the man who would become her husband said he was busy at work and his AC did not work, and then disappeared. Losing confidence, Aunt Li

asked the translator to take charge, writing for her. A couple of months later, unexpectedly, the man who had disappeared showed up again. It was only after they got married that Aunt Li found out the reason for his disappearance—he had gone to chat with a Vietnamese.

In 2001, Aunt Li's then boyfriend went to China to see her, which, Aunt Li says, was required by American law for an international marriage, if an American wants to bring his beloved woman to America. With a hired interpreter, they spent 20 days together, travelling through China.

> This is another turning point in life. (Laughs). My dad said, "xx, you just put $3,000 under the bottom of your feet; if it is not good after you get to America, come back right away." … My husband is a very honest person; after seeing each other, we felt pretty good.

Asked if she were pursuing anything in America, Aunt Li says,

> I didn't have any thoughts of pursuing anything. I hadn't wanted to come to America; it's because my husband is in America that I came. This is the reason. I didn't admire America. No, I never had this kind of thought. When my husband and I were together with the interpreter, he asked me why I wanted to go to America. I said, 'I don't need to go, but because I've found you, how come I don't go? Otherwise you come to China. I didn't (laughs) *chongyangmeiwai* or blindly worship anything foreign.'

Hearing her response about her intention, Aunt Li felt, made her husband feel assured.

Aunt Li remembers feeling excited and nervous about coming to America. The excitement, she explains, was because she was about to "take a different path" in another country. Meanwhile,

> I didn't long for America very much; after all, it is another country. I was a little nervous. Because, at age 50, you go to a strange place, unfamiliar with people and the place, not knowing English, it's quite unnerving. But, to me, 'you have lived in China for half of your life, why don't you go abroad to accept new things, to see the outside world?' I thought so. I didn't feel scared, but was very excited, and nervous.

Life in America

After waiting for more than a year for her fiancé to go through certain procedures, in 2004, at age 50, Aunt Li set her feet on America. Within the first three months of her arrival, they were married, following American law. To Aunt Li, this is the bravest thing she has done in her lifetime.

In a new society, while Aunt Li was adjusting to her marriage, she learned how to drive, and, like many other new immigrants, started learning English right after her arrival and, shortly, searching for jobs.

Aunt Li was intensely aware of the challenge posed by the language barrier, the first and foremost challenge she would face.

> When I arrived in America at 50, I merely knew ABC. I had learned a little bit of English in China, but was unable to communicate. As I had been a busy person while in China, I wanted to look for jobs after I came here. Because of the language barrier, especially at the beginning, it was impossible to find a good job.

For the sake of their communication, her husband bought a translating device. Aunt Li took English classes for a few months, then stopped after she began to work in a restaurant, her first job in America, introduced by a friend. She describes her feelings at the time.

> I felt ok to work in a restaurant. But there's a feeling of *luocha* or dejection, and it didn't lessen for several years. While in China, I was upper-middle [class], earning more than others—when others were earning ¥81, I was already earning ¥2,500. My life in China was exceptional. I had a house. Of course, the houses in the 1980s and 1990s were all the same, not like today's villas. The thing to be most proud of was my work performance; others had called me boss for over 10 years. But here nobody knew me, and I didn't have a job. Working in a restaurant is a job that can be done by everyone, right? So there was a sense of dejection in my heart anyway. But I think you need to adjust to a new environment. My husband used to work for the government, and his salary was not bad. But you know, after Americans get retired, their salary [pension] isn't very high. My husband was retired a couple of years later after I came. To me, it's not just for money. As a woman, I still wanted to go out to work, because it's not the case of being a housewife. So I strived to go out to work while learning English.

Having no time to take English classes at school any longer, Aunt Li, with the help of her husband, studied English at home.

> Sometimes my husband read for me or taught me. Even to this day we are like this: Every night there'll be one hour for learning English; if there's a word I don't understand, he'll stop and we'll look it up in the dictionary or on the phone. We do this every day. My English still is not very good, but I've been working hard to do this. Now there's basically no problem in communicating with him.

Having worked at the restaurant for eight months as a transition, Aunt Li (suggested by her husband, who, having two master's degrees, thought the restaurant work would not be a long-term solution) went on to apply for a part-time job at Macy's—the shopping mall. Aunt Li still remembers the interviewing process.

> At the time I'd only been here for 10 months. My English was not good. He encouraged me to go. There were 20 Americans sitting at an oval table, and we needed to answer questions. I guessed what the person had asked. I didn't understand and just answered in a couple of sentences. In the end they recruited me. It shows you have to go forward bravely for any issues.

Aunt Li continues to share her experiences with interviewing for various job positions.

> My husband was very funny. At that time, I just came and didn't know what kind of work I was going to do, so I went wherever needed. Once a funeral home needed to find someone [as a grief counselor], so my husband said that the funeral home needs someone to comfort people, there're some Chinese families, and he asked me to go. I thought to myself, [Y]ou asked me to go for this kind of work? I didn't want to go, but he got angry, so I went to try the interview. Back then, I interviewed many different jobs, not just one job. I would be nodding there when I didn't understand what others had said, which was particularly ridiculous. I didn't think it mattered, whether I got the job or not. I also went to an interview for housekeeping. I worked at Macy's part-time for three years—they didn't give me a full-time position—only four hours per day. I then found a job at a cultural center, at the front desk, [doing] reception and consultation. After a while, I got a job in a kindergarten. Because it was full time, I thought it was better, and quit the job at Macy's. Given a full-time has benefits, it's better.

The limitation of her English seemed like a lasting challenge to Aunt Li. She speaks of her nervousness at work.

> The job I had at Macy's, indeed, not being familiar with the language is a challenge. When your supervisor is talking to you, or colleague are talking together, you have to guess what they are saying. Sometimes when answering questions, I didn't really understand what they had said, so I would be guessing. Sometimes my answer was correct, which probably was the case. This was very challenging for me, especially when a client came. She would suddenly ask you what kind of clothes are where, but I couldn't

> understand the brands she would name. I would feel very nervous. The main issue is the language barrier. Unfamiliar with the language, you would be really nervous if you go to work among them. It was the same later in the kindergarten. All the names of the kids were hanging there but sometimes I couldn't call or recognize a name. Oh, I would also feel a little nervous.

The language barrier, Aunt Li says briefly, also limited her interaction with her colleagues at the kindergarten. "My English wasn't very good, so some people didn't chat with me that much, the staff. It didn't matter anyway, as long as I could watch the children."

After working for a few years as a teaching assistant in the kindergarten, Aunt Li had a car accident which did not cause a serious consequence except for some problems with the car and a minor injury. Promised by her workplace to keep her position for three months, Aunt Li decided to leave. She then travelled with her husband for half a year, one month and a half respectively in China, America, and Europe. After she came back, she continued to look for jobs, then found one in a preschool where the children were relatively bigger than those in the kindergarten. She worked there for about half a year until her sisters came to America; she left the job to take her sisters to travel around the State by car. Back from her travel, which was seven or eight years ago, Aunt Li landed her current job in a middle school, becoming the only Chinese, surrounded by female Latinos which constitute about 80% of the whole staff.

Regarding her treatment at the workplaces as a Chinese immigrant woman, Aunt Li feels good overall.

> I gave them the feeling that I work hard … In general, everyone is very nice and kind, and they quite like my personality. I don't feel very concerned about racial discrimination. Sometimes the dealing with small issues … I don't feel discriminated. Occasionally, I felt that my supervisor was unfair. I would say, 'It is because I am a Chinese that you guys treat me like this.' They wouldn't admit it, 'No, it's all the same.' ... They are all kind to me.

Aunt Li's life found a way to return to where her dream had begun, at least to some extent. During the first or second year after her arrival, a local Chinese dance group approached

her, asking her to take the teaching position since the former teacher had moved to another state.

It is a group of 20 from all walks of life, with the average age 50, ranging from 30s to 60s.

> I haven't danced for 30 years, so this is a challenge for me. The people together are those who either have a doctor's or master's degree or are leaders in big companies. With these elites, would I be able to teach them well? You need to consider your teaching methods, and what kind of attractions your chosen dance has to them. This is the time to test you … The challenge is since I haven't engaged in it for 30 years, I will need to make lots of efforts to do it well, if I want to take the job.

To meet the new challenge, Aunt Li explains,

> I chose a dance, practiced it at home and memorized every movement. Each [folk] dance—such as Xinjiang dance or Tibetan dance—has its own characteristics. This kind of teaching. In China I had done speech. For example, if I wanted to train my employees, my eloquence, where would I start? This is a life experience. Not just in this aspect. It is summarized from the things you have slowly accumulated in your entire life. Together, you will be at ease when you do work. That's it. So, it turns out that I had experience in training restaurant staff, and I often gave speeches. So I chose a dance, practiced it at home from the basic movements, where it came from, what characteristics it has, all the details. I then first give them basic skills training, then teach them the dance. For so many years, I have been teaching them.

Aunt Li continues, giving testimony to her importance and status at the teaching position.

> Some people also introduced a person who is a graduate of the Chinese Dance Academy, a PhD student here, wanting her to replace me in the future. But most people disagreed, '[L]et's just follow xx [Aunt Guo's first name] and it's OK. We don't require the level of the Central Sing and Dance Ensemble. Her level is enough to teach us.' So I've been leading this troupe for 17 years. Anyway, I'm still working hard in this place and teaching them two dances a year, each being different. [I teach them] all kinds of [Chinese folk] dances, Dai dance, Xinjiang dance, etc., all the works of the first and second prize winners among the competitions in China.

Aunt Li tells of the foundation that the training she got as a teen had laid for her.

> I haven't been engaged in the dance career for so many years, but the basic skills are still there. I'm now in my 60s. If you ask me to have a split. Do you know what a split is? Well, they have been dancing with me for more than 10 years, and no one is like me in basic skills, because mine is Tong Zi Gong [skills learned from childhood]. I can kick to the top, but they can't, no matter how hard they try.

Asked about what she learned from overcoming the challenge, Aunt Li responds,

> Why can I stay with this group for so long and people recognize me very much? It's because first, you must be upright and treat people honestly. For example … in terms of role assignment, of being fair or unfair, selfish or unselfish, no one has ever criticized me in this regard. They all know that I am a very fair person. Second, I am a very generous person. Sometimes when someone said something unpleasant, I would resolve this reasonably. Moreover, my professionalism is unquestionable, so they haven't replaced me.
>
> In fact, there has always been a challenge: As for each new dance, it's not that I teach what I can dance, but that I teach whatever they choose.

Aunt Li continues to share how she works with the group.

> Originally, I chose, but later, because *zhongkounantiao* [it's difficult to cater for all tastes], I said, "I'll also give you some power. You choose. This or that types of dances. But not those we have learned." I'd give them certain ranges. After they chose, we'd further screen until there were two or three left, and then I'd make the final decision. There're a couple of people among the group who are good at dance and who feel quite proud. I use them as protagonists, but I've always been their teacher.

In addition to teaching dance, Aunt Li joined the Guzheng team as well as the Cheongsam team. She has been learning Guzheng [a traditional Chinese musical instrument] for five years, has often performed, and will perform for the coming Spring Festival. "This local town is not a big place; people developed these cultural activities to benefit the community. It's mostly among the Chinese circle, but we also perform for the whole community every year."

Overall, it seems Aunt Li has a secure life in America. She makes a positive self-assessment about her adaptation to the new society, using a comparative lens and others' comments to her.

> Some people become housewives after coming to America, unable to enter society. I learned to drive, have studied English, go out to work, get in touch with society, so I don't feel bad. Others remarked so too, saying '[Y]ou were 50 when you came to America, and now you are doing great.'

In response to whether she feels confined, with respect to her leadership skills, Aunt Li says eloquently,

> Yes. First of all, language is my biggest barrier. Once a shopping mall was hiring a manager. Since I was a deputy general manager before, my husband helped me fill out the form, and I went to the interview. That time was during one of the first few years. How can you speak the language since I only started to learn ABCD in my 50s, right? So when they tested me and asked me how to increase sales etc., I probably knew what they asked, but didn't say much. That kind of position is impossible. So I thought, In another country, I will do a basic one [job], because 50 years old is almost the age of retirement in China, though I feel a sense of dejection. It is not as high-spirited as in China, having this kind of life every day: While eating, the waiter would immediately bring me the dishes and would take them away after the meal; everywhere I was called Chief Peng. It's all this feeling. Here no one knows you. You still have to do the most basic work. You are even embarrassed to say that you do this [kind of] work, right? But you have to settle down, because you are now in America and your language is not good. This is the biggest obstacle. You can't find a good job. Then go with the flow. I can only be like that. In other words, uh, just let the years pass by willingly, (laughs,) right? It's better than being a housewife at home. You even don't have anyone to be a housewife. (Laughs.) My husband doesn't need me to serve him at home all day. So, during the first few years I was quite dejected. Every day I wondered [H]ow can I do this job? But [this is] the life I chose—I married my husband. If you were in China, 55 or 60 years old, you'd be retired. After you retire, you'd still be single, unfit for a guy at a higher post but unwilling to take a lower one. For people like me who have seen the world and met many bosses, it is impossible to find a guy who has great power, neither can I go for one of those who has basic living conditions, who has not gone to college, or who's a factory worker, [as] you can't talk to them. Because I've been in the literary and art world since I was a child, people I saw are all uh, uh, all kinds of those 'somebody.' So I don't think it would be easy for me to find a man in China. I feel it's good to go broad, and I don't regret it. I have chosen my second marriage and I don't regret it. I feel that life is not as bad as I imagined. Now my husband and I, except for the fact that he didn't choose the house very well at the beginning, (and I was unable to speak the language at the time,) I respect him. Since he is older, I don't want to irritate him either. Originally, we wanted to move out this year, to buy a good house. Then my husband changed his mind. He said that he is 80 years old, he wanted to leave the money to me, (laughs,) so we don't bother anymore with that idea of buying a house. I think it's okay. I don't have to worry about food or clothes in my life; I am happy; I can go anytime if I want to travel; I don't have to worry about money. I think this kind of life is already good, right? [I] Need to be satisfied. And there are no worries. Except that I have no children, I think the others are all going well. I have fun here. I have some friends. I am also teaching a dance troupe. These people have been together for more than 10 years. We often play the instruments or go fishing as we like.

It sounds to me that Aunt Li has made a reconciliation between herself and the reality, between her present life and the imagined life in China, at least to a certain extent.

As life proceeded, Aunt Li's sense of dejection faded away.

> The sense of dejection had been there for the first few years when I first came. Then it's gone. Here you are living another life, different from that in China, so it's okay. Plus no one knows what you are doing here. (Laughs.)

Occasionally when she was asked by friends in China what she is doing here, she would simply say that she works at a school.

As for the marriage, a tension seemed to grow due to what Aunt Li frames as "cultural differences," especially at the beginning. The instances of the frictions she had with her husband range from buying gifts to having dinner and going to a party. From those instances, we can sense the intentional adjustments and changes she made, revealing how she made reconciliations with herself and with her husband.

> Americans like to buy small things for you. As for me, I am very straightforward. If I want something, I want the best. I don't like small things. He'd buy this and that for me, and the quality of those things is not very high. It'd hurt him very much. What the Chinese want to buy is the best; Americans can be dismissed and accept a small gift. I can't accept it. Once he bought me a watch online. I didn't want it. It made him very angry.
>
> We would go to restaurants for dinner, one to two times a week. He would go to Mexican restaurants. At first, I couldn't accept the kind of food in Mexican restaurants. Nor could I accept the American restaurants. Because I had worked in Chinese restaurants for so many years and had had lots of delicious food, my taste was still Chinese food. So the two of us would quarrel. Sometimes when he just sat down to order, I'd leave. You know, my personality was like that. He would say I am a 'boss, boss.' I was very strong. I couldn't change my personality. Sometimes he got very mad.
>
> We had a few small frictions before the green card arrived, and I wanted to leave. My personality was like this: I had always been proud and unforgiving. So I thought to myself, 'If he wants to divorce, I'll get divorced and leave.' Later, I thought, 'Well, I haven't got a green card yet. Why are you going back to China? Everyone knows that you went abroad and would think [N]ow you are back?' (Laughs) This had always brought me down. Every time when we quarreled, I'd think to myself, What else could I do since I haven't got my green card?
>
> Later, after I had got my green card, I thought to myself, Why are you so stubborn? I have to change my personality a little bit. As long as my husband is happy, we can enjoy the process when we go out. As for what to order and what to eat, if you don't like to eat something, just take a bite, then bring it back. As long as he is happy, right? We two don't have to quarrel about this kind of thing. You know, I didn't think that way when I first came here. Later, because my husband treated me very nicely, I thought to myself, As for marriage, sometimes you get divorced when you get angry. In fact, this is not necessary. Two people in a marriage need to understand each other, so

> that you can maintain it. Then, slowly, my temper changed a lot. My husband said, 'Oh, you changed so much. Your temper is not the same as before.'
>
> We'd have a party after the dance performance, a year-end party every year, and we would bring our husbands to the party. In the first year or two, my husband would go for the sake of face. Later, he felt that the Chinese were all talking Chinese and he was uncomfortable, so he didn't want to go. I had used to be very angry, thinking [H]ow come you are like that? It's so rude. But then I didn't think so. I'd be thinking, He would have nobody to chat with, and would feel uncomfortable and alone. I then understood him and said, 'If you don't want to go or you feel uncomfortable, just stay at home and I'll just go by myself.' I didn't think this way in the first few years until later. Now he can do whatever makes him comfortable. We've been together for 16 years, even though sometimes we still quarrel over small things. His temper is a bit quick, and sometimes I'm terrible. [Before] when we clashed hard, sometimes we wouldn't talk for 15 days. But then I thought, Why was it necessary? Life is very short. My husband is not young. Don't be like that. So sometimes I'd compromise. When we get mad, I'd talk to him again, no longer than a day. Marriage needs mutual understanding and consideration. Otherwise, what else could you do?

Aunt Li speaks a couple of times of the lesson she learned from her first marriage—to soften herself.

> Before I was too strong: my [ex-] husband, a high-ranking cadre's child, listened to me on everything; otherwise, it would not be ok. It's this kind of the personality I had. Therefore, in my current marriage, I accommodate my husband in many things, because, I think, to maintain marriage it requires more than the two are in love. The marriage is going to end if people, even who are in love, cannot understand, communicate with, and forgive each other.

Another change in Aunt Li brought about by the divorce is her attitude towards a man's appearance.

> My first husband is very handsome. After the divorce, I vowed never to find such a handsome husband again. I swear that I want an ugly husband too, as long as he has a good heart and treats me well.

Aunt Li shares more about her marriage.

> Now that I have a companion, I feel life is more wonderful. There's someone to accompany you, and to share your daily joys and sorrows. You also have someone to play with. My husband took me to see everywhere in America. We also went to over ten countries in Europe. We like to travel very much. My husband treats me wholeheartedly. … When he's 76, he was still able to drive eight or nine hours a day. We drove from the east to the west, from the west to the east. We went wherever we thought

> of and enjoyed the scenery wherever we stayed. We have travelled by car across America three or four times, one month and a half each time. We take cruise once or twice a year.

As for how she and her husband complement each other, Aunt Li explains,

> He handles the bills and makes doctor appointments; I do the housework, as he's old and I want to accommodate him. I listen to him on big matters such as travel. He likes to travel, so he makes plans. I am like a child at home, making him happy. This is my most important job. I tell him jokes or things about my workplace, bringing him daily happiness. He's at home, retired at age 66 and is now 80 years old. I surprise him every day when I come back. Sometimes he doesn't speak much, as he's shy in terms of personality; I am more outgoing and active. He tells me every day, 'I love you more and more.' There are no major events, and there is no problem in life.

Talking about people closest to her, Aunt Li mentions her deceased parents and siblings and a couple of friends in China, as well as a couple here. Asked about her husband, she adds, "[M]y husband is my dearest. There's no question. He's both my husband and friend. We can talk about anything. He should be on the top of the list."

Recognizing her social circle is predominantly Chinese and she does not have close American friends, Aunt Li says, "After all, the communication is not very easy. Also, Americans tend to be enthusiastic about you on the surface, but they don't have deep friendships with you, unlike Chinese."

To my question about her knowledge about how the Chinese immigrants and Chinese immigrant women are perceived by other racial and ethnic groups, Aunt Li responds that it is not often that she talks to Americans about Chinese. From her husband's mouth, she adds, Chinese in general are perceived as "hard worker" and being "capable," compared to some other immigrant groups (such as Indians and Mexicans). As for why some male foreigners want to look for Chinese women, Aunt Li talks about her husband's affinity for "Chinese culture" and his perceptions about Chinese women.

> They like Chinese culture, and my husband felt Chinese women are relatively more reserved and nicer. He had three marriages with Americans. Americans are very

> independent, don't think about their husbands 100 percent, are relatively more selfish. For instance, they would ask you if you want to eat something. They would ask you once and if you answer no, they wouldn't care about you anymore. But Chinese are different, the way Chinese care about you 'goes into your bones.' Also, the way Chinese [women] manage the family, that they are filial to parents, and probably hold many more traditional virtues some Americans. Actually to my husband, I asked him [so], and he said he likes the 'Chinese culture.' The couple of marriages he had were within the American circle, and he had enough of the marital status between Americans, so he wanted to find someone from a different country to see what the marital status would be like.
>
> He said to me, 'I say *I love you* every day. [But] I didn't say it to those people.' When he said that to me when I first arrived, I would say, '[W]hy do you say it that much? Action! Action!' (Laughs.) He said 'I love you' so much, and I wasn't used to it at all. Now if he doesn't say it for one day, I would say, '[W]hy didn't you say it?' This is a big change. The running-in of the East and the West.

Reflections

To share her insights about being a woman, Aunt Li emphasizes,

> I think as a woman, you have to be independent, have your own thoughts and opinions. Your behavior should be independent. Unlike some women who follow the trend or their husbands but don't have their own opinion. … You must have economic independence. Moreover, you have to have requirements for yourself. You have to improve your own quality and be beautiful. Even if you are not beautiful, your behavior must be beautiful. I think this is also quite important. It includes your appearance and the way you dress yourself. I am quite particular about myself in these aspects.

Actually, I am struck by the way Aunt Li makes decisions. Not having any difficulty in deciding, she explains, "When I felt my first husband is good, I didn't hesitate to marry him. Then the divorce, I got divorced without any hesitation. Later, when I found my American husband, I left for America without much hesitation."

Aunt Li divides her life into four stages according to her employment changes, including three stages in China and one—clustered together—in America. "The stages are divided very clearly, because once your career changes, your mentality, adapting to the new environment, will all change accordingly."

Having lived in America for 16 years, Aunt Li, at my request, shares her understanding of the American society, compared to what she had thought before her immigration. The America in her old understanding is captured by her language of "advancement," "capitalism," "free love," and its people having more "independence," "freedom," and "rights."

In terms of America's "advanced science and technology," Aunt Li says she is not impressed, speaking from her normal life experiences such as shopping in the malls or comparing the gas stations here with those in China, the latter being built splendidly. "Here is a small city. You can't say it's backward, nor advanced. We can't see much high tech. America doesn't show these things very much, and there's a gap."

It is interesting to hear how Aunt Li sees Americans' freedom.

> Of course I can feel that their personalities are more distinct. We used to say [America is a] '*hua hua shi jie*' [a world full of temptations for sensual pleasures]. People can do this and that at will, but I think many Americans are still relatively conservative. To be honest, the extent that people indulge in a life of sensual pleasures seems to be more unrestrained in China; especially those with power and money, they are more so. The world of sensual pleasures in America maybe is just its nightclubs, or we can't see it. As far as we civilians are concerned, they don't seem unrestrained. Maybe the city is relatively small, thus it may seem conservative: Everyone will go home after work, and family is still important. This is not the case in China: As long as the men are out of work, as long as they have access, they would spend time in drinking and pleasures outside at night.

Aunt Li continues with her observation about the difference between Chinese and Americans.

> One thing that is more impressive is the difference of self-cultivation between Chinese and Americans. For example, in terms of simple things such as queuing, humility, greetings, etc., their basic training starts with children. This is caused by the environment. The politeness of the Chinese is also there, but it seems as if everyone feels him/herself is 'somebody.' We live here and no one knows us, [but] they all greet us, as if they are born with such politeness.

Aunt Li also talks about trust—the very social fabric.

> There's a high level of trust in America. For example, when you go to the mall to buy things, the merchandise is there, would you take them? Some things may have been stolen, but generally speaking, they are not. Another example is car repair. Chinese people ask a lot of questions when going to repair a car, and they don't trust the other person. But Americans, such as my husband, never bargain with others, he believes in others. ... The Chinese would do careful calculation and haggle prices.

Aunt Li talks proudly about her age.

> I've always been proud of my age. I never hide it, because I'm very confident about myself overall. I'm 66 years old now, my figure is still ok. I feel pretty good in general. Sometimes when I told my husband that I am old and have more wrinkles, he'd say, 'You are still beautiful.' (Laughs.) Of course, now at 66, I suddenly feel, Ah, really? I didn't feel it at 64 or 65 when I had been buying high-heel shoes. But now I'm 66, I question, Can I still wear these shoes?

Apparently, Aunt Li has not surrendered to the aging process. "I'm afraid of getting old, so I do beauty treatments every day. Of course, who isn't afraid? (Laughs.) I am afraid of old age, so I have to keep my youth."

Asked if there is any issue she feels strongly about, Aunt Li says,

> No. Actually we don't participate. Because if you don't personally experience it or if your interests are not involved, you are actually not very sensitive to certain issues. Take the immigration issue for example. If I couldn't immigrate, I'd feel the policy this or that way. But I'm good now, [a green card holder], and I don't have any problems, so I don't have such worries or would not think the policy should be this or that."

As she continues, Aunt Li expresses her disagreement about releasing the undocumented immigrants and granting them permanent residency, about advocating for LGBTQs. Regarding the anti-Asian racism, she feels "enraged" from reading the news, while she does not feel or experience discrimination in reality.

My question about her beliefs elicited Aunt Li's talk about the Chinese Communist Party. Telling me that she believed in the Chinese Communist Party, she adds,

> There was no way not to believe it. Because at that time, it was the world of the Communist Party, and now it still is. Believe it or not, I had always wanted to join the Communist Party when I was young, but I couldn't. (Laughs.) … I had worked hard all my life. (Laughs.) ... Anyway, I don't think I have failed as a human being, so it's okay.

Aunt Li has experiences with churches—Chinese and American ones—here.

> When I first came, my husband took me to church immediately, because he said there are Chinese people there and wanted me to meet some. One or two months later, I found a job, so I stopped going. Now I go there occasionally, when there's an activity during the holidays.

Disinterested in becoming religious, Aunt Li says, "Anyway, I'm invulnerable. I might have had too much education of the Chinese Communist Party."

Currently a green card holder, Aunt Li explains,

> It's [more] convenient for people with a green card to return to China. A citizen must apply for a visa to go back. If you have a green card, you can leave whenever you want; there are no restrictions. Besides, there is basically no difference in the treatment between a green card holder and a citizen in the United States; the treatment after retirement is basically the same. Therefore, whether it is a citizen or not, it doesn't matter to me. For some people, they think it is safer to have citizenship; [because] if both of them [a couple] are Chinese, they might be a bit afraid of policy changes or expulsion of Chinese people or something. [But] My husband is American, so it doesn't matter to me. My husband will be happy if I want to get the citizenship, but I haven't thought about it yet. Because I still want to wait and see. After my husband passes away, I might go back to China and not want to stay here anymore. Because at home, my sisters are still there, and there is someone to take care of me. Here, if my husband is gone, I will have no one since I don't have a child. Although I have friends here, after all ... for family members, responsibility is there, so it's different from friends.

Speaking of regrets, Aunt Li wishes she had a child. "During the 10 years after the divorce, sometimes when I got home from work I felt alone … After my husband is gone, I will be left alone, so I still regret that I don't have a child."

Aunt Li had planned to retire in August of last year, then, with her husband, travel to China; given the pandemic, she changed her plan and decided to continue to work and postpone her retirement until May, three months after the interview. "My husband is old and I want to take more time to accompany him." As for the future, Aunt Li says,

> After my husband is gone, if I'm too lonely here, I might go back to China and buy a big house, live by myself or have my family over. ... Otherwise I'd just stay here in America. After all, I don't get in touch very much with my friends in China, since it has been too long [since I left]. I think I might do a few basic dance skill training classes or folkdance classes after retirement. I don't want to be idle but want to give myself a little bit fun in retirement. I also do a good job of cooking, and I sometimes think about putting the cooking videos on YouTube. (Laughs.) These are all random thoughts. Maybe I will do it or not, depending on my physical condition and interest.

Story 4: Aunt Guo

It was in mid-February, a few days after the Lunar New Year, when I began the interview with Aunt Guo, while she was planning to visit her older daughter in New York the following week for a delayed holiday gathering. As of the time of the interviews, Aunt Guo is 74, widowed, residing with her younger sister in Massachusetts. Given that the local senior center has remained closed during pandemic, Aunt Guo has stayed home, spending a great deal of time on the cell phone, reading articles, remembering, writing and sharing posts within her friends' circle.

The oldest among other participants, she struck me as having had rich life experiences in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and America. In Mandarin with a soft Shanghai dialect, Aunt Guo speaks easily about her life via phone.

Life in Mainland China

As the second of four, three years younger than her sister who was born in Guilin, a city far south, Aunt Guo was born in Shanghai in 1947, two years after the Sino-Japan war ended. Her mother was from a well-to-do family in which Aunt Guo's grandfather worked in the central bank and Aunt Guo's grandmother's side ran a fur business. By age 12, her mother had lost both parents. Aunt Guo's mother's older brother, who worked as a lawyer for Guomindang (often referred to in English as the Chinese Nationalist Party), took all his younger sisters to Sichuan Province in southwest China, where the headquarters of Guomindang were located and where

Aunt Guo's mother received a high school education. Aunt Guo's father was a son of a well-to-do family for whom he ran a fashion shop.

Later, following the idea of Aunt Guo's mother, who did not realize that one might die in fighting in a war, Aunt Guo's father was enlisted into the Air Force, trained by Guomindang and Americans to drive bombing planes in an aviation school in southwest China.

To add some historical background: The period between 1945–1950, the post WWII time in world history, witnessed the second Chinese Civil War between the Chinese Communist Party and Guomindang. It ended by Guomindang's retreating to Taiwan while the Chinese Communist Party took power in Mainland on October 1, 1949. In today's Mainland China, the Chinese Civil War has been one of the popular topics of its television shows; in its official discourse, Taiwan, like Hong Kong, is "an integral part of China."

Aunt Guo's father's family, however, unhappy with their son's decision and concerned for his safety, hated Aunt Guo's mother for her "destroying others' family." With the connection cut off from his family due to the tension, Aunt Guo's father lost his source of income, and, since then, was financially supported by Aunt Guo's mother during his training. Defiant, he commented the principal was corrupt, unwilling to salute. Not having finished his training, he became a deserter before 1945 to get married to Aunt Guo's mother, against his family's will. Aunt Guo's mother, unsurprisingly, was not treated well by her parents-in-law, who regarded her as a person of "evil spirit of white tiger" and "ominous."

Having left the aviation school, Aunt Guo's father worked in the Civil Aviation Bureau, doing work such as protecting the forest, spraying pesticides by plane, or preventing fire. Due to the nature of his job, he had always been away from Shanghai. Aunt Guo's mother worked occasionally as a substitute teacher in elementary school and mostly stayed home.

Aunt Guo remembers growing up without much of her parents' attention and care. In her recounts, "My father didn't care much about us; he's a very selfish person. We even didn't have a picture with him. Usually it's our mom who taught us." Among her family, Aung Guo says, "They had a bad relationship with my father; mine was better." "My father never cared about them. He was not home every day. He came back once a week or once a month. He would beat us when he came back. Maybe my mom told him this or that child didn't behave, he then would beat that child." Her mother, as a housewife, was "very unqualified, lacking the ability to do housework," "not knowing how to cook."

Aunt Guo's earliest memory goes back to the year of 1952/53 when her family, following her father, moved to Tianjin, a large port city in northeastern China, 120 miles away from Beijing, while she was in kindergarten.

In 1957, the family moved back to Shanghai in the south, due to their not being used to the cold in the north, while their mother had moved back one year earlier. In Aung Guo's account, they were "lucky" to take the move in 1957 for two reasons. One is related to the status of having Shanghai *hukou* (household registration). After 1958, according to Aunt Guo, it would be impossible to move back to Shanghai, which, like Beijing, soon would be classified as a first-rate city, whereas Tianjin would be a second-rate city. (Here she did not explain why having Shanghai *hukou* was that significant or what it meant to have Shanghai *hukou* at that time. I can only guess from today's perspective that very likely it had something to do with Shanghai as a cosmopolitan in China.)

Another reason for feeling "lucky" to have moved back to Shanghai in 1957, Aunt Guo says, is that it allowed her father—and the family—to "escape" from the Anti-rightist movement.

> The "rightists" were classified at the end of 1957, when my dad had run to Shanghai. If we still had been in Tianjin, he would definitely have been marked as one. Because he

> often talked about "laymen leading experts" [and that] "[M]any things he invented had been stolen by the leaders," he would say that others were not good. He had been detained while in Tianjin, asked to write self-criticisms. My mother, too, was asked to write self-criticisms, and she said he was wrong for this or that. Then they let him out. It [Moving to Shanghai] meant that his environment changed, people knew fewer things about him, so he wasn't labelled [as a 'rightist'] and escaped [from the Anti-rightist movement].

A big change in Aunt Guo's family was her parents' divorce in 1964 when Aunt Guo was 17, which would affect how the family—particularly the mother and the children—fared.

> The instrument room of an airport in Shanghai was created by my father. His technology was very good, and he had many inventions. Sometimes we would go to the airport to play, thus my mother was exposed to people. 'How can your wife not even walk?' Her feet are curved, probably because of the polio. So my father wanted to get divorced in 1957, as he thought his wife was ugly. But my mother disagreed, because in that case, the children would be sent to the countryside of Pudong [suburb of Shanghai]. They stayed together and didn't divorce until 1964.
>
> My dad's salary was one of the highest in Shanghai at the time. When others were earning ¥50 or ¥60, he was already earning ¥130, but he would not give us much money. He needed to spend ¥70 for himself and would give us ¥40—¥40 for five people. He said that he needed to use money for this and that, and after he calculated the money he needed to use, he would give us the rest. He didn't come home anymore and was living at the airport—Longhua Airport, the first airport [in China]. The monthly money would not be given to us on time. My mother would let us ask for it. We would take the shuttle bus from the city to the suburbs and stop by the workshop to play. He said, 'You can come and play, but don't come if you want money.'
>
> In 1957, we started to live in the Civil Aviation Guest House, with the Air Force. It's like my mother raised a 'white-eyed wolf' [a metaphor for a person who is not grateful], and the two of them were really incompatible in personality. Dad wanted [to save] face; he would pay for clothes, but not food. I didn't have money to buy a gown when I got married; he gave me the money quickly. (Laughs.)

Aunt Guo talks about the difficulty of the material life back then and how her family managed life.

> You know, in my family, we didn't have a father, and the income was very [little]. But we were lucky. During the 'natural disasters' time, in the 50s [1958–1962], food coupons were used. Everyone's food [ration] was only 25 jin [a jin is half kilogram] or something. But our family members had a very small appetite; for instance, others would need 30 jin, but 25 jin might be enough for our family, so while others didn't have enough food coupons, we would still have extra. In addition, my aunt sent things and money from Hong Kong, so we were not starving. Besides, we were staying in a civil aviation guest house where the food provided for those pilots was good. Who would eat the leftovers?

> The caretakers, and people in the kitchen. They would give some to us after they ate, because we didn't have a father. The chef was a Cantonese, and he often cooked Cantonese soups, I remember very well, [with] eggs, green beans, cha shao, glass noodles, everything put in a pot. After they ate, maybe there would be a half-bowl left for us, we would just cook and eat it, so we were not starving. Others didn't have anything to eat. We still had the leftovers; relying on it, we still had things to eat.

Aunt Guo's school year ended in 1966 since the Cultural Revolution had begun, when she finished high school, at 19, while her younger brother—the only boy in the family—finished his middle (that is, junior high) school. "At that time, half of my classmates would go to the countryside. When I was in school, my interpersonal relationship was relatively good, and I didn't offend anyone. The two factions were against each other; if the opposing faction hated you, they would get you to the countryside."

With two children graduating at the same time, the family needed to decide which one would go work in the factory and which one would go to the countryside. Aunt Guo explains how the decision was made, a decision that would affect her fate, her brother's, and, eventually, her brother's lifelong estrangement from the family:

> At that time, someone came to our house and asked, 'Should the one in high school or the one in junior high go?' Mom said, 'The girl would stay at home, she has bronchitis, and the boy would go.' My younger brother heard it, but he didn't object. It didn't occur to me to ask him if he would want to go or not. Back then I had no understanding of that concept at all. If you didn't go, the street committee would come to do mobilization work. We were not afraid, because my dad was living at the airport and they would not harm him … My mom didn't have a job. You could be disobedient if you didn't have work pressure ... My brother didn't want to go. He has hated me to death. I was stupid, so was my mom. How could we talk like that? Patriarchy. As a result, my brother hated it so much that even until today he doesn't contact me. We were all in Boston, but he didn't contact us. He's hated us for a lifetime. Therefore, I'm checking, 'Parents shouldn't decide this kind of thing.'

When it comes to her brother, Aunt Guo's recount was sad, reflective, and regretful; occasionally, she choked. Seen as "naughty, disobedient" compared to the "obedient" girls, her

brother had been beaten often by both parents, and he believed the family favored girls over boys.

> My brother lacked father's love since he was a child, and our mother didn't understand it so much. When my father was beating [my brother], he let me and my sister hold my brother's legs and put him on the ground. At that time, he was only four or five years old in Tianjin. My sister and I would plead our father, 'Don't beat, don't beat.' My brother said [years later], 'You could have not pressed me.' He hated us. We really didn't have the spirit of resistance at that time.

The estrangement of the younger brother was so intense and deep that years later he even refused to come when their father passed away.

Asked if the family had been greatly influenced by the Cultural Revolution, Aunt Guo recollects,

> Dad had escaped the 'rightist' [label], but they said he was 'on the fringe of the rightist.' He had escaped it, but then I went to disclose him. At that time, he was no longer in the Civil Aviation Bureau and was already in a small work unit. I just said that he made a lot of reactionary remarks; for instance, he said Mao Zedong was unprecedented, etc. Because at home he would say how bad the Communist Party was. At that time, I was still unawake, unable to understand, so I went to his work unit to expose him. Then his work unit showed me his file, a thick one, and said he was a 'counter-revolutionary Guomindang's officer.' Later, I said in fact he was not an officer, but just a bachelor student, and, also, a deserter. At that time, if they had put a 'cap' on you, you wouldn't have been able to clarify; if they said that you were a counter-revolutionary officer, you were a counter-revolutionary officer. Back then he had been taken onto the stage to be denounced. However, it was already very good that he was not labeled as a 'rightist,' otherwise, our whole family would have been unlucky.

Asked to talk about her experience during the 10-year turmoil, Aunt Guo recalls that she had seen students beating a teacher to death, she also participated in writing "big-character posters," she traveled to Beijing to see Mao, and, sometimes, she was persecuted by her classmates. To give me an example, she elaborates:

> At that time they were inexplicable: the class was divided into two factions; someone from one faction said that I had said that his/her father embezzled, and I was even unable to explain it clearly. In addition, there's the theory of class origin: It must be workers and peasants; my father was an office worker, and it seemed that the office workers were all bad. … So they attacked me. When I was attacked, writing self-criticisms or speaking, I

> said, ‘The class origin theory is wrong. The emphasis should be on performance. You can’t say [I]f the father is a hero, his son is also a hero; if the father is a reactionary, his son is a bastard.’ They thought what I said made sense.
>
> At that time, if I knew I would be persecuted on a specific day, I would have a fever and rubella, for three days. … Of course, they didn't beat me; they just made me do the self-criticisms. After that, they, instead, felt that I spoke well.
>
> As it turned out, later, one faction fell. It meant our faction was OK, the situation was reversed, and I was asked to disclose the other faction. I said no need to do it: when they persecuted me, they didn’t know the truth, and they felt that what they were doing was a good deed. So I refused. At this time, people in my faction, the insiders, didn’t like me anymore. But I didn’t make enemies with the other faction. When it came time for designation, I was assigned to the industry.
>
> People from my faction said something, which in local Shanghai dialect means, ‘If you are good to others, it will be good for yourself in the future.’ Because I didn’t have a revenge mentality, and I thought that everyone was doing what he/she thought was right and that it was for the revolution, I was unwilling to disclose others and take revenge. ‘You are so shrewd and think so clearly about the future.’ (They implied the selfish shrewdness in me.) I felt wronged; I wasn’t that smart. How come I thought so much?

Two years after the Cultural Revolution took place, Aunt Guo started working as a lathe worker in a factory, for the following eleven years. “Life was difficult at that time, extremely difficult.” The situation of the family was further adversely affected when Aunt Guo’s father changed his job. Aunt Guo recalls:

> Later, he stopped working in the airport, because in the airport he had to smell the rubber water, which was not good for one’s health, and the responsibility was too great, as he had to sign before the flight. Since he was unwilling to give us money, if he didn’t do it [the job at the airport], we wouldn’t get the money. In the 1960s or 70s, he went to work in a local factory. Originally, he had made ¥130; when he went to the local factory, it became only ¥50. He wouldn’t give us money; he used it alone. What should we do? We had an aunt in Hong Kong who would send us HK$100 per month, so we relied on her to send us money. Later, my sister and I both worked, and we took out most of our money to support the family. For example, when I was earning ¥36—roughly $5—[per month], I would keep ¥12 and give ¥24 to my family; my sister’s wage was a little higher than mine, and she would give ¥30 to the family.

Aunt Guo remembers feeling “disgusted” with the “formalism,” like “doing time in jail” while going through it.

> It was weird at that time: you were doing work and then they would ask you to go to a meeting. If you went to a meeting, you wouldn’t need to work. Then we would go to the

> meeting. Having a meeting was also very good anyway; you would just listen to the report. You should ask for instructions in the early morning and then report in the evening, read the newspaper, say that the Communist Party is good; some even danced the 'loyalty dance.' At that time, I was very disgusted, wondering when I could stop dancing and when I could stop reading the newspaper. (Laughs.)

Marriage with a Hong Kong Man

A major turning point in Aunt Guo's life is marrying a Hong Kong man in 1975, at age 28. Aunt Guo shares how it happened.

> My father had an American awareness; he thought it's better to leave and said I should go. Where did the idea [of leaving Mainland] come from? There's a Korean woman who's a bit older than me, single. Probably because her parents lived in Korea. … She wanted to go to Korea. I don't know if she had a boyfriend. She prepared her dowry. Then my dad took me there, and I got to know this woman. She gave me an enlightenment that [Aunt Guo's voice dropped to a whisper] we could go, leave this place. In the end, she didn't succeed, but I made it. Back then I was 26 or 27; my father said I should go. At that time, to leave did not mean going to America. [Back then America and Americans were 'enemies.'] For the Korean woman it was to go to Korea; for me, it was to go to Hong Kong.

Aunt Guo thought that maybe it was this "enlightenment" that brought her the chance.

> One of my younger brother's classmates said to him, "A Hong Kong man comes back; your older sister doesn't have a boyfriend, right? She seems very nice." Do you know how hard my life was back then? I was living in the factory, earning ¥36, and I would give ¥24 to my family and save ¥12 for myself. How difficult it was, right? Plus, my family had owed two years' rent. The rent per month was ¥2.5, so it was ¥50 for two years. Back then the landlord was so reasonable that he didn't kick us out. So [when] my brother said to me, 'How about you marry this guy?' I was thinking, 'If I didn't marry, my family would never *fanshen* or turn around.' Right? Everybody earned that little. How could you *fanshen*? So I said I will marry. My husband is 13 years older than me. At that time the usual age difference [between a couple] was usually two or three years; there's no such thing as a thirteen year's age difference. I thought, 'What I'm marrying is not marrying a man, but marrying out to Hong Kong.' So I got married to him. He's a *laoshi* [honest or trustworthy] man, but poor. So that's it.

In December 1975, five months after Aunt Guo met her husband, they were married. To marry a Hong Kong man put Aunt Guo in a position in which she faced "huge" pressure.

> At that time, I was the first one in our factory, a factory of 5,000 people, to marry out. They said to me, 'This Hong Kong man is a spy.' I then went to ask him, 'Hey, are you a spy or not?' He just said, 'Do you think I'm a spy?' (Laughs.)

To contextualize Aunt Guo's marriage in 1975 against the then time and environment, I asked her what people in Mainland thought about Hong Kong at that time.

> People admired Hong Kong—the songs of Deng Lijun [a well-known singer from Hong Kong whose pop songs became widely known almost to everyone in Mainland in 80s and 90s], the clothes, the radios, razors, etc. [Leaving Mainland] was not considered good: before it had been [seen as] 'treason;' at my time, it wasn't 'treason' anymore, but was 'pursuing a bourgeois lifestyle.'

Some background knowledge of Hong Kong offers insight into her story. A former British colony during 1840–1997, its specific location, especially its close proximity to Shenzhen in southern Mainland—with Shenzhen river as the border, the narrowest part being merely two meters—makes it convenient for Mainlanders to escape to Hong Kong. The Shenzhen-Hong Kong border is known as China's Berlin Wall and the 38th parallel in Korea. It is reported that during 1950–1980 200,000 people from Mainland escaped to Hong Kong, in different waves, for different reasons—such as survival, fleeing political persecution, seeking a better life or reuniting with one's family (Qiu, 2007a, 2007b). About 1,200,000 refugees were involved in different waves of the escape, and many people lost their lives in their efforts to escape (B. Chen, 2019). It was also argued that "[T]he great escape to Hong Kong triggered the economic reforms in China" (B. Chen, 2019, p. iii). *Better Rich than Red* (1985)—title of a video episode that depicted life of legal and illegal migrants from Mainland in Hong Kong in 1980s (Levy & Torrens, 1985)—seems to vividly capture one of the major driving forces behind people's leaving Mainland for Hong Kong, including Aunt Guo's departure.

Aunt Guo fills me in with details about the process of getting married in the late 1970s, which sounds extremely complicated today, four decades later. One had to get permission from one's work unit before going to the Civil Affairs Bureau to get the marriage certificate. In order to get the permission, she had to bribe the then department director with her overseas remittance

coupon that her aunt sent from Hong Kong to support the family. (The coupon, Aung Guo adds, could buy rare things such as TV or meat, things average Chinese had no access to.) The written report by the department director, wisely suggested by a couple of Aunt Guo's colleagues, should be subtle: the appraisal of her should not be too good nor too bad; otherwise, either way, it was very likely that she would not be allowed to leave. Looking back, Aunt Guo comments that it was "fortunate" that she was not a party member, otherwise she might not have been able to leave either.

The application of marriage was finally approved one month later, after her husband's constant "urging."

> They made things difficult for us. They told me, 'Don't marry him.' and told him, 'Don't marry her. She would cheat you and abandon you after she arrives in Hong Kong.' So and so. They didn't let the two of us marry, because it had never happened before. Ours was the precedent. It'd be open after the 1980s, but it had not in 1975.

My question about the most difficult moment or experience in her life elicited Aunt Guo's response about how she dealt with the pressure she faced.

> Usually people were afraid of public opinions. It isn't easy that I wasn't afraid of public opinions and that I married a Hong Kong man. It was against the social trend; there had never been such a thing before. On the matter of the relationship between men and women, I was 'famous' throughout the factory. When it was already like that, I was no longer afraid, no longer afraid of any public opinions. None of the public opinions had any impacts on me. Because of this foundation, there was a subsequent action, and I could dare to jump out.

In response to my curiosity about where her courage came from, Aunt Guo replies:

> It's not where the courage came from. In a factory of 5,000 people, when you walked in, people would stare at you, *zhi zhi dian dian* or gossiping and pointing at you. That's how I experienced it; everyone considered me a bad person. After having experienced this, I wasn't afraid of anything. Many people live for others, live under [the pressures of] the public opinions—'I want to do it in a certain way, but since the public opinion doesn't allow it, I can't do so.' But I already passed this level, so I can do whatever I want.

Reflecting on how the decision about marriage affected her, Aunt Guo says, “Marriage is like a second reincarnation, a reincarnation into a completely different social system. It totally changed my destiny.” To Aunt Guo’s family, the immediate change brought by the marriage was ¥300 for her family’s living expenses per month, and the rent owed for two years was paid off.

Embedding her own story against the history, Aunt Guo mentions that in 1949 some Guomindang, defeated by the Communist Party, ended up in Hong Kong while retreating from the Mainland, and that there were waves of the great escape from Mainland to Hong Kong in 1962 and 1972. She recalls people who lived through that history: the brother of one of her classmates (while she was in junior high school) whose escape failed and who thus became “anti-revolutionary;” her current next-door neighbor who, decades ago, escaped by swimming.

Leaving for and Living in Hong Kong

Not until in 1979, four years after the marriage, did Aunt Guo move to Hong Kong, at age 32. She tells why and how:

> My husband didn’t want me to go. He said he couldn’t afford to feed me. At that time vegetables in Hong Kong cost HK$5 per jin. How could he feed me? In Shang Hai it merely cost several dimes. He described Hong Kong to be terrible. I was thinking to myself, I’ll feed myself after I arrive. Why would I need you to feed me? [But] He didn’t apply for me. Then he fell sick and wrote me a letter saying he was living in a nursing home. My neighbor told me to apply, urging, ‘While he didn’t ask you to go, you can go.’ That’s right. So I took a letter to the local police station. … It would make sense for me to visit when my husband was sick. I applied for a one-way trip at that time. They taught me how to write it. … It was approved by the eighth month, and it went very smoothly. My husband even didn’t know, because he didn’t want me to go. Once my application was approved, he was anxious to death, as he was still in Germany.

Decades later, Aunt Guo’s memory about her passage to Hong Kong is impressively vivid and clear:

> At that time, there were no buildings around Luohu Bridge [the passageway between Mainland China and Hong Kong]; it was all wasteland and farmland. Back then no one helped me carry my stuff. It was later when there were a lot of people going back and forth that someone would help people carry their things. You know, I took a luggage and

> a ham. (The ham was to give to someone.) And I had to hold a child, a three-year-old child. Do you know how I crossed the bridge? I had to 'de de de' [mimicking the sound] walk forward, put it down, and then 'de de de' to go back to get another thing. So I had to walk back and forth to walk through the Luohu Bridge. (Laughs.)
>
> Then, when I arrived at the Entry-and-Exit, they [on Shanghai side] only exchanged HK$20 for me. You know, it's not that I didn't have RMB [Chinese currency]; of course I had RMB. But he didn't exchange more for me, so stingy, only HK$20. You really should write about this; it's indeed history. Then at the pass, he confiscated all my ID, food coupons, and everything, saying that none of these things can be seen by outsiders. People nowadays can bring out their ID, but not at that time. (There was no ID card at that time; they took all my paperwork—and coupons—anyway.)
>
> Then I entered Hong Kong. There was cross-examination again; it was very thorough: 'How much is your monthly income?' I remember one thing in particular they asked: 'How often do you change towels, the face towels?' He asked questions like that. We never changed the towels; the towels were used until they were worn out. I was most impressed that they [even] asked you how often you would change the towels. Then he asked you about the food coupons or something, that is, if you were willing to be a Chinese spy when you come out, you could be a spy; you could also be a Hong Kong spy after you come in, as long as he gives you tasks. The kind of questions they asked was as if [you were] providing information or something [for them].
>
> Without money to cross the customs, what should I do? There happened to be a Cantonese who was probably helping a relative cross the border and who lent me HK$20 and then gave me a phone number.
>
> When I arrived in Hong Kong, I took a taxi. Fortunately, the train station was close to our home, otherwise I wouldn't have had money to take the taxi. I had already paid HK$20, and I still had HK$20 left. If it had been far away, HK$20 would definitely not have been enough. It turned out that taking the taxi was okay, and it cost about HK$5.

To this day, Aunt Guo still remembers clearly that she felt quite impressed by the skyscrapers in Hong Kong that "brightened my eyes." It turned out that her husband was away and would not come back until one month later. Alone, Aunt Guo first stayed at the house of a friend of her aunt's (while her aunt was already in the U.S.), and then, through the friend's recommendation, rented a house, using the money her husband had saved in the sailor's union. She recalls her first exposure to Hong Kong's social media:

> When I first arrived in Hong Kong, the landlord subscribed five or six types of newspaper, some in dialect [Cantonese], some in Mandarin. My husband was still away, on the German sea, so I read the newspaper for one month. The internal [Mainland] was closed. [In Hong Kong] I was being brainwashed; the weekly magazine was anti-Communist.

Having lived in the rented house for less than a year, Aunt Guo had her second daughter—born in 1980. A detail Aunt Guo shares is revealing: After the birth of her second daughter, she had her mother over for half a year to help take care of the baby, but then, because her pass was overdue, her mother was taken to a detention center. “I went to see her every day. She told me not to worry about her, she had eggs, milk, and fruits every day, and she’s very happy. She stayed for one or two weeks.”

Aunt Guo tells at great length how she had to deal with the housing issue. Before presenting Aunt Guo’s story, it might be useful to provide a brief background knowledge in order to contextualize her experience. Housing has always been an issue in Hong Kong, particularly the lack of residential property, the sky-high price and housing affordability crisis, etc. Quoting a Chinese idiom Aunt Guo uses, *cun jin chi tu*—which literally means that a square foot of land is worth a square inch of gold—describes the scarcity and expensiveness of land in Hong Kong.

To date back, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the sudden flux of refugees from Mainland into Hong Kong created a large squatter population, which reportedly accounts for 25% of the entire population (Hong Kong Memory, 2012). Illegally, the refugees built squatters’ sites with iron or wood at the edge of the city or on the hillsides, which were significantly overcrowded, with poor sanitation, and frequented by fire accidents (Hong Kong Memory, 2012). In 1982, squatters were required by the government to become registered so that they could continue to live on the land until there were alternative solutions (“Resettlement Area,” 2021).

During 1974–1990, the government built Temporary Housing Areas (THA) or Resettlement Areas as a solution of housing for the refugees (“Resettlement Area,” 2021). What

THA were most commonly criticized for were their living conditions, severely overcrowded and full of inconveniences, such as communal bathrooms, outdoor kitchens ("Resettlement Area," 2021). Most of them were torn down by the late 1990s ("Resettlement Area," 2021).

In Hong Kong, public housing is mainly for low-income residents, while a relatively small part of it is for residents with medium income.

To Aunt Guo, to have a house or not links up to her notion of the "poor"—a poor person seems to be equivalent to one not owning a house. She says emphatically, "You must first solve the housing issue. Otherwise you would always be the poorest, poorest, poorest, and poorest person; except for enough food, you wouldn't be able to think about anything else." Aunt Guo had a practical plan to get what she wanted:

> What I first encountered, once I got there, was the problem of housing. In 1979, when I rented a house of 100 [square] feet [roughly nine square meters] in a better location, it cost HK$ 650 [roughly $84]. The salary was over HK$1,000, which means half of the salary was used to pay the rent. I know that if you don't solve the housing problem in Hong Kong, you will always be poor, and you will never be able to turn your life around, because you have to pay rent.
>
> So I told my husband, (He had been in Hong Kong for decades, and he had friends, those friends who had escaped after the 'liberation' [in Mainland]), 'You help me borrow HK$2,000 from each family, five friends would be HK$10,000. Let's buy a squatter hut.' At that time, there were squatters on the hills. After buying a squatter hut, one could *shanglou* or apply for the public housing. This was a policy of Hong Kong.

While Aunt Guo believed it was inexpensive to buy a squatter hut, her husband refused to follow her idea to turn to his friends for help, as people in Hong Kong usually do not borrow money from others. It seems chance then played a role in Aunt Guo's life when she was visiting her mother in the detention center:

> I met a Cantonese who opened a hardware store. His brother came here smuggled. He went to see his brother. At that time, I was too poor. I borrowed [from him] HK$ 2,000 to send my mother back to Shenzhen. (And I also went back to China and sent her back to Shanghai.) While paying back the money, I told him I wanted to buy a squatter hut. … This hawker has a small one, 47 feet, five square meters, and it had been written in red letters. The government can register at any time, and soon one [who owns the squatter

> hut] can apply for the public housing. He asked me whether I wanted to buy it or not, and I said I do. It would cost HK$ 26,000 to buy a squatter hut. He lent me HK$20,000. (The interest from the bank was high, 21 percent. By instalment payments, HK$2,000 per month, we paid it off after two years.) He also told me to buy fruits with HK$30 for each family of the neighbors, so that they would call me if the government came to register.
>
> Coincidentally, a week after we purchased the squatter hut, I got a call to ask us to move in. A couple of days later after we moved in, the government came to register us. … Because my older daughter and I are from Mainland, my younger daughter was born in Hong Kong, the four of us are two-to-two; we couldn't apply for the public housing, and could only go live in the resettlement area. (The resettlement area was for the refugees who had no houses to live in after the fire accident in the 50s or 60s; it was a seven-story building built temporarily by the government.) There were only communal bathrooms. I could only go to this building. It was very cheap, about several dozens to HK$100 [per month]. I lived in this building for a few years, and it was very difficult. My house was facing north and was very small—the room was only about 70 or 80 square feet, only enough for a bed and a table. Where was my kitchen? It was in the hallway. How would I cook things in the north-facing hallway? I used a cardboard box with a gas tank in it. When the wind was strong, the gas would be blown off. I had a few years in the wind and rain. The faucet for washing clothes. … was shared by 20 families on the same floor. At that time, my heels were even cracked, due to the wind and rain. I said that it was as if I went to Hong Kong for camping, not living in a house, but living outside.

Seven years later, according to the policy, Aunt Guo and her family moved into the public housing. "So the housing problem was solved; since then, you wouldn't need to think about rent in the future." In 2002, Aunt Guo made another crucial move when the government, rather than renting the public housing, decided to sell them, offering interest-free loans and no down payments needed. With a loan and 12-year monthly payment, Aunt Guo owned the house, the worth of which today has increased immensely.

"Our luck was really good." Aunt Guo says. In addition, she stresses:

> You must have a clear mind about certain things. For example, regarding getting married, I really couldn't survive in China, because we didn't have a father, we had no source of income, so we must find a way. How to change? It was to go out, to escape. After escaping, you had to think clearly about how you could change in order not to be poor, at least not to be exploited very badly by others, right? You only do things you can think of; you wouldn't do things if you can't think of them.

As for what to do to make a living, Aunt Guo learned that for the sake of protecting women, Hong Kong does not allow women to be lathe workers—which was what she had done

while in Mainland. She once thought about becoming a hawker: “The hawkers in Hong Kong were very rich; they all bought a house. ... But my husband didn’t want to. He cared about ‘face.’”

Eventually, Aunt Guo launched a career in teaching Mandarin, first for families, then for institutions. Before there were professionally trained Mandarin teachers in Hong Kong, she would go to the elementary schools to teach Mandarin; she also collaborated with the International Scouts, opening Mandarin classes of different kinds. There was a point when Hong Kong issued a policy requiring Mandarin teachers in Hong Kong to be certified, thus the candidates need to take exams to acquire their certificates. Since then, Aunt Guo had been providing trainings of that kind. It turned out that her younger daughter, currently a Mandarin teacher in elementary school, was one of the first cohort Mandarin teachers in Hong Kong that had been professionally trained by her.

Aunt Guo relates her occupation to her social status:

> People would often say that others discriminate against mainlanders [in Hong Kong], and after we came to America, that others would say we are ‘second-class citizens’ and discriminate against us, but I didn’t feel that way. It may have something to do with my profession: Because I was a teacher, others respected me very much, although I can’t speak Cantonese [the principal language of Hong Kong].

Two other important decisions Aunt Guo made pertained to her daughters. The older daughter, at a certain point, was enrolled into an international school, which then afforded her an opportunity of becoming an exchange student studying in America and which led her to continue to study and eventually stay. Her younger daughter finally chose teaching Mandarin as her future profession, when, at a juncture, she faced two paths—to continue through the general college or to enter a normal college.

To the question about what she thinks about opportunities in Hong Kong, Aunt Guo responds, using a comparative lens:

> There may be many opportunities in [Mainland] China now. In the past, people were really too conservative: Except for your work unit, you couldn't even change jobs. Hong Kong was the same as America; you do whatever you like, right? If you are willing to start a company, you can start a company, right? If you are willing to open a store, go open it. If you want to be a teacher, go for it, as long as you take a test and get the certificate. I also went to a public University. I had gone to high school in China, and I always felt that I should go to university. Of course, later in China everyone went to university to study. It should be said that the degree of freedom is definitely greater in America and Hong Kong than in China. Of course, there are very successful people in China now, but when I was in China, people's thinking was really conservative.

Looking back on her decision to leave Mainland for Hong Kong, Aunt Guo says, "The decision was quite clear: I wanted to go for freedom." Pressed about what she meant by freedom, she explains, "Freedom of thought. I can say whatever I want to say and do whatever I want to do. I wanted to be a Mandarin teacher, I then became one. If it had been in China, it wouldn't necessarily have been so."

At the end of each interview, I asked each of the women, "In order to know you well, is there anything I should have asked but have not?" This question elicited from Aunt Guo the following:

> My daughter felt I looked unhappy every day after I married out to Hong Kong, 'sitting there, lost.' You know I was reluctant to marry. She would ask me, 'Why do you look lost?' I had had a boyfriend that I liked very much, but it was impossible, so I made this choice. … Why did I choose my husband? What I chose is life, or you could also say what I chose is freedom, not love.

Efforts to Leave Hong Kong

The changes in the political scene in Hong Kong have created various waves of migration, largely due to people's lack of confidence in the Communist's rule (Qiu, 2007b). One wave took place during 1985–1997, the post-transition period, following the signed Sino-British Joint Declaration, which included a promise of 50 years of Hong Kong's relative autonomy, and

before 1997 when Hong Kong would revert back to China (Ye, 2021). The most recent wave was created in 2020 when the national security law was imposed on Hong Kong by Beijing government, after a year of massive pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong (Y. Wang, 2021).

Aunt Guo's life story is one of those whose immigration was driven, at least partly, by political reasons. She recounts her earlier efforts of leaving Hong Kong before her final settlement in America, revealing her leaving would be a long-term undertaking.

In 1989, at age 42, Aunt Guo first went to Australia where her younger sister lived, having six months to stay. (Aunt Guo had sent her younger sister to Australia to study in 1986, as many other people did.) She recalls why she journeyed to Australia:

> It was because my husband became unemployed and teaching Mandarin couldn't earn lots of money that I wanted to go to work in Australia. My sister said it was very easy to find a job in Australia. Plus, in Australia they wouldn't check your ID: the factory is not allowed to check your ID, nor are the police on the road; only people from the immigration bureau are allowed to do so. Within one day, I did find a job, as a carpenter.

Aunt Guo worked there for five months and sent money back. She remembers, "In the mornings in July I'd need to go to work. It's terribly hot. The roof is made of iron sheets. [I] constantly sweat and drank water." Planning to get her husband over, Aunt Guo rented a place, but her application was denied. During her stay, she applied for an American tourist visa, which she believed was relatively easier than applying in Hong Kong, and then returned to Hong Kong.

The next year, in 1990, Aunt Guo came to America, wanting to stay. Suggested by someone from a church, she went back to Hong Kong 40 days later to get her children. Her efforts failed again, unfortunately, because immigration officials suspected her purpose to be permanent immigration. "I had been thinking too easily back then."

"The days seemed to be really fast. Twenty-five years had passed in a daze. It's too fast." Aunt Guo describes her sense of the passage of time in Hong Kong.

Life in America

Sponsored by her older sister, Aunt Guo finally immigrated to America in 2004, at age 57, after a nine-year-long wait. The fifth preference of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act favored family unification via kin sponsorship by siblings and chain effect (Chan, 1991b). Ten years' waiting is common; some had even forgotten about their application when they got the notice of the approval from America (Chee, 2005). By the time of Aunt Guo's arrival, her older daughter had been in America for 10 years. Her husband and younger daughter, however, were reluctant to leave Hong Kong as there they thought it "rather convenient" and thus did not want to give up on Hong Kong.

Aunt Guo answers passionately when asked to tell more about her decision:

> Coming to America is because of '97' [the year of 1997]. I knew long ago that '97' is coming. It was in 1979 when I went there; '97,' '79,' '89,' [She was counting backward the length of her residency in Hong Kong], almost 20 years. Knowing that it is going to be '97,' I wanted to escape quickly. That's for sure.
>
> There is also the consideration of being old. In Hong Kong, there's no welfare; it's impossible for me to rely on my daughter. If I come here, housing, medical care, etc., if you are a poor person, it would be provided for you. So considering my age, I also wanted to come to America.
>
> There is also the issue of freedom of speech. Look at Hong Kong. It was made like this in June of the year before last year. [By 'like this,' she might refer to today: 'Since June 2019, Hong Kong has seen months of non-stop protests and unrest which show no sign of stopping' (CNN, n.d.)]. It's for sure (laughs), it's for sure that you flee if you can, right? I am one of those who fled early.

Aunt Guo continues, dating back to an early wave of escape, which helps me both embed her story against a larger picture and better understand her through her way of seeing things.

> There was one wave of escape before mine. (I escaped in 2004.) A large number of people had escaped to Canada when the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed, before '97.' You must have known this. ... They all had escaped to Canada, and very few to America at that time. I don't know why they all had escaped to Canada. Maybe it's because housing in Canada was cheaper or something. Many people from Hong Kong had purchased houses in Canada. (At that time, houses in Hong Kong were very cheap, probably only from HK$500,000 to HK$1,000,000.) After selling their houses in Hong Kong, they went to Canada to buy houses. The two places might be about the same.

> Working in Canada was not so easy and there were not many job opportunities. So those who had gone, 10 years later, [came back] but had nothing. (Because I taught Mandarin in institutions, I met a group of people who had returned from Canada.) Ten years ago, they, those who had fled, all had been at the upper level of society. When they returned, all the people who had been below them were above them, and the house was gone. Because by that time, [a house] worth HK$ 1,000,000 [ten years ago] was already HK$10,000,000, they couldn't afford to buy one. Their situation was very difficult. It means they had taken a wrong step.
>
> So you see, even when Hong Kong is in such a mess, average people still don't leave; he/she is very cautious and would not leave on the spur of the moment, because many people couldn't 'stand on their feet' after they had left and they had to return. There was really no other way.
>
> Those who now go abroad are mostly students. Nowadays the international schools [in Hong Kong] have lost a great many students, because their parents, for the sake of their children, want them to study abroad, either in the UK, in the U.S., or in Canada. People in Hong Kong have the capability, the economic capability.

Pressed to talk more about the fears that drove her to "escape," particularly where the fears came from, Aunt Guo explains,

> As we are *guolairen* [people who have had certain experiences], we were afraid. But as those young people didn't know … they were not afraid. Why is it now, from '97' until now, that it exploded? ['Now' probably refers to the time since the 2010s.] Because those young people have seen that the Communist Party is taking control of Hong Kong step by step. The government in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is completely a puppet government, entirely controlled by Beijing. If you look at its policies, many of them are not acceptable.

Aunt Guo is of the opinion that "the Communist party did not abide by the Declaration and is persecuting Hong Kong people." She criticizes the fact that the promised referendum in Hong Kong in 2017 was negated by the Beijing government, and that it all changed after only over twenty years after the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed. "The fears are not imagined," declares Aung Guo, pointing out that many people in Hong Kong were caught and some were even taken to the Mainland by the police, and that other acts of violence were carried out by the police in Hong Kong.

Aunt Guo was first settled in the West with her older sister and mother, helping her older sister build a house. In May of the next year, attracted by her father's comment about the "culture" of Boston, she decided to move to the East.

"In America, what else could I do except for babysitting?" Aunt Guo says of her limited options. Her first job was as a live-in babysitter for a Hong Kong woman who wanted to hire someone able to speak and teach Mandarin to her two young children. Four months later, wanting to have her husband over, Aunt Guo switched to a different family who offered a place for both her and her husband. Another four months' later, Aunt Guo was about to change to a family of "foreigners," however, was told by the family her English was not good and was asked to learn English. Therefore, she stopped working and, soon, began to learn English at adult schools.

It turned out that Aunt Guo managed to have finished her second language learning [ESL] in college. She shares her experience in a way that can help guide new Chinese immigrants:

> If there comes a new immigrant, how should he/she learn? Let me tell you. First, you need to go to Chinatown to take a beginning-level class. You need to pay for it. After that—after you can listen—go take a test for the intermediate-level class. The government would give you money. You must follow this path. Many people in Chinese restaurants have done this. The institutions [that provide English classes] are Asian American Civic Association (AACA), Greater Boston Chinese Golden Age Center, Chinese Progressive Association. Many Chinese institutions. …
>
> My grammar was very good (I had gone to high school in China), and once I took the exam, I was at fifth-grade level. But I couldn't understand even one sentence, so I asked them to lower my level to the third-grade level.
>
> I also studied in the church across from my house, for free; I studied for half a year, and it's pretty good … lots of progress. I once paid $100 to a Haitian person for half a year, full-day study. After you have finished this, you will have the opportunity to apply for government money. To apply for government money, you need to do something first. [It is not clear whether what she meant by government money is for college, for the intermediate ESL class, or for something else.]

Aunt Guo emphasizes, “New immigrants like us with a low level of education really should learn English; otherwise, you would really become ‘blind and lame.’”

Aunt Guo points me to her credential, another small example indicating the transition from one system to another:

> I had gone to college in Hong Kong, but it didn’t count. The domestic high school certificate [from Mainland China] must be notarized and authenticated. Because I was low-income, I was eligible for going to the government-paid college. If I had gone to college in China, it wouldn’t have allowed me to study. I had this [benefit].

She reveals her English level, “When my second language [learning] was done, basically my listening and speaking were okay. I didn’t learn much later. Now I can read things, but my speaking isn’t very good.”

During Aunt Guo’s first year in Boston, her father, who was living in Boston, taught her to drive, and she got her driver’s license. Two stories, both related to the language barrier, are elicited from this experience by a question about if she had ever been bullied or discriminated against. One was when she was doing the writing test.

> The Transportation Bureau asked me to fill in my address. Back then I was doing babysitting and didn’t have an address, so I needed to go to the bank … I had already paid $30, and, while halfway through the writing test, was asked to go get my address. When I came back, the class had already changed, and I needed to pay another $30. … This taught me an important lesson. Not knowing English got me *qifu* or bullied, and I was not even able to see it clearly, [because] I had just come.

Another time, when she was asked to present her ID before the road test, somehow she did not understand it, thus she was not allowed to take the test.

> Just for a trivial sentence, he didn’t let me take the test. Don’t you think he’s bad? It meant I had wasted the money for the test. He could have explained to me until I understood. He meant to ask me to take out my ID; it’s not that I couldn’t understand the instructions for the exam. So I took the test three times.

The most difficult obstacle in her life, Aunt Guo summarizes, has been the language.

While learning English, Aunt Guo was financially supported by her daughter—$500 per month—until she had jobs again. Aunt Guo tells how she landed a job by chance, and her other work experiences:

> While learning English in church, one day I encountered in the elevator a black and an Ethiopian who were paying a family visit about bedbugs and cockroaches, etc. They don't speak Chinese, so they asked if I could help with the interpretation. I said yes, and I took them over. Later they said I could go to work with them, so I went to the interview. My English was very poor. (I had finished studying the second language [learning].) I listened and guessed, interviewed Chinese, wrote reports in English, and did some translation. It was $15 per hour … I did it for more than a year.
>
> I also did many other jobs. Once I went to work in a Chinese clinic, helping take out the medical record card, giving it to the doctor, and then putting it back once the doctor was done. I did it for half a year. Why was I asked to do this job? It's for people above age 55. The wage is about $10 [per hour]. I was low-income, thus didn't need to pay rent.

According to Aunt Guo, this was a job provided by an institution that helps [new immigrants] with transition.

> Twenty hours per week. Within half a year, you needed to keep looking for jobs; they wanted you to find a full-time job. If you are 55, you can still work. Before 65 you can still look for jobs. Later I quit as my supervisor was not good. After this I went to college, where I took ESL. I forgot how many times I had studied. (Laughs.)

Aunt Guo continues to share two other work experiences:

> Later, I worked for an organization that supervises public housing, organizing local people to set up a residents' committee. After that, my boss introduced me to Tufts Medical School's research that investigated air pollution. My job, again, was to visit Chinese people and write an English report to foreigners. It was also $15 per hour. I did half a year or so.

Having had several different part-time jobs, Aunt Guo, at a certain point, found herself being in a position where she had to stop. "When I worked to 65, they didn't allow me to work anymore." She explains her situation, embedding it against the pension system in America:

> I wanted to learn and then work in the canteen of a college. (If you go for the training, it would be financially supported by the government; after half a year of training, you can work there.) But he didn't allow me to do it, explaining that I am 65 and therefore I can take money from the government. I hadn't worked enough to earn the 40 points. … How

> to get retirement pension in America? One needs to work at least for 10 years, full time, and then one earns the 40 points. After that, you can get your retirement pension. I can't get mine [by 65] and still need to work; my estimation was I would need to work until 72. At that time I was thinking, 'Wow, I need to work until 72? Would that be possible?' I thought that's impossible. Since he didn't allow me to work anymore and told me to go get money, I did.

Aunt Guo explains that she is an American citizen, thus eligible for receiving money from the government, that what she has received since then is called SSI[10] (Supplemental Security Income), and that it has been eight or nine years. (The amount of SSI she receives has increased from $800 to a bit over $900 per month now, "absolutely enough," she says.)

The place Aunt Guo currently lives in is a Jewish-run apartment located in a suburb specifically for low-income older people; its residents are mostly Jewish and Russian Americans and a relatively small number of Chinese Americans. Content with her living situation, Aunt Guo comments on the good conditions and management of the apartment, a mere one-third rent, the proximity to subways, and the nationally-high-ranking safety of the town.

A long story about Aunt Guo's husband's death emerged when I requested an example for how she overcomes a challenge. Her husband, having suffered a heart attack and high blood pressure, was sent to hospital and, after receiving certain treatments, sadly, passed away, at age 80. Aunt Guo had reasons to strongly believe that the hospital should be responsible for his death. Having wanted to sue the hospital, she eventually gave up, thinking she would not win. The death of her husband affected her deeply.

> After my husband passed away, which was six years ago, I was thinking back then, 'What should I do when I am old? Should I find someone else or what?' I had fears at that time. When I had fears of the future, I became depressed.

---

[10] SSI, "a Federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues (not Social Security taxes)," is "designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people, who have little or no income" and "provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter" (Social Security Administration, n.d.).

She explains her fears,

> Think that I was alone, my daughter was in New York, and I was alone here. What should I do? I would have nobody to rely on. 'What shall I do from then on? Who will I rely on in the future?' I was thinking about these things. Then others told me not to think that much, to go find a boyfriend from online in order to divert the attention. (Laughs.) Later, I experienced depression.

Aunt Guo continues,

> Originally, I didn't know it was depression. I wanted to go to the senior center to sing and dance; but when I visited it, the boss told me that it wouldn't be approved because I was only in my 60s. ... I said I have arthritis, but that wouldn't count. I asked if depression would count. I then went to the doctor, asking for a letter of proof. I kept crying at that time, and I cried all the way to see the doctor. When I got there, the doctor said, 'It's not only that you have depression, your depression is too serious.' So I had the letter and took it to the senior center. The doctor also asked me to see a psychologist. I went to see the assistant. It was very difficult to make an appointment with a psychologist, so I decided to forget it. I took half a pill, and then went to the senior center to dance and swim. It's been five years since then. It was when my husband had been gone for almost one year that I had the depression.
>
> It took Aunt Guo half a year to recover from depression by going to the senior center.

Gradually, she regained her confidence, and the fears and worries about the future were gone. "I can live at least 30 more years, so why am I worried? No need to worry."

The renewed confidence in Aunt Guo seems also to have something to do her passionate exploration of and devotion to traditional Chinese medicine and other health issues, which is another significant effect of her husband's death on her, besides her disbelief in western medicine. Some of the focuses of her interest that she talks about with a great enthusiasm are the nutritional products that can "wake up sleeping stem cells," the "quantum physics," the "frequency vibration." She even found "a sense of mission" after encountering "something that can restore the vision of the blind" which she has planned to promote. "Originally, I didn't seem to have such any sense of mission. I had been busy, doing nothing, but I think this thing is very meaningful."

Despite the fact that she has health insurance, Aunt Guo, due to her distrust for western medicine, rarely goes to see a doctor or takes any medicine. She is "pretty healthy," "having no sickness," believing her "body age" is merely 46, measured by a device she recently discovered. Aunt Guo does not have the concept of old age mentally. She links her sense of age to her subconscious:

> In my subconsciousness, there isn't the concept of 70s. By talking to me, you can probably feel that there is no generational gap between us. It seems that I can talk to 20-year-olds, 40-year-olds, or 10-year-olds, without generational gaps. ... When your subconsciousness is young, everything is young—your thinking, your ideas are very creative, and your actions are very agile. I chase the bus and the subway all day long. … Your consciousness determines your current situation.

Asked about any regret, Aunt Guo sighs. "There doesn't seem to be any great regret. It's a pity that my husband died, he was killed in this way, so now I study Chinese medicine."

Aunt Gou's lengthy telling led me to more about the family dynamic, especially the dynamic within the marriage and its impacts on the children:

> Speaking of marriage, he's a very good person, but you know he didn't even graduate from elementary school and only reached the fourth grade. So the education level and cultural level are different. There are [differences in] some common-sense aspects and abilities. You know, Shanghai women are very capable. For instance, when there's something wrong with water or electricity in the house, it was I who did all the repairs; he didn't know anything. Thus, I became the authority of the family, and the children would not respect him. Sometimes authority is not elevated by others, but because facts are there. For example, when my water tank was broken and they were repairing it, I would learn and ask questions, so that in the future I wouldn't have to pay someone to repair. Or when the refrigerator door was broken. … There surely is a cultural gap between my husband and me, but I married him after I had known him well—he didn't lie to me. So I had never made any belittling remarks about him, I was very polite, but there must have been a little contempt deep in my heart.

More differences are revealed between Aunt Guo and her husband:

> There were many things I wanted to do but he didn't … [He believed] if you don't do anything you wouldn't be wrong, and the more you do, the more mistakes you would make. He was pessimistic while I am optimistic; the two of us were diametrically opposite. Thus, I didn't have an admiration of him. I surely didn't have it, even though he's a very good person.

Aunt Guo continues; in fact, she does admit with emotion a regret about her deceased husband:

> At the beginning, 'the petty intellectual' still had the sentiments of petty intellectuals (laughs). But after he's gone, I regret it. (Silence, then she choked.) He's a good person and I shouldn't have used his education level to measure him. Don't you think so? Actually, a man needs a woman to cultivate him. How do you cultivate him? If you say he is good, you praise him, he'd get better; If you look down on him, he'd get down. Don't you think so? Just like a child, if you say he's stupid, he'd get stupid. In fact, this person does not necessarily have to be the person you admire. As the head of the family, a man should be given a sense of status and honor. Although he liked to listen to compliments, I just didn't want to say any. It made him feel that in the eyes of the children it always seemed that mom is good and capable, so he for sure had a sense of inferiority. So I'm thinking that his heart disease was also a kind of anxiety—that is, he couldn't get a complete love, therefore, lacking it, he got sick. (Silence.)

The marriage had a detrimental effect on the children:

> So my husband beat my daughter(s) every two or three days. My daughter said, 'It's all for you that he beat me.' Because he couldn't beat me, he couldn't lose his temper at me. Of course, a man has his temper; his was vented onto my daughter(s).

Aunt Gou reflects on the marriage again, seeing it from a broader view while sharing a different scenario:

> This tragedy is tantamount to a social tragedy, because if it is not a social tragedy, how could one find a person with such a disparity in terms of culture? Right? At least a high school graduate should match another high school graduate; it would have been impossible for a high school graduate to find a primary school graduate. That would have been impossible. Plus, he was born in the countryside. That is to say, it [the marriage] is entirely for an economic benefit.
>
> Of course, I didn't, um, um, 'cross the river then break the bridge'—I could have used him as a springboard and then, when I arrived in Hong Kong, could have completely thrown him off. But I didn't do this kind of thing, because he was the vulnerable one. If he and I had been equal, I could have left; but he was the vulnerable one, I couldn't get rid of him. If I had dumped him, he would have had nothing—no daughters, no home, nothing. It would have been … How to say it? He would have had nothing left, right? So he was quite satisfied. He said he had merely planned to live to 40 years old, and then he lived until 80; plus, he had two lovely daughters, so he's quite content. But as a man, he didn't become a man—a man should always seem to be the king at home (laughs). He was unable to make it.

Aunt Guo's analysis of her marriage continues, while also shedding light on the lasting trace of the marriage on her daughter(s):

> In fact, people like me are political victims, because it was the political system that caused the economic difficulty, which in turn contributed to such an unreasonable marriage. … The marriage of this kind created such a [tense situation] that made their father beat them.
>
> When she was a child, [mostly like the older daughter,] she felt a little shadow, a psychological shadow, and then she would blame me, saying that it's because I don't love her father. I said, 'If you have found someone today, but you don't like him, it would be hard for you to love.' Don't you think so? At that time, I was not at the current level as now; now I probably would think that since you are married, you should really love. … Because she has the shadow from her childhood, you can see that she is still tossing this or that way; in fact, she is healing her unfortunate childhood.

The question "What, if any, makes you angry?" elicits another layer of Aunt Guo's relationship with her older daughter. "My older daughter's attitudes towards me are quite bad." Apart from feeling overwhelmed by her older daughter's complaints about life, Aunt Guo reveals the dynamic, "She believes she's correct, and I don't have qualifications to persuade her." Feeling confused, I ask about the divergence between them. "She is a Falun Gong [believer]," discloses Aunt Guo. [Falun Gong, founded by Li Hongzhi in 1992, was an exercise and spiritual movement that attracted millions of adherents of Chinese in China and beyond, and then was banned by the Chinese government in 1999 for being an "evil cult," resulting in the detainment of its leaders and adherents who refused to renounce it (Johnson, 2004).] Aunt Guo continues, "It's a dualism; everything is [seen] outward. I can't say anything, because she maintains she's a practitioner … I pity her; she's harming herself. Fortunately, our political views are still consistent." Aunt Guo also felt "pushed" by her older daughter in terms of belief, which in contrast, she does not feel from her younger daughter.

From her observation of her (older) daughter, Aunt Guo reflects:

> My daughter is very smart, and pretty as well, but it seems her life is not very smooth, for example, on the issue of her boyfriend. What's the reason? Emotions. One must be able to control one's emotions. The cultivation in this area is very critical. Emotions will determine one's destiny.

As for her political participation and political views, Aunt Guo tells me that she voted in 2016 for Trump. By the time of the interview, the political issues she feels particularly strong about are issues about Hong Kong and about the 2020 presidential election in America. The latter, she believes, involved a scam.

Reflections

To compare her life with her mother's and daughters' lives, Aunt Guo reflects:

> My mom's main issue is that her marriage didn't go well, as if she were a victim. She thought she was a victim. Of course, the economic conditions at that time were … If it had been our current economic conditions, people could have separated if they didn't get along, right? In the past, it was very difficult for you to separate, unless one would have raised two children and the other would have raised two other children. But if she's not willing to give the children to him, it was really difficult to do it by herself. She was quite bleak and had never had a good life.

Asked if her mom had remained single, Aunt Guo confirms, "Yes. How could it have been possible for her to re-find someone, with four children and not good looking? That's absolutely nothing to think about."

Talking about her own life, Aunt Guo summarizes, "I know at least what I want to do, and I can do whatever I want." As for the comparison of her life with her daughters, Aunt Guo comments,

> The education they received in Hong Kong and in the U.S. is certainly very good. Mine is out of touch; the domestic education [in China] is useless here. [But] They can connect [their education] with here. My younger daughter works as a primary school teacher in Hong Kong, belongs to the government staff, so her income is very good. Now she does not go to school to work during the epidemic, but she has always been paid. If it is another job, she might be unemployed, with no income. Her life is pretty good.

To the question, "Do you see yourself first as a Chinese or Asian and then a woman, or the other way around?" Aunt Guo says, "I don't have these concepts. There's no need to fight for something specifically for the Chinese; just to fight for fairness. For example, it is wrong for people to take special care of black people for fairness; as long as we Chinese have good grades,

we should still enter universities according to the grades. This is what it should be, not aimed at Chinese but all the same for Americans. That is to say, there is no need to fight for some benefits specifically for the Chinese. No, it is the whole; I am an American."

In response to my question about how Chinese women are viewed by other racial/ethnic groups, Aunt Guo says, "I haven't considered women's issues." Mentioning the name of a second-generation Chinese American who was in a power position in federal government, she reasons, "The status of Chinese women should be quite high, right?"

Aunt Guo is aware of the intragroup gap among Chinese immigrants. Responding to my question about the perceptions of other racial/ethnic groups about Chinese, she says,

> There're two kinds of Chinese: one kind of Chinese, like you, come to study and then stay, belonging to a higher level. Basically, they are integrated into America, and they live in noble neighborhoods, not Chinese neighborhoods. There are also some who live in the Chinese neighborhoods, maybe the older ones, maybe those who came 50 years or decades ago, um. They came to open restaurants, or something. The earlier generation. Or those from the countryside, and those who came smuggled. Those may be in a lower level. These people would go to church to get relief items. This may not give a good impression of the Chinese. They are completely two types of people. Don't you think so? One is people in noble neighborhoods, and the other is people with low-income.

Aunt Guo believes that "In fact, those people with low-income are not short of money. I even worry that they have nowhere to spend money." She explains,

> If they are non-citizens, the government would support each person $300 or $400 for a couple. This is the lowest. Then they would also have food stamps, free health insurance, and only need to pay dozens of or $100 for rent. Then they would keep going to church to get something to eat. Hence, I'd say their money is nowhere to be used.

Seeing it as "wasteful of resources," Aunt Guo concludes that "in America, those poor people have a really good life."

As for the opportunities she has in her life, Aunt Li reflects, "Going to Hong Kong was such a big opportunity. Then coming to America was also an opportunity. From the perspective of freedom, people in China are envious. Don't you think so?" She continues, "Look, what we

are talking about can be said here. Would you dare to say so when you go to China? No, you wouldn't dare to say it, to say these nonsenses[11]. This freedom is the greatest freedom. This freedom is *yaoming* or gravely significant."

When asked what life is like from her—a 74-year-old woman's—perspective, Aunt Guo, instead of responding to my inquiry, asks me back about my understanding of the meaning of life. I shared my journey briefly including my intellectual and political interests. Sensing my critical views about the Chinese society, she comments on the commonality between us, which seems to elicit more from her. She mentions that her friends in China cannot see her posts in WeChat whereas her friends in America can. "Two systems within one group," she declares. "There's no freedom of speech. So no matter how hard it was, I had to go to Hong Kong, just for the 'free air' … What could you have said during the Cultural Revolution? You couldn't tell the truth, you would have been in trouble if you had said it." She also makes a distinction: "The difference between a regime, a political party and a country. 'Betrayal of a country,' in fact, is not a country that is betrayed, but a regime. A regime 'represents' a country."

In response to my curiosity about whether she feels she can control her life, Aunt Guo sounds quite sure. "I can, especially now, more capable." She relates it to her understanding of age.

> Confucius said, one should be independent at 30, *buhuo* or wise at 40, understand one's fate at 50, *ershun* or enjoy everything at 60 and be unbounded at 70. At 60, I didn't reach '*ershun*.' At 50, I didn't reach '*buhuo*.' But when I turned 70, I did feel '*buhuo*' and '*ershun*.' The so-called '*er shun*' means that no one can irritate me anymore, and I won't be angry however you scold me. This is called '*ershun*.' '*Sui xin suo yu*' means you can

[11] I must add that on a daily basis, people in China today are largely free to talk and act as they please, so what Aunt Guo shared above does not stand entirely, especially in a circumstance of the kind like the communication in person between her and me. On the other hand, there exists a subtle line between danger and non-danger, between "excessive caution and carelessness" (Johnson, 2004, p. 22). If the regime feels threatened, it will use its institutions in place for suppression (Johnson, 2004).

> do whatever you want. For example, I study Chinese medicine or do some things about health issues. I now have a sense of mission. In the past, I never knew 'What have I done in my life and what contribution(s) have I made to mankind?' Now, instead, I can think about 'What can I do?' In other words, age is not an obstacle. If I think I have at least 30 years left, I'm not in a hurry; if I think I have 10 years to live, it will be over soon, right? There are many things you can do in 30 years, right?

It sounds to me that 70 is like a front Aunt Guo has crossed. I also note that she sees her age in a way that measures her relationship with the future.

To describe herself, Aunt Guo points me to her name, saying she is like what her name implies: "*xiaoyao* and *kuaihuo* or unfettered and happy, *anyi junzi* or an easy gentlewoman." ("Xiaoyao" is a Taoist concept.) She also regards herself as highly adaptive—able to sleep either on a "very luxurious bed" or "on the floor," "totally without any feelings, not at all," because of so many changes from such a young age and thus a "very fluctuating life." After hearing me admiring her for having experienced so much, Aunt Guo reacts, "Not really. I accomplished nothing, nothing." I then pointed to the various times and three different societies she has lived through. Aunt Guo concludes, "I went from Shanghai to Hong Kong at the age of 32, then spent 25 years in Hong Kong, and then came here. (How long has it been? 16 years.) One [life] divided into three."

CHAPTER VI: INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter looks across the four individual women's stories for further understanding, interpretation, and analysis. Presented in nine themes as below, it offers a provisional reading from the point of view of my "here and now" at the time of the interviews.

Theme 1: History and Memory

Among the four women in this study, one was born in 1947 and three in 1954, thus, it is probably safe to say that they are from the same cohort who grew up and came of age in Maoist era. As told in their stories, their earliest memories go back to as early as the 1950s. Their telling altogether touches on several historical events, spanning from the Anti-Rightist Movement (1957–1958, mentioned by Aunt Guo), the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962, mentioned by Aunt Li and Aunt Guo), the Great Famine (1958–1962, mentioned by Aunt Li and Aunt Guo), "Zhenbaodao accident" (in 1962, mentioned by Feng), the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976, mentioned by all of them), and China's admission into the United Nations (in October 1971, mentioned by Feng). In 1966 when the "ten-year-turmoil"—Cultural Revolution—began, three of them turned 12 except Aunt Guo who was 19; also, they witnessed the fundamental social change in post-Mao's China—the Reform and Open Era—since the end of 1978. (Aunt Guo left Mainland China in 1979, relatively earlier than the other three women.) Experienced by the women individually and/or collectively, these historical, political, and economic backgrounds embed their life journeys.

As a researcher born one year after the Cultural Revolution had ended, I had no direct experiences with the historical events mentioned by the women, nor did I experience the reform era in the same way as did three of them. Before the interviews, my knowledge about the contemporary Chinese history, including the historical events that emerged from the women's

stories, primarily came from my intentional exploration—relearning and unlearning—during my last years while in China and, primarily, in the 10 years I have been in the U.S. One thing to note, which is also a part of my own learning, is that history in China has been and still is largely been silenced, voluntarily or forcibly, or distorted. Thus, it remains largely, if not entirely, unknown or at best, known as hollow names to the public within China, including many of my cohort, not to mention the cohort younger than I.

I will take my own experience as an example, as this is what I know best. Among the historical events mentioned by the women, the Cultural Revolution was the focus of my first exploration, mainly because it was close to the year of my birth. The version I had learned from history class and textbooks was an oversimplified one: "It was mistakenly launched by Mao Zedong, taken advantage by anti-revolutionary groups, and resulted in disastrous effects to the party, the country, and the people" (The Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1981). This official version has held its place till today: Mao and his position has never been really challenged; his heroic activities have always been highly recognized and his thoughts have continued to be part of the guiding theory of the party. I cannot remember exactly how and when I started to try to locate myself, especially the year of my birth, in the historical spectrum in contemporary China, but I do remember one specific moment; it must have been in my late twenties when I began to be awakened by the stories of the incarcerated women I was interviewing. While reading a book of the collection of conversations by the writers and artists from the older generation, a rare one that was allowed to be published, I was shocked to read that one writer recalled that he, an urban youth sent to a remote rural area, when hearing the news about Mao's death from the radio, found himself smiling secretly. The behavior of such kind seemed subversive to me and made me wonder why he was smiling rather than showing grief

like most others. (I cannot remember where I had got the impression that everyone felt sad about Mao's death.) This moment, like a crack, sparked my questioning of the official history and, gradually, led me to explore a past different from what I had learned.

In fact, my exploration of history met disappointment and frustration originated from the gap I felt between my parents—at the same age as Aunt Guo—and me. For instance, the topic of the Cultural Revolution rarely appeared in our interactions. My intentional probing merely elicited a very limited account from my mother in which she sounded innocent. My father never really talked about it. Also, I remember once I tried to confirm with him whether it was true or not that there were people eating others during the early 1960s, a fact I discovered in a book that shocked me greatly. But he immediately refused the topic at all, which made me feel that it was taboo and that I should never question it again. The experience with my parents of this kind left me unsatisfied with what I was told about their life history. Also, I came to realize that people who surrounded me—either my friends or my former colleagues—and who belong to the same cohort as I, seemed uninterested in this historical event. All this had led me to reflect on "why" and to further my intentional exploration of history which has been deepened and expanded since I came to the U.S., given the accessible materials including those forbidden in China.

I should mention that what is unwritten is as significant as what is written. This study covers the stories of four women who were urban residents and who, along with their families, survived a series of political and societal events in and under Maoist communism—including the Anti-rightist Movement, the Great Leap Forward, the Great Famine, and the Cultural Revolution. What is not written in this study are the stories of millions of people who or whose family, for myriad reasons, suffered in different ways or did not survive those periods of time. For instance, while urban residents, like Aunt Guo in this study and her family, were provided food rations by

the state in the Maoist era, those who lived in rural areas were left to fend for themselves. Consequently, during the Great Famine (1958–1962), among the harrowing unnecessary deaths of tens of millions, a stunningly large percentage occurred in rural areas (Dikötter, 2010a; J. Yang, 2012).

Although this study does not have the purpose of retelling the historical events, their presence in the women's telling demands my attention and contemplation. I found myself wondering: How do the women's stories contribute to the understanding of the historical events? Do the women's accounts confirm, contradict, or supplement the existing materials? If what the women shared of a specific historical event is largely consistent with the existing materials, should I dive into those parts in details in my analysis or should I merely mention them briefly? Or put differently, what is the value of the accounts of the historical events by the women? How many materials are "enough" for understanding a specific historical event? What does the telling of the historical events mean to each woman, to others, and to me? How does their telling contribute to my previous knowledge of the historical events? Is there any continual relevance of the past to today? If so, what is it?

Without intending to provide—nor do I have—neat answers to all the questions posed above, as a researcher from a younger cohort than the women, I would like to start with reflecting on my learnings from the women's accounts of history. Aware of the differences of age and of life experiences between the women and me, I listened carefully. As told in their stories, history, interwoven with ordinary people's lives, becomes alive. The significance of the remembered history in the women's telling can be understood from a few perspectives.

First, the distinct contrast between telling and silence. As mentioned earlier, there is an omnipresent silence and apathy about history throughout China, which has involved and

impacted different generations. What happened when I was trying to find people here to interview for this study was, surprisingly and yet unsurprisingly, the denial and/or avoidance of telling the past, thus the reluctance of participating in the study, maybe due to the fear of the Communist control. It is relevant to know that the surveillance of any dissenting voice from the Communist party goes beyond its national border to abroad, and that, among the Chinese abroad, there is a strong sense of nationalism and patriotism. It might also be that they are cautious not to cause any harm to any remaining (even distant) family members in China. Seen in this light, particularly the light of silence, the women's stories here and now are of significance.

Second, history and voice. Among the various existing materials about the historical events in the Maoist era, particularly the Cultural Revolution that all the women in this study experienced, the groups most often mentioned in relation to this period are the intellectuals, official leaders, red guards, urban youths; comparatively, the attention to the very most ordinary people is still lacking. (Two examples of work that cast its attention to ordinary people: one is the book titled *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962–1976*, by Dikötter (2016a), that brings together the broader historical event with the stories of ordinary people; the other is a compelling and moving documentary titled *Summary of Crimes* by Chinese documentary maker Xu Xing (2014), in which he interviewed fourteen peasants in Zhejiang Province who were wronged and put in prison during the Cultural Revolution for different types of crimes.) Seen from the perspective of the relationship between history and voice, particularly whose voice is lacking, the four women's telling assumes its meaning.

Third, subjectivity as agency. Given that all of the women in the study grew up and came of age in the Maoist era, it is critical to identify what Maynes et al. (2008) point out, the intersection of the individual and the society, especially how the historical event marked the

individual's life course, how the subjectivity and psychological complexity played out, and how the historical content becomes an element of the narration and interpretation of their and others' life stories. Actually, the theme of the individual versus state power is a focus in most oral histories of totalitarianism, such as those of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (Crownshaw & Leydesdorff, 1992). In such works, the developments of oral histories have moved beyond "filling in the gaps in official histories, saying what could not be said for political reasons, or finding ways to speak the traumatically unspeakable" to "a means of understanding the relationship between subjectivity, memory, and totalitarianism" (Crownshaw & Leydesdorff, 1992, p. xv). In the introduction to *Memory and Totalitarianism*, Passerini (1992) highlights the importance not only of analyzing the subjective experience of a totalitarian system but of differentiating the subjectivities across different systems or even under the same system. To borrow these insights, I would consider whether the women's lives were homogenized under Maoist communism, and if not, how the same regime has affected each differently. In the light of subjectivity and agency, the women's telling, individually, is worth close attention. I would consider, for instance, if each saw herself as a witness, a victim, a participant, or the combination of two or three of those perceptions; how each negotiated a sense of moral agency and autonomy under circumstances of an authoritarian regime and/or later as an immigrant into the U.S.; or if each individual woman embodies a sense of historical consciousness.

It might be worth thinking further, if the four women's stories are looked at together, whether there is experiential overlap as a "Mao" generation. Mannheim (as cited in Andrews, 2007) stated that where an individual belongs in the historical spectrum matters; the life stage of youth yields a particular force of influence on subsequent political development; "a cohort (individuals who share the same year of birth bears a common location in the historical

dimension of the social process) can become transformed into a generation only when they are bound together with a shared group consciousness and mobilize as an active force for political change" (p. 58). In light of Mannheim's perspective, women's stories merit space and contemplation.

Fourth, the nature of the regime in China. The women's remembered history reveals the coercive nature of the system under Mao's rule, which has a continual relevance to the following period through today, embodied, for instance, in the omnipresence of the "state effect," in the state's ruthless and determined eradication of the suspected threatening factors, or in the nationwide indoctrination—and study—of one man's words as if they are the truth. Seen from this perspective, the women's telling calls for attention.

Taking into consideration the above four aspects, I reengage into the women's stories, particularly the stories about their lives in China.

Theme 2: The Interplay of the Individual and the History of the Maoist Era

Listening to the living memory of women in this study about Maoist China, attention is paid to what is (chosen to be) remembered and how, and what is not remembered. To a large extent, what emerged from their accounts about the Maoist era is consistent with and adds to what I have explored about the history of this period. A few common themes that emerged include the hardship of survival, the disrupted schooling, women's participation as paid labor force and other aspects of life, the pervasive violence, and class labels and class struggle.

The Hardship of Survival

As the most pressing issue that confronted almost every average family at that time, survival seems to be a common theme that emerged from three women's stories. While this is the

history that almost every older Chinese knows, the women's stories, individually and collectively, tell us specifically what it felt like or what it meant for them and their families

In Linda's telling, her childhood memory includes her "digging wild vegetables" and her parents' hard labor mom's hard work of carrying heavy tobacco bags, each probably with 50–60 kilograms' weight. Aunt Li describes the era as a time when "everybody was the same," which points to the radical egalitarian nature of Communism. Her earliest memory goes back to the time of the Great Leap Forward and the famine (1958–1962) when "[E]veryone smashed pots and irons, had no food to eat. There were a few grains of rice in a pot of water. That was the day." Impressively, today, over six decades later, she still remembers that her mom would go to the field to pick up soybeans, and shares a vivid family anecdote in which she, as a little kid, "stole" the soybeans her mother had put away. She also remembers that her father spent ¥100 to buy a watch, a detail I did not include in her story, though she cannot recall the exact year. Aunt Guo also talks about the hardship at that time and how her family managed it by food coupons, support from her aunt in Hong Kong, and taking the leftovers from the civil aviation guest house where she and her family stayed.

Seen together, these detailed recollections reflect the economic difficulty in and under the communist China in Mao's era, particularly during the Great Leap and the famine, and how their families managed to survive. I remember feeling impressed that to this day, Aunt Guo, in her 70s, can still remember sharply and with rich details what was in the soups. A similar feeling ensued from my reading of the accounts of older Chinese rural women about their lives in the 1950s when interviewed by Hershatter (2011) in 1996, four decades later. I have found myself wondering: Is it because they had suffered deeply during the disruptive and disastrous time that they remembered the specifics so well that their memories have not faded even six decades later?

(Interestingly, a small story emerged while I am writing this part: while in graduate school almost two decades ago, a professor of mine shared in class one day what communism had previously meant for him—that someday he could have fried rice.)

The Disrupted Schooling

All four women remember that their schools—in different locales—were disrupted during the Cultural Revolution, as did all others in their cohort. Linda had to start working at fourteen and did not have a chance to go to college until 25, 11 years later. Aunt Guo's schooling stopped after she had just finished high school, which she continued while in Hong Kong. Feng's detailed account of her middle school life heavily colored by the revolution is quite revealing; it is particularly striking that she can still recite the revolutionary slogans in Russian today.

These women's accounts about the suspended and disrupted school experiences links up to the loss that goes beyond the specific historical time. Imagine that this entire cohort would soon enter the society, performing various jobs in all walks of life—politics, business, academia, industry, etc. As I am writing as a researcher from a younger cohort, I recall my prior interaction with the older cohort on a daily basis at home, school, and work unit, some of whom, decades later, still held the mindset of and used the language from the Maoist era, like Linda's peers in China who were referred to and critically viewed in Linda's account.

Women's Participation as Paid Labor Force and Other Aspects of Life

Another common theme about the four women's experiences in the Maoist era is the fact that they were all working women: a lathe factory worker (like Aunt Guo), a translator (like Feng), a dancer (like Aunt Li), or a tobacco factory worker first, then a teacher (like Linda). The phenomenon of women's widespread participation in paid labor is consistent with the literature explored in Chapter II. As Feng shared, "women support half of the sky" (Mao's words) was one

of the dominant doctrines. One is reminded that it was an era when the revolution promised gender equality with a claim that women were "freed" from "inner" to "outer" domains, that in state-provided language the latter was "privileged as the domain of paid work, political visibility, and liberation" (Hershatter, 2011, p. 287).

Women in this study did not give in their stories many details about their work experiences in Mao's era except for what their jobs were. Aunt Li's experience as a dancer was entirely absent, which puzzled me as I thought dance was where her passion lay and which I imagined must have been heavily colored by the discourse of "revolution." So was Linda's work experience as a factory worker and/or as a teacher. In Aunt Guo's account, the 11-year-long work experience as a lathe worker in a factory is brief followed by her comment on hardship in life: "Life was difficult at that time, extremely difficult." The understatement uttered by Aunt Guo is gripping; although it does not provide a full account of her work life, it provokes one's imagination.

The feminization of heavy labor emerged both explicitly and implicitly in women's accounts. In Linda's story, her mother had to carry tobacco bags each weighing 50–60 kms. In Feng's case, as she mentioned, the heavy labor she performed while on a farm involved shoveling dirt, cleaning the pig tiles, or planting rice seedlings in freezing water, and slaughtering pigs. In Aunt Guo's case, that she mentioned the unavailability of the job as a lathe worker in Hong Kong out of the protection of women implies that her job was heavy labor. All this is consistent with the literature explored in Chapter II.

The relation between work or revolution and personal issues was made clear in Feng's account: "Revolution and career always came first. Personal issues were trivial matters."

This is a small example of the presence of the dominant discourse of "revolution" in one's life—the individual should surrender him/herself to the grand revolution. It reflects, indirectly, what Dikötter (2010a) stated regarding the relationship between the state and the individual—the former was everything, and the latter nothing. (It is also my life experience that the individual under the party-state merited little even into the first decade of the twentieth century when I was still there.)

One way to understand women's work life is to see it in light of the whole structure of their lives at the time. In fact, under the name of "revolution," the domestic realm, in state language, was seen as "residual, uninteresting, slated to wither away at some undefined future moment" (Hershatter, 2011, p. 287), and, in general, as women's responsibilities. The topic of their domestic life in China, I noted, did not emerge from women's accounts (except from Feng's account about her parents). It leaves in question whether this has something to do with the impacts of the then state language on the women who do not have language (except from the dominant one) to talk about it or whether they absorbed the state language and thought the domestic realm was too uninteresting to share.

Another aspect of urban life, artificially differentiated from other parts of life, is what might be simplified as "political study." Since the early years of PRC, such political study was organized through one's worksite on a weekly basis (Hershatter, 2019b), and, during the Cultural Revolution, seemed to have penetrated into every corner of the society and people's daily life—either at home, school, or worksite, woven with the cult of personality (Dikötter, 2016a). The then ideologically penetrated daily life is reflected in the women's accounts, including Feng's well-remembered political slogans, Aunt Guo's brief mentioning about such activity at her worksite, and Aunt Li's remembering of the daily family scene. In Aunt Li's account, her

parents would go out for meetings at night (which was quite common at that time); the whole family, before dinner, would "line up and dance, facing Mao's picture," and "call out a few quotations from Chairman Mao," in order to show their "loyalty." One might wonder, "To what extent did women in this study—three as teenagers and one as young adult at that time—take in and believe in all this ideological indoctrination?"

A brief word about the continuity of the urban life between the Maoist era and the following decades until now: While the daily political ritual at home narrated by Aunt Li has become the past, political study is still part of life, organized through one's work site.

The Pervasive Violence

The scene of violence, in various forms and at different levels, experienced directly or indirectly, surfaced in all four women's accounts, brief or lengthy, ranging from the fights between the opposing factions to persecution, detainment, heavy manual labor, and to the potential risks of being outside. In Linda's vivid account, such as "the wealthy were tied up with thick ropes, hung up and beaten ... an iron board hanging from the neck of the 'rightist' or the 'capitalist roaders;' the board was heavy, having two holes [on each side] and a thin iron wire through the holes, and the neck was bleeding" the violence sounds pervasive and arbitrary, echoing the voices of many survivors who went through and survived the political campaigns under the Maoist era (Hu, 2010). In Aunt Li's account, violence is reflected not only by the facts of death and weapon-making, but by the potential risks that her parents were trying to avoid by keeping the children at home. In Aunt Guo's remembered experiences, there was the detainment of her father in the late 1950s who was made to write self-criticisms. She also mentions seeing students beating a teacher to death during the ten-year turmoil. [This was not a single case; one can find the first case of that kind that is made into a documentary *Though I was Dead* (Hu,

2006).] In Feng's story, one is led to take a glimpse of a formerly high official, apparently persecuted and treated badly for being a "class enemy," performing heavy manual labor.

No doubt, the examples here are merely a few out of the numerous, far less than complete. Having learned about the violence, chaos, and mass hysteria, I found myself wondering about the impacts of witnessing violence on the individual, like these women, as teenagers or young adults. Unable to find answer in the women's accounts, I turn to other materials to understand better the nature of violence and imagine what it was like for the women, as teenagers or young adults experiencing violence.

Interestingly, both Chinese American writers Moying Li (2008) and Eberlein (2020), of the same cohort as three women in this study, recount the ending of their childhood, both related to their experiences with death. In her memoir written decades later in America, M. Li (2008) says, "[M]ost people cannot remember when their childhood ended. I, on the other hand, have a crystal-clear memory of that moment. It happened one night in the summer of 1966, when my elementary school headmaster hanged himself" (p. 42). Eberlein (2020) was 12 in 1968 when her older sister, a Red Guard and a middle-school student, in an effort to follow Mao's famous swim, drowned at 16. In an interview, she shared (Eberlein, n.d.),

> For three decades after her death in 1968, I couldn't bear to look back at that summer, yet the wound in my heart was never healed. It was after 9/11 I finally began to write a memoir piece about her. I cried constantly when I was writing and revising it. (para. 7)

Published in 2006, the memoir piece titled *Swimming with Mao* tells about the happenings within the family following the tragedy (Eberlein, 2020):

> My childhood ended at twelve, in July 1968. It became my duty to guard my grandmother, who was already seventy-five, from knowing that Ruo-Dan was dead. Mother thought it would kill grandmother, and I knew how much she loved her first granddaughter. Ruo-Dan's death also had to be concealed from my little sister because you can't prevent a six-year-old from speaking the truth. When Grandma and my two sisters came back from the countryside a month later, my mother and I told them

> Ruo-Dan had joined the army and was stationed in faraway Xinjiang, a province in the northwest of China. Mother asked me to compose letters from Ruo-Dan and to read them to my illiterate grandmother. Writing those imaginary letters from a dear sister I had just lost filled me with resentment that I could not quite articulate. For years I was bitter, but I never failed to carry out my duty. (para. 53)

In reflection, Eberlein (n.d.) called attention to the issue of "the relationship between idealism and violence:" "The strong idealism of the young generation of Chinese that became the Red Guards" and "[Y]et the fact remains that the Red Guards did commit numerous acts of violence" (para. 4). Lin Da (2011) reveals that violence was not confined to Red Guards; rather, it involved a large number of ordinary people and happened widely in the cities—in almost every work unit, neighborhood, and school—and almost every village in rural areas, and that all this was exercised under the name of "revolution." Writer and documentary maker Xu Xing (personal conversation, May 20, 2016,) critically commented about violence in my interview of him (in Mandarin) a couple of years ago: "All this violence was actually justified under the name of 'justice,' because they [people who were targeted] were 'class enemies.' In fact, violence is not just at all. But it was justified, giving violence a just reason." A metaphor he used to describe the psychology of the viewer of violence is "violence is actually like taking drugs." He explained it by describing his experience as a 10-year-old boy when the Cultural Revolution began:

> Why did I say it's like taking drugs? On one hand, for kids at our age, we were all afraid; on the other hand, we couldn't stop watching because we were too curious. It's like an addiction. Wherever there's *pidou* [public shaming] or arguing, a group of children would run to there and watch, though we were afraid. I feel this is very interesting—violence, how people accept it, how different ages of people see it. I can tell from adults' face that they were horrified too as they couldn't tell when the violence would fall on themselves. Everybody was terrified. Kids were both anxious and scared; it's hard to resist the temptation of watching because of the attraction of violence.

Like Linda's, Xu Xing's remembering richly filled with details five decades later impressed me. Particularly, his analysis of the viewer's psychology is penetrating. One might be surprised to hear from a survivor's story, for instance, in documentary *From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in*

China (1979), that the beating was all right, compared to the torture of mind and that it was the latter—along with humiliation—that was most unbearable and that made some people commit suicide (Lerner, 1979). The violence of that time seemed to have reached to the lowest point of humanity, stirring up all the evil in that regime. One lasting consequence of the deluge of violence of the Cultural Revolution, observed by Xu Xing, is a common tendency throughout today's Chinese society that people, especially the older cohort, often resort to violence to problem-solving (Wei & Qiao, 2012). To him, part of the impact of witnessing violence at a young age is reflected in the fact that he integrated his experience and reflection into his works—both in his writings over two decades later, and in his documentaries, even later (Wei & Qiao, 2012; X. Xing, personal communication, May 20, 2016).

In a program made in Hong Kong in 2016 in response to the 50th anniversary of the Cultural Revolution, part of its reflection leads to the relationship between violence and its theoretical support—the so-called "class struggle theory" which created "enemies" and made people fight against one another (Y. Yang, 2016a).

Class Labels and Class Struggle

The concept of "class" emerged explicitly from three women's accounts. Both Linda and Aunt Guo mentioned the "right class"—peasants, workers, and soldiers; by contrast, there were people, like the older man in Feng's story, who were labeled as "class enemies"—which referred to five groups of people: landowners, wealthy peasants, the anti-revolutionaries, rightists, and bad elements (H. Gao, 2006; Hu, 2010; D. Lin, 2011); the social status of intellectuals, mentioned by Feng, was "low," labeled as "stinking nineth."

One has to know that under Mao's rule, people were assigned class labels that were "inheritable through the patriline" (Hershatter, 2019b, note 5), thus in most cases one's class

status was fixed, except that women could change their class labels via marriage, for instance, by marrying into a poor peasant family. The fixing of class labels had long-lasting effects (Hershatter, 2019b): Categories such as "landlord" in place could influence subsequent generations even long after landlordism as a social phenomenon had actually disappeared; a woman might still be gossiped about as "a landlord's daughter" even after she had married to the poor. More importantly, the class line between "right" and "wrong" was distinct—people who did not belong to the "right" class became the targets of "class struggle" which, as known by everyone at that time, had been used as a dominant guidance according to Mao's directive (H. Gao, 2006; Hu, 2010). As history evolved, not until December 1978 did the party officially stop using Mao's guiding directive about "class struggle" (Hu, 2010).

The individual women in this study experienced the impact of the dominant class "ideology" differently. Among other women, Aunt Guo's family, as she told, did not belong to the "right class" because of her father who, although "had escaped the 'rightist' [label]," was "on the fringe of the rightist. Back then he had been taken onto the stage to be denounced." Aunt Guo's detailed telling offered a light in understanding the Cultural Revolution through her family's, particularly her father's, experience; also, her reflections revealed her position as a daughter, who was both a victim and a participant, and perhaps, her gradual departure from the dominant discourse. At another moment, "the theory of class origin" emerged explicitly from her telling: "You can't say '[I]f the father is a hero, his son is also a hero; if the father is a reactionary, his son is a bastard.'"

I remember feeling surprised at hearing Aunt Guo's telling of her experience with arguing with "the other faction" against the "class theory;" this seems to contradict the knowledge I had learned about that period of history— there was the pervasive fear and great

caution in people, because even a careless utterance or action could cause a disaster, not to mention questioning. Using Xu Xing's words, "[Q]uestioning was a crime" and thus there was no possibility for questioning or not believing (personal communication, May 20, 2016; Wei & Qiao, 2012). There were cases of the very few courageous individuals—such as Zhang Zhixin (see J. Wang, 2012), Lin Zhao (see Hu, 2005), and Yu Luoke (iSun TV, 2020)—who did question and who ended up being executed, paying a high price with their lives. As for Aunt Guo's arguing with others about the class theory, as a researcher, I consciously let her story unfold in her own perspective and truth, while acknowledging the distinction between what others have identified as historical factual truth and subjective truth (Andrews, n. d.; Josselson, 2014). I am also reminded that one way to treat narrative inconsistencies—which is data itself—is to consider what we might learn from them (Hershatter, 2011). Perhaps what is important to Aunt Guo is her critical position about the "class theory" or sharing her critical position with me.

The "class theory" seemed to have a different practical meaning for Linda who would make friends with whoever was popular. It reveals how in practice her grasp of the "class" concept—which went beyond Maoist time to the reform-era—shaped the way she navigated the society through her intentional affiliation.

In Feng's case, she recounted a story about the interaction between her, then an urban youth sent to the countryside, and a "class enemy." As she named it, what she experienced was "a conflict between humanity and party character" due to two divergent teachings: One is to "fight with feudalism, capitalism and revisionism and to build a society for the proletarians" and to "draw a clear line from the 'class enemy;'" the other is her upbringing "filled with living examples of caring and kind people both at home and in the society." Feng also remembered once when the older man kindly reminded her that it was time to eat, he was, however, scolded

by the team leader, “Don’t corrupt the revolutionary teenager!” Such an experience, as Feng said, “was hard to process and had relatively large impact on me at the time.”

Feng’s inner struggle reveals the presence of the prevailing discourse about “revolution” and “class enemy,” and its impacts on her as an individual. The ambivalence she experienced about whether to treat the older man either as a “class enemy” in the name of “proletariat revolution” or as another human being seems to indicate that she did not take a position of blind belief or total surrendering to what was around her. It might also partly account for her sense of liberation after the Cultural Revolution ended, which will be mentioned later.

As shared in women’s narratives, the way people were categorized in the Maoist era created a social hierarchy, which not only determined one’s social and political status and the family’s fate, but forcibly (re)arranged and shaped social relations. People often treated each other (even among friends and family members) merely on grounds of one’s political stance—an imposed identity, a reduction of a whole person to one category: enemy or not, forgetting that others are also one’s colleagues, fellow Chinese or fellow human beings.

While the concept of “class struggle” has had no relevance for four decades now, perhaps a lingering relevance for today is, borrowing the insights of Sen’s (2004) shared in an interview, related to his experience as a child seeing the Hindu-Muslim riots in the 1940s, “[H]ow easy it is to make people forget their reasoning and the understanding of the basic plurality of their identities in favor of one fierce identity” (para. 42).

Seen in a different light, the dominance of class labels in public discourse in the Maoist era has implications for naming and understanding the reality at the time (Hershatter, 2019b). It means, as Hershatter (2019b) reveals, that “no language of class was available to express the emergent relationships of inequality, for instance between city and countryside, cadre and

worker, village leader and peasant" (note 5), or "the naming of other inequalities, such as those of gender, difficult to articulate" (note 5). It is my own experience that the lack of language of class has actually continued through the reform-era when class labels and "class struggle" had long been discarded and the gulf of urban/rural divide has been persistent.

Theme 3: The Individual and the Society in the Reform-Era

While the political system has remained much the same in nature, China has gone through profound societal and economic changes in the reform-era starting from the late 1970s. The experiences of women in this study during this period of time reflect the changes in general and, in particular, what it meant for them individually. Both Linda and Aunt Li, like many others, found new career opportunities and chose to revise their career paths in a way they wanted, which led to the increased material freedom and "a sense of accomplishment." Feng's narrative about a sense of liberation in her inner world is also typical to her cohort as a whole: "I felt the parts in me that are beauty-loving, kind-hearted to all people were relieved. Instead of always repressing my natural feelings, I began to enjoy what life presents me, especially the love for my daughter."

These examples speak to many other cases that reveal the societal changes particularly with regard to people's increased living standards and the loosened control of personal life. In addition, these women's emigration from Mainland China, like millions of others', were possible only after the society became relatively more "open."

The chosen examples reveal the interplay of the individual and the society, which accounts for women's distinctive journeys. They also show the directions of the influences of the individual and the society, which go in both directions. A reminder for the reader is that women in this study were urban residents, which implies they, in addition to having different daily

activities, often enjoyed more possibilities than their counterparts in the countryside, given the persistent huge disparity between city and countryside. Very likely, the possibility of transnational marriage—that Aunt Li and Aunt Guo had and that Linda had anticipated (for her daughter and for herself)—could only be entertained by urban women, particularly those in coastal cities.

Theme 4: The Coercive Nature of the System in China

Women's experiences with and within the party apparatus reveal the coercive nature of the party-state, which is consistent from Mao's time to the reform-era.

A small example of state apparatus that may not sound familiar to people outside China is the "street committee," briefly mentioned by Aunt Guo. (It emerged from her account of her family's experience during the Cultural Revolution—when her young brother refused to go to the countryside, someone from the street committee came to their house to do mobilization work.) In fact, as a party-state's effort to mobilize urban women, the "street committees" (or the "residents' committees") were widely installed in the early years of PRC throughout neighborhoods in cities, establishing the presence of the party-state (Hershatter, 2019b). It was run by unemployed or retired women recruited by the government, responsible for things like "transmitting policy, mediating local disputes, staffing a neighborhood watch, and in general and being like the eyes and ears of the state" (Hershatter, 2019b, para. 30) Journalist Ian Johnson (2014), with experiences with living and working in both the East and West, including two-decades-long living experience in China, explains the invasiveness of "street committees," which continue to exist today in relation to the magnitude of the political control system: "The street committee is the lowest level in the mighty Communist Party's system of control, one that starts with a few top men in Beijing and spreads down through its 55 million members to every

neighborhood" (p. 195). It functions as "part Communist cell, part social services office and part neighborhood watch" (Johnson, 2004, p. 195); some of its responsibilities are "organizing occasional 'hygiene' campaigns to sweep out the streets," or "monitoring women of childbearing age to make sure they had only one child" (p. 195).

A few stories about the experiences at or related to their worksites emerged from the women's accounts. Linda recalls that during the Cultural Revolution, she was punished once at work: "While working in a middle school, someone reported [to the school] that I spread western bourgeois thought, so they had a talk to me, and suspended my class for two months." In Aunt Guo's story, she had to get permission from her work unit before going to the Civil Affairs Bureau to get the marriage certificate. In order to get the permission, she had to bribe the then department director with her overseas remittance coupon that her aunt sent from Hong Kong to support the family. The application of marriage was finally approved one month later, after her husband's constant "urging." In Feng's recollection, she mentioned two experiences of being warned by her work unit in the early 1980s because she was interacting with foreign (including American) friends. Later, in 1989, when she was about to leave for America after the "June 4th" the jittery political atmosphere at her workplace can be sensed in her account.

Here it might be helpful to introduce another effort of the party-state in the early years of PRC to establish its presence in cities—installing "party committees" in every municipal organization and workplace to "guide urban administration and economic production, acting as a sort of shadow government" (Hershatter, 2019b, para. 26) Like the street committees, party committees are still present and active today, responsible, for instance, for recruiting new members and organizing political study. Although party committees were not mentioned directly by women in this study, very likely, the few seemingly small examples cited above had

something to do with party committees at their work units. These examples were merely a few out of the numerous Chinese experiences—similar or different—with and within institutions, hence they were "normal" in that sense, though what was "normal" would look "abnormal" at a different time or from a different social context. No doubt, these specific experiences are context specific, so an understanding of them requires the grasp of the historical, political, and societal background. There is, however, also consistence between the authoritarian system then and now.

To better understand women in this study in light of human development, it might be helpful to step back and to look in general at the functioning of the system and how one's institutional life affects the individual. It is my own experience that coercion works in two ways on the individual. One is vertical/hierarchical: it goes from the state at the top downwards through various apparatus—family, school, workplace, social media, etc., which, as the instruments of control, function consistently with the system and which reinforce each other. The other is lateral: the coercive system regulates and shapes how the individuals relate to and interact with each other. This way, the omnipresent power of coercion penetrates into the individuals' daily lives even without one's awareness of its impacts. This, however, does not necessarily mean the individuals are powerless victims.

Regarding the interplay of the individual and institutions, especially how the latter affects the former, Scott's and Fromm's insights can facilitate our understanding. Concerned about the political consequences of institutional life, Scott (2012) urges us to be alert to the aggregate effects of institutional life in shaping us, our expectations, habits, personality and routines, which is framed by him as "the gross human product" (GHP; p. 67). He critically points out that the settings of the most contemporary life-world institutions, such as the family, the school, the factory, the office, the worksite, inhibit the development of autonomy and independence, thus,

rather than citizens, they create subjects with personalities of deference, caution, servility, conformity, dissembling when necessary and rarely venturing an independent opinion (Scott, 2012). One question posed by Scott (2012) that might be relevant to this study is: "How does one move directly from what is often a dictatorship at work to the practice of democratic citizenship in the civic sphere?" (p. 78). (The key political policy, Scott (2012) contends, is to craft institutions that expand the independence, autonomy, and capabilities of the citizenry.)

Fromm (1965) offers a different lens in understanding social process. He coined the concept of "social character" (Fromm, 1965) which refers to "the essential nucleus of the character structure of most members of a group which has developed as the result of the basic experiences and mode of life common to that group" (p. 276). Through this concept, Fromm (1965) believed we can better understand how human energy is channeled and operates as a productive force in a given social order, and how it in its turn determines the thinking, feeling, and acting of individuals.

To make it more explicit, within the authoritarian system like China, even in the reform-era, including the first decade of the 21st century when I was living and working there and when two women in this study emigrated, what has been consistent is, to borrow Havel's (1978) insights which are still applicable to today's China, individuals have no opportunity to take part in public life, ideological ritual fills the gap, people's interest in public affairs naturally dwindles, and independent political thought is regarded by the majority as both utopian and risky.

Theme 5: Restricted Options Experienced in the Chinese Society

The elicited life experiences in China and the women's reflections on their past reflect the hindrances that they experienced and that shaped their life course respectively. Below I will draw

from the women's stories to identify the restricted options while asking in what way(s) these factors undermined these women's full development as humans.

The Family as a Disadvantage

Among the four women, Linda's and Aunt Guo's beginnings of life in their natal families seem to be more difficult than that of the other two. In Linda's case, her mother's beating of her and preference for boys had significant influences on her—her relationship with her siblings became estranged, and she carried the hatred of her mother for several decades until she was older and forgave her. In Aunt Guo's case, she experienced limited attention and care from her parents—a father who "did not care much about us" and a mother who was a "very disqualified" housewife "lacking the ability to do housework, not knowing how to cook." It is not clear how Aunt Guo's natal family had influenced her.

Family, with its lifelong presence, has a profound significance in one's life—one's development of the whole range of the human capabilities, associations, emotional well-being, education, etc. (Nussbaum, 2000a, p. 245). As "the basic structure of society" (Rawls, as cited in Nussbaum, 2000a, p. 245), an "institution" (Nussbaum, 2000a, p. 245), family controls and shapes one's destiny through resources distribution, decision making, providing or denying opportunities and liberties. "Family, then, can mean love; it can also mean neglect, abuse, and degradation" (Nussbaum, 2000a, p. 243). Viewed in light of human development, a difficult beginning of life within the family constitutes a disadvantage, as "exceptional risk and vulnerability itself is a disadvantage" (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007, para. 20).

The Authoritarian Nature of the Party-State

Women in this study related their experiences to the party-state explicitly or implicitly, shedding light on the nature of the party-state and how it shaped their lives. Below, the attention will be paid to each case as well as how each is different from, or similar to, others.

In Linda's case, she made sharp criticisms articulately about the party-state of China:

> The whole [Chinese] society hinders one's growth. It represses you, so you don't dare to speak the truth. You can't shape yourself as you want. It's always the collectivism—you, me, and everyone should be the same, otherwise they would rule out or distance you.

Linda's words penetrate the authoritarian nature of the society ruled by one party and the relationship between the individual and the society, which speak to the critiques made by many survivors of the political campaigns in her generation—other social critics, activists, and scholars within and beyond Mainland China (Havel, 1978; Hu, 2013). To an individual like her, the society was/is repressive and totalizing. On the one hand, there were/are things and ways an individual was prevented from doing and being, for instance, to "speak the truth" or to "shape yourself as you want;" on the other hand, there were/are things and ways an individual was required to do and to be, given the "collectivism." Otherwise, a consequence would follow: "they would rule out or distance you." Linda's message conveys an individual's existential situation under the party-state—the lack of freedom.

Individual freedom, defined by Hayek (1978), refers to the state in which a person is "not subject to coercion by the arbitrary will of another or others" (p. 11). He stresses that one is "being prevented from doing things" and that one is "being made to do particular things" are equally important (Hayek, 1978, pp. 16–17). In fully understanding an individual's existential situation under authoritarianism, one may argue, these two questions are able to capture or supplement what Nussbaum's (2011) question, "What is one able to do and to be?" (p. 18) fails

to do, as the core question of the Capabilities Approach is set in the context of political liberalism, where choice is essential (Nussbaum, 2011). Borrowing the concept of "combined capabilities" that refers to "not just abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social and economic environment" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 20), Linda's insights shed light on how the larger society undermined her growth as an individual (and as a woman, as well). Seen in light of human development, it probably defies our imagination to calculate the lifelong loss for an individual who lives a life with limited individual freedom on a daily basis.

An understanding of the significance of individual freedom, Hayek (1978) argues, should go beyond the individual to a society as a whole.

> We must show that liberty is not merely one particular value but that it is the source and condition of most moral values. What a free society offers to the individual is much more than what he would be able to do if only he were free. We can therefore not fully appreciate the value of freedom until we know how a society of free men as a whole differs from one in which unfreedom prevails. (pp. 52–53)

Similar to Hayek's point, Gardner (1995) also points out in his book *Self-renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society* that part of the significance of a free/open society lies in the fact that very few people, or even merely one person, have the liberty to do something the majority do not, and the benefit goes beyond the few people or the single person to the whole society.

To borrow Hayek's and Gardner's insights, the consequence of the absence of individual freedom goes beyond the individual to the whole society. The loss for the society as a whole is immeasurable, if we calculate the lives of the numerous individuals under the same party-state. The price is dear and is shouldered, even unconsciously, by each and every one within the society, if we keep in mind that freedom is indivisible.

Linda also made remarks about how she felt living under the communist regime:

> [I]t led me to see the horror under the communist regime, its disrespect for people, and its arbitrary trampling on you. It could arbitrarily put a 'cap' on you, such as 'bourgeois thought,' 'liberalism,' or 'messing up with the relationship between men and women,' etc. … All these made me feel that it's not a good country, because I lived without dignity—they could send me to the office at their will, questioning what I did yesterday, what I did today, etc. There's no dignity.

In Linda's account, the Party-state had power that can be used "arbitrarily," leaving an individual "no dignity." The system has left a profound and long-lasting impact on her—fear:

> The Communist Party [used] people to watch each other, report on each other; maybe the police would knock on your door. … Since I grew up, I had always felt that the shadow of the Communist Party and the high pressure on people had been lingering. I'm not stupid. If you know it [the system], you would be afraid.

Similar to Linda, Feng also talked about fear—the "lingering fears" following the 10-year political turmoil. However, different from Linda's case is how the fear affected others and how it intervened in her life as well, more specifically, her career choice: According to her observation, "many people wanted to shun away from politics;" to herself, it led her to the denial of a career opportunity presented to her, very likely an opportunity quite rare to many others at the time. Feng's example reveals how she, at a certain point of her life, as a young adult, made a decision about her career path.

In contrast to Feng's denial of a career opportunity, Aunt Li commented on the lack of career choices, as mentioned in her individual portrait, after she had to leave the dance troupe due to her injury and then was "designated" to work in a state-run theater company. Aunt Li's case reflects one's limited job choices which can only be understood against the context. Her account conveys a sense of an individual who had little control of her career path, a path not chosen at her will but imposed on her by the state. If she had had choices, what would she have chosen to do? If she had had choices, perhaps her first marriage could have been able to sustain.

The limited career choices were also mentioned by Aunt Guo, comparing China's past with its present and Mainland with Hong Kong. In addition to the lack of job choices, Aunt Guo poignantly attributed her 'choice' of marriage (out of a need for her family's survival) to the then political, societal, and economic conditions: "In fact, people like me are political victims, because it was the political system that caused the economic difficulty, which in turn contributed to such an unreasonable marriage." Here again, Aunt Guo's story conveys a message that behind her decision of marriage she had no choice. It sets another example of how an individual's path, in this case, her marriage, was dictated by the then societal environment and her circumstance, the influence of which, as she said, goes down to the younger generation within the family. Who can imagine how her life, if she had had choices, could have been different, or how much more she, and even her daughters, could have flourished?

Interestingly, in Feng's case, her reflection also touches on marriage, and it links her personal experience as a female young adult to a generational phenomenon within the then much more closed social environment:

> Back then [in China] there was no free space for young people to *date*; there was no such thing as a *dating concept*. If you wanted to play, you'd play with a group of people, men and women; if you go out with someone once, you would self-censor, making yourself feel there's something between yourself and that person, otherwise you'd be gossiped about as 'frivolous.'

It is unclear in Feng's telling if her insight about the lack of "dating concept" has something to do with her new experience with intimacy in America. Again, one may be provoked to imagine, if she had lived in a relatively more open society, how would her life trajectory have been different? Perhaps she would not have ended up being divorced. Maybe she could have flourished in an alternative intimacy starting as a young female. Feng's story furthers our understanding of how her experience with intimacy—and many of her peers' as well—was

marked and shaped by the broad social context at the time. Chan (1994b) offered insight into the social phenomenon of "dating" which may help further an understanding of Feng's reflection: "[D]ating, as a social practice, is culturally specific to American society, though it has been adopted by young people all over the world. In other words, although 'courtship' is a near-universal phenomenon, 'dating' was quite American" (p. xii).

Distinct from those of the three other women, Aunt Guo's life journey spanned from Mainland China to Hong Kong and (without including Australia) then to America. Reflecting on the Chinese society from a distance of over four decades, her open—and vehement—criticism points to the freedom of speech:

> There's no freedom of speech. So no matter how hard it was, I had to go to Hong Kong, just for the 'free air' … What could you have said during the Cultural Revolution? You couldn't tell the truth; you would have been in trouble if you had said it.

Aunt Guo's message echoes Linda's, and represents what drove and still drives many others' experiences: the Mainlanders who escaped in different periods of time to Hong Kong, people in Hong Kong who escaped to other parts of the world, or people from other authoritarian systems who chose voluntarily or involuntarily to move to a relatively free society.

Much has been written on the topic of freedom of speech. One way to understand what its lacking means for people under the Party-state like China—or somewhere else—is perhaps to see the interconnection of freedom of speech to other forms and levels of freedom. One's freedom of speech, for instance, determines if one can publicly practice and spread one's belief, (i.e., religious freedom), one's association with people around this person or with strangers (freedom of association), and one's engagement with the public and government (freedom of press, academic freedom, freedom of protest and demonstration). Seen in this way, the hindrances for women in this study exist beyond the boundaries of their stories.

Clearly enough, in this sub-section, we are led to see how different aspects of women's lives, under the force of the Party-state, were hindered or forcibly altered, ranging from their existence as individuals to career choices, "dating" experiences, marriage, and to a specific form of civil rights (freedom of speech). Seen together, they reflect the lack of "a set of opportunities to choose and to act" (Sen, 1999, p. 18), which were defined by Sen (1999) as "substantial freedoms" (p. 18).

The Presence of Social Expectations and Pressures on Women

This sub-section addresses the forces that undermined these women's lives as women, though sometimes they themselves did not identify the forces explicitly.

In Feng's case, although she did not think the lens of gender explains her life experiences, I sense it in the way her ex-husband was socialized to have expectations of her as a woman. Elaborating on the marital change, she gave me examples of the things her ex-husband refused to do: taking time reading books for the children, sitting in the children's swimming game, and showing affections to the children. It is probably safe to infer that Feng's ex-husband had felt and behaved in that way in China, which he then transferred to the American society.

Linda's case provides an example of how she as a woman who divorced and remarried was treated by her family:

> My parents, especially my mother, were not happy with my first and second marriages, and she spread the word among my siblings that I was a *lanren* [an expression usually used to describe a morally stained woman]. They didn't see me as a good person. My siblings called me a *lanren* when we quarreled. Back then if you were divorced, society would discriminate against you.

One can discern from Linda's account that the way her family treated her is largely consistent with how women in general were treated by the society. In fact, family and the larger society

influence one another and the direction of the influence goes in both directions (Nussbaum, 2000a). Linda's case seems to confirm the influence of the large society on the family.

In Aunt Li's case, after her divorce, she encountered difficulty in finding a new boyfriend. As she told, "So I had been seeking a *duixiang* or boyfriend actively. But it seemed that there wasn't one in China that would suit me." She used a widely used Chinese expression to describe her situation—"unfit for a guy at a higher post but unwilling to take a lower one," an expression that captures many women's situation in the marriage market in China where single women at their late twenties and older are often labelled as "leftover" (see literature in Chapter II). In many urban areas of China, a woman with a particularly successful career is often called an "iron lady." (When I mentioned it during our conversation, Aunt Li confirmed that this was actually the way she was perceived.) Depending on the specific context, this label sometimes, if not often, has a negative connotation, implying that successful women are unconventional, compared to the traditional gender roles. Thus, one ready answer to Aunt Li's difficulty of building a new intimacy, whether she would agree or not we do not know, is that perhaps her status as a middle-aged, divorced woman, coupled with that label, had put her in a disadvantaged position in the marriage market in China.

In different ways, these three examples offer a glimpse, implicitly and explicitly, into the presence of the social expectations and pressures on being women, which worked against their full development.

Above, this section identified the hindrances that fundamentally shaped various aspects of these women's lives. Notably, the hindrances lay within the political, societal, and economic forces largely out of the power of the individual to control. Seen in light of the interplay of the individual and the society, or agency and structure, together, these aspects are helpful in

understanding and interpreting women's life journeys and their development as humans and as women. Particularly, these aspects link up to what the women were unable to do and to be and why, what they were prevented from doing and being, what they were made to do and to be.

Theme 6: Exit from the Home Society

As shown in each story, women exited from the home society in different ways with different motivations of immigration: Feng, aware that many of her peers had gone abroad before her (which is part of the first wave of emigration in China), first emigrated in 1989 as a visiting scholar and then became a student who later stayed and worked here; Linda emigrated in 2004 as a tourist, (a temporary status,) but intended to stay, with a longtime desire for America as "a paradise for democracy and freedom;" Aunt Guo first emigrated from Mainland China to Hong Kong in 1979 as a wife in order to live a better life, and then, as part of the exodus, "escaped" from Hong Kong to America in 2004 under the family unification program, with a chief concern for freedom; Aunt Li came to America in 2004 as a fiancée who did not "long for" or "admire" America very much.

It is interesting to notice that in Linda's and Aunt Guo's cases, their desires to break away from the home society and the attractions they felt by the host society (in Aunt Guo's case, Hong Kong and America) were particularly strong, which are in contrast to Aunt Li's case in which such a desire for America was irrelevant.

Aunt Guo explained her migration to Hong Kong: "[R]egarding getting married, I really couldn't survive in China, because we didn't have a father, we had no source of income, so we must find a way. How to change? It's to go out, to escape." Her immigration to America was driven by the changes in the political scene in Hong Kong involving the "freedom of speech"

that was in jeopardy, and "the consideration of being old" along with the welfare system of America from which that she, at an older age, would benefit.

Together, the four cases in this study serve as an example of the heterogeneity of Chinese immigrant women as a group. The diverse motivations behind their immigration are divergent from what is reported by the literature in Chapter II (see X. Lin et al., 2015) that the most common reasons for the immigration of many older Chinese immigrants to different western countries (with cutoff ages 50, 60, and 65 years old) are family reunion and helping look after their grandchildren.

One commonality across four women's migratory paths emerges in this study. Unlike women whose immigration status are "dependents of their husbands," even including those who are formerly professionals (Shih, 2005), (a consequence of a gendered immigration process that places more value on males' education and skill than women's (Man, 2004),) women in this study migrated on their own terms. Linda created an unconventional path within a relatively short time from an old marriage and the "old" society to a new marriage and a "new" society; Feng left China by herself first and brought over her husband and daughter half a year later; in Aunt Guo's case, she was the one making all migratory efforts without involving her husband first. Her move to Hong Kong was the initial effort, though her husband did not want her to go as "[H]e said he couldn't afford to feed me." Aunt Guo's second transition was her temporary stay in another western country other than America. Before her final settlement in America, Aunt Guo had journeyed to Australia with a tourist visa, worked there for five months and sent money back to her family in Hong Kong. She had also rented a place, planning to get her husband over, though it did not succeed because her application was denied. Her final move was to America: She reached America alone, while her husband and younger daughter, reluctant to leave Hong

Kong, thought it was “rather convenient” to remain there. As for Aunt Li, whose status was as a fiancée, she was on equal terms with the American man who would become her husband.

Behind the paths taken, one may argue, lie their agency embodied in their own desires and needs they identified and recognized, the forming of (at least certain) clarity about what kind of life they wanted (or did not want), and their final decisions. Such a move—at 50 with limited language—was seen by both Linda and Aunt Li as the “bravest” event in their lifetime.

Theme 7: Challenges Faced in America

In this study, each woman faced and/or faces various challenges while living in America. This subsection will first diagnose what challenge(s) emerged in each case, how the challenges, individually and interactively, affected each woman’s life, and then will bring them together, hoping to shed light on an understanding of how they have fared after immigration.

Aunt Li repeatedly talked about the language challenge. A few small snapshots of the challenge functioning in her life: communication within marriage, challenging job interviews, denied job opportunities, untransferable prior work experience, and hindered relationships outside marriage embodied in limited interaction with colleagues and lack of close American friends.

In fact, language inability is a type of “corrosive disadvantage,” the failure of which leads to failure in other areas (Nussbaum, 2011; Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007). Aunt Li’s case fully reflects how language inability, as a single missing capability, hinders her functioning simultaneously in various parts of life on a daily basis, pervasively and severely. She vividly expressed how the challenge made her feel “nervous” at work, either as a saleswoman interacting with her colleagues, superior or clients, or as a teaching assistant in the kindergarten. Compared to Chinese women who are confined by language incompetence to Chinese communities (Cheng,

2013), Aunt Li has persevered, despite the difficulty. Equally admirable is her unremitting efforts of improving her English every day, coupled by her acute awareness of the challenge itself.

In addition to the language challenge, Aunt Li was also aware of her age of 50 at immigration. She mentioned it multiple times: "When I arrived in America at 50, I merely knew ABC;" "How can you speak the language since I only started to learn ABCD in my 50s, right?" "Others remarked so too, saying '[Y]ou were 50 when you came to America, and now you are doing great;'" "I will do a basic one [job], because 50 years old is almost the age of retirement in China." These excerpts show Aunt Li's awareness of age as a disadvantage in different contexts: while in Chinese context it means the approaching retirement, in American context it doubles the challenge posed by her limited language ability.

Age at immigration, as explored in the literature (see Phua et al., 2007), indicates the extent of one's socialization in one's home society, which impacts one's ability to adjust to the new environment. It also suggests one's potential motivation for immigration (such as work, family reunification, or education) which is related to one's willingness to adapt to the host society (Phua et al., 2007). In this study, Feng was in her mid-30s when she reached America. The other three women were at a relatively old age—Linda, same as Aunt Li, was also 50, and Aunt Guo 57 (after a nine years' waiting for the admission)—which may imply a disadvantage itself.

In Aunt Guo's case, similar to Aunt Li, she also faced language and age challenges, both of which hindered her. She shared adverse, not just hard, experiences directly linked to language. Aunt Guo related two episodes of her experiences as a new immigrant trying to acquire her driving license. Episode 1 happened when she was asked to go to the bank in the middle of the writing test and then had to repay the test fee. Episode 2 happened when she was asked to

present her ID before the road test; somehow she did not understand, thus was not allowed to take the test. Though seemingly small, these two episodes express Aunt Guo's sense of grievance over how she was treated badly. Similar to Aunt Li, Aunt Guo also demonstrated a strong motivation of improving English. "New immigrants like us with a low level of education really should learn English; otherwise, you would really become 'blind and lame,'" she emphasized.

Age functioned explicitly as a disadvantage when Aunt Guo turned 65, a point when she was not allowed to work anymore. But, as an immigrant, she had not earned enough points to get her retirement pension in the American system. In her case, her old schooling—either from Mainland China or from Hong Kong—did not count anymore after immigration, compared with her daughters' education received in Hong Kong and in the U.S. Her comment on her job choices is brief but thought-provoking: "In America, what else could I do except for babysitting?" In Aunt Guo's case, language barrier, age, the immigrant position, and untransferable prior education are intertwined, putting her into a low-income position.

Like Aunt Guo, Linda also shared distressing experiences in regard to language:

> My English is not good. I feel dumb. I can't talk to people. Sometimes I'm discriminated. When I go see a doctor, I have to take Steven with me, as I can't take the questions. Sometimes the way the nurses or the doctors looked at me made me feel they were discriminating against me. I'm sensitive. Maybe they thought how come I can't speak the language, which is the very basic, or why does this guy have this Chinese woman. I might have thought too much.

In her message, she conveys a sense of injured self-esteem or inadequacy, a reality of constrained social interaction (which is common particularly among older immigrants with limited language competence), and an awareness of potential or real discrimination (either by language or her position as a Chinese woman).

The experiences shared by Linda and Aunt Guo are not unusual among immigrants of non-European origins living in a society dominated by English where, as Chan (1994b, 2005) discloses, language discrimination exists.

In Feng's case, she highlighted both age and her immigrant status that have determined her position in society.

> It's really not easy for an older woman to find a job. I used to say that I could get that job as long as I was given the opportunity to be interviewed. I could almost guarantee it. But I began to realize things are different for me now and *I am old*. (Laughs.)

To Feng, age means fewer opportunities in the job market for her as an older woman. We do not know if she would agree that this is particularly gender related. At the time of her interview, Feng, working as an assistant to the department head at a university, shared her understanding of her position in society:

> I understand if I had not immigrated to America, I would have been in a different situation. Do you know what my current job requires? It merely requires a *high school diploma, which I was qualified 40 years ago.* (Laughs.) As for the often-discussed social problems of American society, such as *racism*, *sexism, agism and etc*., *among all these discriminations and inequalities, I think, age discrimination is the least discussed and underrated*.

Apparently, Feng has a complex—and critical—understanding of the American society, including its various "-isms," and she is acutely aware that due to discrimination she is overqualified for the current job. Feng expressed what the job position meant for her, and why she has to accept the reality:

> I'd been working as a *professional* all my life; and now I could only get a *clerical job*. My daughter and friend asked me, 'Why do you take it?' My answer to them was: 'I am an immigrant, the time I live here is too short and my employment time is too short. I have to earn enough points for getting my *social security benefit*. I need work. *That's it*.' I have to say this transition is one of the most difficult adjustments in my life.

It might be helpful for one to be reminded of a basic but blatant fact applicable to all immigrants: the way that points are calculated in the American social security system is that it does not count

the length of the immigrants' work years in their countries of origin; in other words, their old working life is being "cancelled" after immigration.

Here again, Feng explicitly related her experience at her workplace to discriminations:

> As a woman, I personally don't feel the *inferiority*, but I do feel so as an older person and as a foreigner. Some people say that there are not so many *discriminations* in America, but I think there are still *discriminations* and *biases* in this society, and in the *workplace*, at a deeper level. … However, for me personally, the discriminations I've experienced were not a *gender* issue, but an immigrant or age issue.

Feng mentioned she has extra workload compared to that at many other departments, but without compensation. In other words, it is a job position where she is exploited.

Among the four women, Feng is the only one in this study who experienced childbearing, had to raise young children while she studied and worked in America, and maintained a marriage within which her ex-husband held male privilege and was "reluctant to change" accordingly into American ways, and who ended up being divorced. A few glimpses into what she shared about her life offer some insights into its complexity.

One such glimpse entails Feng's role as a mom and how it affected her employment decisions. The reasons for her employment changes, as she explained, have something to do with her "overall idea" about life, particularly her consideration about whether it would allow her to take good care of her children and whether her children would get good education. For instance, when she noticed that her daughters did not like Boston and learned her daughter was very much attached to the area they live, she quitted the job in Boston and moved back to the valley. Meanwhile, she was also very clear that having a full-time job so that she could have health insurance and afford to raise her children was a survival necessity. Feng explains that, although she enjoys teaching, it was impossible for her to find a benefitted full-time teaching position since she did not complete her dissertation. In another glimpse, Feng put her younger through

college; since then, she has felt a little more relaxed. This small message implies the financial pressure she faced, unclear if she was a single parent.

While we may not know exactly how much Feng's life was more circumscribed by the additional responsibilities of house chores, childrearing, dealing with marriage and/or divorce, and being in a new society, or whether or not she has a support system, we can already see how age, her immigrant status, and gender related experiences as a wife and mom affected her life.

In sum, looking across the four women's stories, we see the presence of multiple challenges in their lives: language disfluency, aging, untransferable prior education and work experience, language discrimination, discrimination against immigrants in the workplace, gender related experiences as a mom and wife. We also see both differences and similarities among the four cases, and how different individual challenges combine and interact with each other, affecting the women's lives fundamentally.

Perhaps one way to interpret the consequence of the challenges is to compare the jobs women got in America with what they had had before their immigration. Feng, currently a clerk (with formal American schooling and multiple part-time experiences with teaching and researching), had formerly been a highly educated and well-trained professional translator at a central government agency in China. Aunt Li, a full-time food staff at an American middle school and a part-time dance teacher—with multiple (mostly part-time) employment experiences as a restaurant worker, a saleswoman, a teaching assistant—had been a deputy general manager (with a college education) in a large business domain in China for 10 years. Aunt Guo who worked various part-time jobs in America as a live-in babysitter (twice), a helper in a Chinese clinic, a worker in public housing, and research helper (in interviewing Chinese and writing English reports), had been an experienced and respectable Mandarin language trainee in Hong

Kong. Linda, a homemaker who juggled jobs as a restaurant worker, a cleaner, a babysitter after her arrival in America, had had a job as a teacher (with a college education) and then had worked in foreign companies or joint adventures before eventually becoming a homemaker living with financial security and leisure while in China.

Among all the jobs held altogether in America by women in this study, Aunt Li's part-time as a dance teacher appears to be the only case where her old skills are translated to a degree into a similar kind of job, though it may not necessarily be what she had been looking for. One may safely infer that a large portion of women's prior work experiences—as well as their "old" schooling—become untransferable or obsolete as a result of immigration. One should note that education, money, language competence, occupational skills, and transferable work experiences are human capital, and that how much human capital immigrants carried with them or acquire after immigration determines how well they are able to "take advantage of opportunities and overcome barriers that confront non-European origins in settings where racism and nativism still exist" (Chan, 2004, p. 129). Out of the four women, only Feng received formal American schooling (first as a visiting scholar, and then as a doctoral student). As human capital, education is a type of "fertile advantage," the opportunity of which generates other opportunities, such as employment choices, political voice, or greater bargaining power in the household (Nussbaum, 2011; Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007). Also, among the four women, only Feng is bilingual and bicultural. However, even that human capital does not guarantee her a stable and secure status job.

Women's occupational changes across two different societies reveal a striking contrast between their pre-immigration occupations that largely imply their well-established social-economic status and many, if not most, jobs they perform(ed) in America—noticeably

menial, low-pay, low- or, at best, semi-skilled, unstable, insecure, and without benefits. Even for Aunt Li and Feng who work full-time, it seems more for practical reasons than for the intrinsic value in the kind of work itself that they feel compelled to hold their current jobs that are far beneath their skills.

The distinct contrast between women's pre- and post-immigration occupational status reveals a pronounced downward social mobility (social prestige and income). The literature reviewed in Chapter II has reported such a downward social levelling among professional Chinese/Asian immigrants in the U.S. (Bao, 2001; Espiritu, 1997; Mazumdar, 1989; D. Qin, 2012; Shih, 2005), among Chinese immigrant women in Canada (Man, 2004), and, regardless of their high social background and level of schooling, among older immigrant women from various ethnocultural backgrounds in Canada (Charpentier & Quéniart, 2017). This study confirms those reports. In this sense, this study speaks against the "Model Minority" myth pervasively applied to Asian immigrants and Asian Americans.

Theme 8: A Sense of Injury

Social mobility, as a class experience (Sennett & Cobb, 1973), does not merely mean change in income, but also fluctuation in status or social prestige (Chan, 2004). Thus, downward social mobility implies loss beyond income or other material factors. In this study, a particularly strong sense of injury derived from downward social mobility is distinct in Feng and Aunt Li while they, as immigrant workers, have come to accept their real positions in American society.

In Aunt Li's narrative, she eloquently expressed more than once her feeling of "dejection" due to the loss of her prior social-economic status after immigration. Below is her description of her feelings at the time while working in a restaurant, her first job in America:

> I felt ok to work in a restaurant. But there's a feeling of *luocha* or dejection, and it didn't lessen for several years. While in China, I was upper-middle class, earning more than others—when others were earning ¥81, I was already earning ¥2,500. My life in China was exceptional. I had a house … The thing to be most proud of was my work performance; others had called me boss for over ten years. But here nobody knew me, and I didn't have a job. Working in a restaurant is a job that can be done by everyone, right? So there was a sense of dejection in my heart anyway...But I think I need to adjust to a new environment. … As a woman, I still wanted to go out to work, because it's not the case of being a housewife.

One's job, as one may be reminded, is more than a paycheck. It is related to what type of social circle one has, what one's social standing it implies, if one has leisure time left, how it affects one's status within the household, etc. Between the lines of Aunt Li's above message, one may sense (a) the huge contrast between her pre- and post-immigration status in terms of money, self-pride, social prestige, and other's respect; (b) the way she perceived the job at the restaurant—"that can be done by everyone"—which seems to convey a sense of innate disrespect or dissatisfaction she harbored; (c) how her psychology worked to balance herself through the recognition of her need "to adjust to a new environment" and "to go out to work" and ruling out the option of being a housewife, and (d) her active coping with tenacity.

In addition to the emotional impact of her occupational situation, Aunt Li managed to balance herself by comparing the choice she made with a different scenario of living in China.

> But [this is] the life I chose—I married my husband. If you were in China, 55 or 60 years old, you'd be retired. After you retire, you'd still be single, unfit for a guy at a higher post but unwilling to take a lower one … So I don't think it would be easy for me to find a man in China.

She then moved toward acceptance of the present, looking at what she has in her current life.

> I feel it's good to go abroad, and I don't regret it. I have chosen my second marriage and I don't regret it. I feel that life is not as bad as I imagined … I think it's okay. I don't have to worry about food or clothes in my life; I am happy; I can go anytime if I want to travel; I don't have to worry about money. I think this kind of life is already good, right? [I] need to be satisfied.

It suggests that Aunt Li had psychologically reviewed her situation many times, and with difficulty, until she eventually came to accept her situation.

In the last subsection, we have seen clearly that Aunt Li was aware of how the disadvantages of her age and language disfluency have worked against her. On the one hand, she seems to feel inadequate—not fluent enough in English. At the same time she has taken full responsibility. She wants to make sure she does not end up as a housewife and makes every effort to take care of her needs (love, care, learning English, a job). Her self-assessment seems to reflect a positive self-image in general.

In Feng's case, while confirming with me the differences between her present and past social-economic status, she used her counterparts in China as a reference frame.

> There is definitely a difference. With today's *communication*, I'm *constantly reminded by my counterparts in China of these differences*. Even yesterday a friend of mine in China made a comment to me, 'Even if you hadn't accomplished a lot, you'd still have already been promoted to senior researcher level by staying in your position and enjoyed a fat pension by now.' My Chinese counterparts are all enjoying their retirement life, holding their grandchildren, travelling domestic and abroad, indulging in their new hobbies. *Constantly being reminded* [by them], *I have to remind myself: What am I here for in this world?* I want to experience more in life.

The question Feng posed to herself "What am I here for in this world?" is profound, showing how she worked psychologically on the gap she felt between her peers and herself, which goes beyond one's social-economic status. At another moment, she expressed explicitly that she does not define herself by her job position: "I've lived through life and know *what I'm doing doesn't define who I am.* I can handle it." Her message is powerful in that it reflects her distinction between her sense of self and her social standing, her strong claim for her value as a person, and a critical disposition in her self-definition.

What do Aunt Li's and Feng's messages tell us, if we look at them together? "Do they have a sense of control over their lives?" one may wonder. It does seem so, which is

demonstrated in Feng's refusing to define herself by her social standing and in Aunt Li's coping to achieve upward mobility. Meanwhile, the terminology such as "dejection" used in Aunt Li's account and that which is not explicitly spoken by Feng seem to convey how their occupational status led them to an intense feeling of indignity or humiliation, which exposes vulnerability. Further, they engage in the intense inner work of making sense of and, in ways, reconciling with the reality of their positions. One may ask: When moving around in society, do women in this study feel respect from others? Do they feel that respect is what they need to earn with their social-economic status? Do they feel they need to prove their worth?

Here it might be helpful if our understanding of Feng's and Aunt Li's feelings goes beyond their immigrant status to the American society as a whole by taking a close look at "the myth of the permeation of class line" (Sennett & Cobb, 1973, p. 29). Four decades ago, Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb (1973) investigated the working life of laborers in America and penetrated how a class society like America creates "hidden injuries of class" in working people's sense of dignity. In their ground-breaking book *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, they reported a paradox: Society denied opportunities for the working-class people; however, workers felt they should be responsible for their social positions even if they believed they were deprived of the freedom to control their lives in a class society (Sennett & Cobb, 1973). While ability became the "badge" for an individual to wear, respect was its reward (Sennett & Cobb, 1973). Public injury to one's dignity and standing as a person lies at the very center of class experience for American workers who felt indignation because of their belief that they were not accorded the minimal recognition as human beings on the job (Sennett & Cobb, 1973). Even among the daughters and sons who have changed their class through a higher level of education or better jobs, Sennett and Cobb (1973) discovered feelings of self-doubt, inadequacies, powerlessness,

and a general sense of ambivalence. As a conclusion, the authors strongly emphasized the existence of a natural dignity in all people, an idea preached by the humanists of the 18th century, and, therefore, that the link between dignity, respect, and ability should be broken (Sennett & Cobb, 1973). Permeability, they warned us, allows one to move from one set of circumstances to another, but the result is that the system—situations, classes, structures—remains (Sennett & Cobb, 1973).

Although published over four decades ago, Sennett's and Cobb's (1973) work remains relevant today, relating to each and every one in society. Perhaps it can facilitate our understanding of why, in particular, Feng and Aunt Li felt discriminations and "dejection" respectively, what happens during and after one's mobility—either downward or upward—in general, and how destructive it is to measure each other and oneself against one's social standing or ability. It serves a necessary reminder that all have the same claim for respect from others—and from ourselves—regardless of their social positions or abilities.

Theme 9: On Doing and Being

Through their engagement in various aspects of their lives in America, women in this study have gradually developed new feelings, thoughts, and understandings as societal members and individuals. Although immigration at a relatively older age implies a disadvantage, Aunt Li and Aunt Guo are highly adaptive to the American society, and Aunt Guo appears quite resourceful. They have striven hard to keep improving their English while continually exploring what was possible for them. That Aunt Guo has family members who had arrived earlier than she, and that she had had the experience of emigration from Mainland China to Hong Kong, likely contributed to her adaptation to the American society. Indeed, in her narrative more weight

seems to have been put in her adaptation to Hong Kong than that to America. In Aunt Li's case, her husband's supportive role is apparent in facilitating her adaptation.

Linda experienced a disillusionment about the American society. "I had thought America was like a paradise with freedom and democracy." Sixteen years later, she told about a shattered dream:

> Before I actually did not really know America; now I do. Its democracy and freedom are fake. … If I had known what today's America is like back then, I would not have wanted to come over. … Without Steven, I would have left.

By contrast, Aunt Guo still cherishes dearly freedom and seems content with her choice. It is interesting to notice her integration into the society: a naturalized citizen, she practiced her civic participation via voting; she made an observation of the intragroup difference among Chinese immigrants and of the poor; she was aware of the discrimination against immigrants in general, which is revealed in the expression "others would say we are 'second-class citizens' and discriminate against us," against which she holds her sense of dignity expressed in the message, "I had no sense of inferiority."

Having lived for three decades in America, the longest period of residence among the four women, Feng thoughtfully reflects on the meaning of living in America: "In general, my life in America has given me a lot of thinking space, allowing me to think about social issues and to observe many different lives around me." She conveys a belief in social progress in general:

> I feel our society is making progress. Through the little and small progress made by each of us, even if it is just a *millimeter*, it will increase a lot if there are hundreds of millions of people are there and a *millimeter* per person.

As for women's sense of social identity, "race" concept does not emerge in this study (without including Feng with whom I did not have time to probe this concept); no one (among

three women) identifies herself as Asian or Asian American. This, however, does not mean that they are not racialized in reality in a White dominant society in the U.S.

In Aunt Guo's account, the way she identifies herself reveals ambivalence on some levels. At one moment of recounting she identifies herself as American: "[T]here is no need to fight for some benefits specifically for the Chinese. No, it is the whole; I am an American." At another moment her narrative changes to "we Chinese" ("as long as we Chinese have good grades, we should still enter universities according to the grades"). Later, when referring to the intragroup gap among Chinese immigrants and the poor, the language seems to switch to "them." A small detail that is also interesting to notice—she uses twice "foreigners" when telling her work experience: one when telling she was about to change to a family of "foreigners" for babysitting, the other when sharing part of her responsibility of the work for Tufts Medical School's research which involved writing an English report to "foreigners." It might be because she is aware that I, the listener, am a fellow Chinese.

Both permanent residents (meaning green-card holders), Aunt Li and Linda explicitly identify themselves as Chinese. At the end of the interview Aunt Li told me that she hoped her story can be helpful as "an example of Chinese women." Linda's self-identification as a Chinese woman is explicit:

> Here there are this or that nice things and people are nice, but it's not my country. I still miss the mountains and waters from my childhood. It's not a comparison at the physical level. This is the 17th year I've been here. I have a home with Steven. But it feels like deep in my heart I'm still a Chinese, (to say I'm Chinese is not equivalent to politics,) and my hometown is in China. It's sad that I cannot integrate into the American society … Hometown means you know where your roots are.

Linda appears to feel marginal in terms of her social position**,** though perhaps in different measure from Feng, who attributes her marginalized position to the society.

In a society like America—multiracial, multiethnic, and industrial—where racism and nativism still exist, perhaps understanding of other ethnic groups' situation facilitates the forming of one's sense of "minority awareness." It is not clear how much women in this study understand the reality of other ethnic minority groups. Such groups merely appeared in Aunt Li's narrative: Indians and Mexicans were mentioned in her conversation with her husband; her job exposes her to a mixed-racial work setting primarily with Latinos.

Also, it might be right to say that both Linda's and Aunt Li's mixed-race marriage (with white men) play a role in leveraging their social-economic positions in general. Interestingly, in their narrative, when they referred to "Americans," what they actually meant are white Americans. This happened when Linda was saying "to marry, marry Americans" and when Aunt Li was telling me that in the neighborhood where she lives it is predominantly "Americans." I then clarified by asking each of them if by "Americans" they meant white Americans, African Americans, native Americans, Latinos, etc., and they confirmed that white Americans are what they referred to. This might be partly because the America they, as many other Chinese, knew while in China had been predominantly a white America and partly because they have a relatively limited experience with mingling with other ethnic minority groups.

Women in this study shared different views on being women. Aunt Li's and Linda's choices and perspectives on being women constitute a pair of interesting opposites: Aunt Li emphasizes women's "independence" whereas Linda affirms strongly women's traditional roles. Aunt Guo's emphasis falls on the importance of the ability to "control emotions." Also, she distinguished herself from her mother who, according to Aunt Guo, regarded herself a "victim" of marriage: "I know at least what I want to do, and I can do whatever I want." Feng stresses the

importance of women occupying multiple roles and having friendship from the perspective of mental health.

In addition, pieces of wisdom emerge from women's life stories, transcending time and differences of any kind. To give two examples. Linda, after having suffered a lot, shares a beautiful message about living: "Don't be afraid … the purpose of life lies in that you really live your life." Aunt Guo makes a succinct summary out of her life experiences: "You only do things you can think of; you wouldn't do things if you can't think of them." It is probable that these messages are made available to us only after these women have lived, suffered, persevered, and reflected on what they had experienced at a relatively older age. These messages go beyond these specific women and speak to all immigrants and even to all human beings. In response to Linda's message, one might wonder how, which Linda did not say explicitly but which is left to others to contemplate. Aunt Guo's message conveys the role of imagination in crafting a different reality in one's life, which is part of what Andrews (2014b) explores in her book *Narrative Imagination and Everyday Life*. Interestingly, Morrison (2019) has a similar message—"You can't imagine it, you can't have it" (p. 320), a message in a different context though, where she talks about the role of imagination in the jazz age in the 20s—"a period when black people placed an indelible hand of agency on the cultural scene" (p. 318) by engaging their "interior, imaginative freedom" when political and economic freedoms were still "distant." Morrison (2019) poses a stimulating question "[H]ow do you inhabit it without surrendering to it?" (p. 309). (In her question, "it" referred to slavery.) Provoked by Aunt Guo's or Morrison's message, one might wonder about the role of narrative imagination in everyday life, including how to live with constraints without surrender while fostering real possibilities.

Summary

Above has presented the interpretation and analysis of the four women's life stories in nine themes, which in general respects a chronological order. The themes range from those women's remembered histories to their life journeys in different societies, integrating three lenses that have been mentioned in Chapter I: 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.

As in much other social justice oriented research, identifying the factors that function to serve the structure stratification system(s) is integral to a full comprehension of the women's lives, of the realities in which they live(d), and of their social positions in light of the interplay between the individual and the society. Therefore, a large part of the analysis, as shown in the themes, looks at the structural factors in China and/or in the U.S. that have shaped the women's lives. (To help English readers better embed the women's life stories against their past, part of the analysis has endeavored to dive deeply into the Chinese context.)

This chapter now returns to the research question about what we can learn from life stories of women in this study. Acknowledging that there are multiple versions of interpretation and analysis of these women's stories, this study hopes to stimulate further conversions and discussions. Having journeyed far and hard, women in this study have constantly found new ways to access levels of freedom. Without intending to make a definitive evaluation of what they are able or unable to do and to be, without positing any moral judgements, I would like to highlight certain capabilities that have carried them through, led them to where they are and

made them whom they have become, capabilities that might have implications for each one of us.

In general, none of the women in this study holds a view of herself as a passive agent in her own life course, regardless of whether or not others consider their self-assessments to be objective. Within their positive self-images lie the capabilities embodied in them: defiance and insurgence, transcendence of suffering, the distinct individuality and subjectivity in each woman, the fierce perseverance in all of the women's overcoming challenges of various kinds, their ability to choose according to their own terms rather than simply conform to what was expected of them, an ability to employ imagination and practical reason to craft and realize a new possibility for life, and the ability to reflect on life and choices.

A few examples, among many others, reveal how the women used their capabilities wherever possible to navigate the systems in which they live(d). Linda sought out friendships with people from the most popular groups in power in the Chinese society, chose to marry a second time in a desperate need for the care of her daughter given her health situation, and later managed to stay in America by finding an American man to marry. A new immigrant juggling three different odd jobs and wanting to change her life situation, she helped her husband with job searches and interviews until their life circumstance fundamentally changed. Aunt Li, having had difficulty in China finding a new intimacy for 10 years, became connected through a friend to a local translator who managed international dating, and eventually built a new marriage in America. Aware of the language obstacle, she has persistently improved her English on a daily basis. Aunt Guo, despite the huge social pressure she faced from the 5,000 co-workers, was determined to marry a Hong Kong man to escape Mainland China, and then, from the bottom, marvelously managed to establish a secure life in Hong Kong. After a long-term planning and

efforts to join the exodus, eventually she settled in America, willing to work incessantly towards a life she wanted rather than abusing the resources accessible to her. Feng experienced "the awakening of the motherhood" after her first daughter's birth and recognized the "natural aspects" she had repressed during the Cultural Revolution. As an immigrant worker with a job position where she is undervalued, she holds her sense of dignity high; she shares thoughtful reflections on the experience of her generation. The examples can go on; readers are encouraged to read and discover for themselves from these women's stories.

All of these women, across time and space, one may say, have developed capabilities, whether explicitly named or not, that brought about positive changes to their lives. Perhaps one way to understand these women's journeys is to acknowledge that 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. These stories embody four lifetimes of movement and transformation, some as a gradual consciousness and some as epiphany, as these women gain autonomy and agency through these capabilities.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

By fully and conscientiously using myself as the "research instrument," this study has endeavored to come to know four older Chinese immigrant women in a holistic view as intensively as possible. It is responsive to the need for more comprehensive and interdisciplinary research on older Chinese immigrant women, a group with multiple and related social positioning as immigrants, women of color, and an aged generation, given the limited literature on them in feminist/gender studies, gerontology, and immigration/race relations studies. A greater understanding of the women perhaps can only be attained in light of their past, demanding no moral judgment. How we see the past informs how we listen to and read the women's stories. Without knowing their past, it would not be possible to understand them as a whole, nor would it be possible to appreciate their humanity, courage, suffering, sacrifice, and agency. In this sense, the four women's stories join other research on immigrants, calling for one's attention, listening, imagination, empathy, and recognition, especially given the persistent immigrant and refugee crises in the U.S. and beyond, and the Sino-U.S. tensions as well, both involving an adversarial political climate.

Having historized these women's stories, transferred them from the Chinese world to the English one, and presented each as a unique whole, I hope 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.

To other Chinese immigrant women and men and even beyond, I hope the four women's stories spark reflections on one's life journey, resonance with one another's stories, recognition of one's both strengths and vulnerabilities, initiating dialogues, building and maintaining connections, discovering courage and a sense of liberation.

To the academic world, the study leaves space for further conversations about certain theoretical, methodological, and ethical issues. At the theoretical level, like "gender" or "class," the terms "society," "family," and "work" would assume a different meaning in the Chinese context, divergent from that in the American society; therefore, there is a risk of essentialization of these terms. There is also the issue of the entanglement of women *and* China, as Hershatter (2007) notes, contributing to the inextricability and complexity of understanding the women. For instance, while this study makes an effort to contextualize the women's life stories, it does not further expand on the changes in the 1980s in urban China but is mainly confined to what emerged from these stories. The complexity of the 1980s goes far beyond the scope of this dissertation, with topics, as Honig and Hershatter (1988) elaborate, varying from "the pleasures of adornment and the dangers of sexuality" to "changing patterns of courtship," marriage, family relations, divorce, work, violence against women, and to feminist voices. For the scope and purpose of this dissertation, these topics are not fully explored but left for future research. A significant issue, integral to this study, though implicit throughout, is the nature of "freedom"—although broad and ambivalent itself, the fact that the term "freedom" arose from Aunt Guo's and Linda's accounts conveys a message that their love for freedom emerges from their particular experiences with authoritarianism. Therefore, it suggests the exigency of critical dialogues among people from different political, societal, and historical backgrounds.

This study also suggests methodological and ethical issues as topics of discussion, such as the difference between the researcher's self-interest, how this impacts the research, the researcher's presence in constructing the conversation and revelations about who the researcher is; whether evaluating the participant by the researcher is moral or not based on the research materials the researcher collects; or whether or not, or to what extent, to address the research agenda during the interviews of others' life stories.

I have found working and reworking on history—either the contemporary Chinese history or the Chinese/Asian women's immigration history to be both informing and disturbing. The former has been and is still mostly silenced nationally. The latter reveals a largely hidden past of anti-Chinese sentiments in the U.S. that took a different form during the COVID-19 crisis. Although quite plain, the question "What can we learn from the past?" remains relevant to today's China or America. I have wondered about questions such as "How can the past empower the individual without creating fears?" and "What, if there is any, could contribute to collective memory, either among a cohort or across different cohorts?" Crossing the Chinese and the English worlds with primary concerns about authoritarianism and desire for freedom, I have come to see the significance of understanding the Chinese history and experiences in light of the human world in 20th century and beyond.

Looking forward, I find Feng's words resonating throughout this study—"Through the little and small progress made by each of us, even if it is just a *millimeter*, it will increase a lot if there are hundreds of millions of people and a *millimeter* per person." It is my hope and belief that someday when my daughter is old enough to read this dissertation, her cohort is living in a better world while they continue or even lead the journey of contributing to a more just world.

References

AAPI Equity Alliance. (2020). *We fight for AAPI equity*. http://www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/stop-aapi-hate/

Adler, S. R., Fosket, J. R., Kagawa-Singer, M., McGraw, S. A., Wong-Kim, E., Gold, E., & Sternfeld, B. (2000). Conceptualizing menopause and midlife: Chinese American and Chinese women in the US. *Maturitas*, *35*(1), 11–23. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0378-5122(00)00090-6

Ai, X. (Director). (2017). *Jiabiangou Elegy: Life and death of the rightists* [Documentary].

Ai, X. (2017, December 31). Mingji tamen de xisheng [Remember their sacrifice] [Address]. *Chinese News Digest*, *1427*. http://hx.cnd.org/?p=156961

All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2011). *Disanqi zhongguo funü shehui diwei diaocha zhuyao shuju baogao* [The report of the third survey of Chinese women's social status]. http://www.china.com.cn/zhibo/zhuanti/ch-xinwen/2011-10/21/content_23687810.htm

Andrews, M. (n.d.). *Understanding life backwards: The shifting ground of interpretation* [PowerPoint slides]. https://cupdf.com/document/making-sense-of-life-history-data-the-shifting-ground-of-interpretation-molly.html?page=8

Andrews, M. (1991). *Lifetimes of commitment: Aging, politics, psychology.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511571176

Andrews, M. (2007). *Shaping history: Narratives of political change.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511557859

Andrews, M. (2014a). Narrating moments of political change. In P. Nesbitt-Larking, C. Kinnvall, T. Capelos, & H. Dekker (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of global political psychology* (pp. 353–368). Palgrave Macmillan.

Andrews, M. (2014b). *Narrative imagination and everyday life.* Oxford University Press. http://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199812394.001.0001

Anonymous. (n.d.). *shidai de chong'er: Gongnongbing xueyuan* [The darling of the times: Workers, peasants and soldiers]. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Service Center for China Studies. http://mjlsh.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/Book.aspx?cid=4&tid=4459

Arendt, H. (1951). *The origins of totalitarianism.* Harcourt, Brace, and Co.

ArtsEmerson. (2020, March 8). *Filmmaker livestream discussion: Who killed Vincent Chin?* Boston Asian American Film Festival/Asian American Resource Workshop.

Asian Women United of California (Ed.). (1989). *Making waves: An anthology of writings by and about Asian American women.* Beacon Press.

Atkinson, R. (1998). *The life story interview*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412986205

Atkinson, R. (2007). The life story interview as a bridge in narrative inquiry. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 224–246). Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226552.n9

Balibar, E. (2005). Difference, otherness, exclusion. *Parallax*, *11*(1), 19–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/1353464052000321074

Bao, X. (2001). *Holding up more than half the sky: Chinese women garment workers in New York City, 1948–92*. University of Illinois Press.

Bateson, M. C. (2004). *Willing to learn: Passages of personal discovery*. Steerforth Press.

Bateson, M. C. (2011). *Composing a further life: The age of active wisdom.* Vintage.

Becker, J. (1998). *Hungry ghosts: Mao's secret famine*. Holt Paperbacks.

Bogart, A. (2001). *A director prepares: Seven essays on art and theater*. Routledge.

Bogart, A. (2014). *What's the story: Essays about art, theater and storytelling*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315780832

Bonnin, M. (2013). *The lost generation: The rustication of China's educated youth (1968-1980)* (K. Horko, Trans.). The Chinese University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1p9wqts

Booth, M., & Young, K. (Directors). (2009). *Pidgin: The voice of Hawaii* [Documentary]. New Day Films.

Burns, R., & Yu, L.-S. (Directors). (2018a). *American experience: The Chinese Exclusion Act* [Documentary]. PBS.

Burns, R., & Yu, L.-S. (Panelists). (2018b). *The Chinese Exclusion Act: Film screening and discussion panel* [Video]. Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmOW3G6Xguw

Cabouat, P., & Grangereau, P. (Directors). (2012). *Mao's Great Famine* [Documentary]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r33Q8cl87HY

Catalyst (2020, October 14). *Women in the workforce: United States (Quick Take).* https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-the-workforce-united-states/

Catalyst (2022, January 31). *Women of color in the United States (Quick Take).* https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-of-color-in-the-united-states/

Chan, S. (1991a). The Exclusion of Chinese women, 1870–1943. In S. Chan (Ed.), *Entry denied: Exclusion and the Chinese community in America, 1882-1943* (pp. 94–146). Temple University Press.

Chan, S. (1991b). *Asian Americans: An interpretive history.* Twayne Publishers.

Chan, S. (1994a). Asian Americans: Resisting oppression, 1860s–1920s. In S. Chan, D. H. Daniels, M. T. García, & T. P. Wilson (Eds.), *Peoples of color in the American west* (pp. 366–376). D.C. Heath and Company.

Chan, S. (1994b). Preface. In S. Chan (Ed.), *Hmong means free: Life in Laos and America* (pp. ix–xx). Temple University Press.

Chan, S. (2004). *Survivors: Cambodian refugees in the United States.* University of Illinois Press.

Chan, S. (2005). *In defense of Asian American studies: The politics of teaching and program building.* University of Illinois Press.

Chan, S., & Hsu, M. Y. (Eds.). (2008). *Chinese Americans and the politics of race and culture*. Temple University Press.

Chang, I. (2003). *The Chinese in America: A narrative history.* Viking Press.

Charpentier, M., & Quéniart, A. (2017). Aging experiences of older immigrant women in Québec (Canada): From deskilling to liberation. *Journal of Women & Aging*, *29*(5), 437–447. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2016.1213111

Chee, M. W. L. (2005). *Taiwanese American transnational families: Women and kin work*. Routledge.

Chen, B. (Writer & Director). (2016). *Wenge wushi nian (II)* [Fifty years after the Cultural Revolution (II)] [TV series documentary]. RTHK.

Chen, B. (2019). *The great escape to Hong Kong* (J. Y. P. Pang, Trans.). American Academic Press.

Cheng, H.-I. (2013). "A wobbly bed still stands on three legs": On Chinese immigrant women's experiences with ethnic community. *Women & Language*, *36*(1), 7–25.

China Daily. (2007, October 31). *Rang jiating hexie chengwei shehui hexie de yuantou* [Let family harmony become the source of social harmony]. https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqzg/2007-10/31/content_6220556.htm

Chinese Feminism. (2020). *Women de gushi, women yu pingquan* [Our stories: We and equal rights]. https://chinesefeminism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/e680a7e588abe6ada7e8a7862020.pdf

Chow, A. R. (2020, May 20). Violence against Asian Americans is on the rise—But it's part of a long history. *Time*. https://time.com/5834427/violence-against-asian-americans-history/

Chow, E. N.-L. (1994). Asian American women at work. In M. B. Zinn & B. T. Dill (Eds.), *Women of color in U.S. society* (pp. 203–227). Temple University Press.

Choy, C., & Tajima-Peña, R. (Directors). (1987). *Who killed Vincent Chin* [Documentary]. Film News Now Foundation.

Chu, B. (2014, July 31). With urbanization as goal, China moves to change registration rules. *The New York Times*. https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20140731/c31hukou/dual/

Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry: A methodology for studying lived experience. *Research Studies in Music Education*, *27*(1), 44–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X060270010301

Clandinin, D. J. (Ed.). (2007). *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://dx-doi-org.antioch.idm.oclc.org/10.4135/9781452226552

CNN. (n.d.). *Hong Kong protests*. https://www.cnn.com/specials/asia/hong-kong-protests-intl-hnk

Cohen, C. E., Varea, R. G., & Walker, P. O. (Eds.). (2011). *Acting together: Performance and the creative transformation of conflict* (Vol. 1). New Village Press.

Collins, P. H. (1994). Shifting the center: Race, class and feminist theorizing about motherhood. In E. N. Glenn, G. Chang, & L. R. Forcey (Eds.), *Mothering: Ideology, experience, and agency* (pp. 45–66). Routledge.

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203900055

Costantini, P. (2019, Jan. 16). *Manufacturing illegality: An interview with Mae Ngai: Reflects on how a century of immigration law created a crisis.* https://fpif.org/manufacturing-illegality-an-interview-with-mae-ngai/

Crenshaw, K. W. (2011). Twenty years of critical race theory: looking back to move forward. *Connecticut Law Review*, *43*(5), 1253–1352.

Crownshaw, R., & Leydesdorff, S. (1992). On silence and revision: The language and words of the victims. In L. Passerini (Ed.), *Memory and totalitarianism* (pp. vii–xviii). Routledge.

Di, Y. (2017, February 23). Zhongguo nüquan zuzhi nvquanzhisheng weibo zhanghao bei jinyan [Chinese feminist group's social media account suspended]. *The New York Times*. https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20170223/china-feminist-weibo/zh-hant/dual/

Dikötter, F. (1992). *The discourse of race in modern China.* Hong Kong University Press.

Dikötter, F. (2010a). *Mao's great famine: The history of China's most devastating catastrophe 1958–62.* Walker & Co.

Dikötter, F. (2010b, December 15). Mao's Great Leap to famine. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/16/opinion/16iht-eddikotter16.html

Dikötter, F. (2013). *The tragedy of liberation: A history of the Chinese Revolution 1945-1957.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Dikötter, F. (2016a). *The Cultural Revolution: A people's history, 1962–1976.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Dikötter, F. (2016b). *Understanding China's Cultural Revolution* [Interview]. Institute for New Economic Think. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9iVDCzGyiE

Dikötter, F. (2019a). *China since the communist revolution* [Address]. Hillsdale College. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8gaHPVaaCk&t=520s

Dikötter, F. (2019b). *How to be a dictator: The cult of personality in the twentieth century.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Ding, S. (2004). Wenge zhong de qingli jieji duiwu yundong [The "Cleansing of the class ranks" movement in the Cultural Revolution]. *Huaxia Wenzhai* [*China Digest Supplement*]. http://archives.cnd.org/HXWK/author/DING-Shu/zk0412b-0.gb.html

Dong, A. (1982). *Sewing women* [Documentary]. DeepFocus Productions. https://www.deepfocusproductions.com/films/sewing-woman/

DuBois, E. C., & Ruiz, V. L. (Eds). (1990). *Unequal sisters: A multi-cultural reader in U.S. women's history.* Routledge.

Eberlein, X. (n.d.). Interview with Xujun Eberlein. *Livingston Press*. https://www.xujuneberlein.com/my_book/authorQA.htm

Eberlein, X. (2020, May 28). Swimming with Mao: Survival and family. *The Walrus*. https://thewalrus.ca/swimming-with-mao/

Espiritu, Y. L. (1997). *Asian American women and men: men: Labor, laws, and love*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Essed, P. (1990). *Everyday racism: Reports from women of two cultures*. Hunter House.

Essed, P. (1994). Contradictory positions, ambivalent perceptions: A case study of a black women entrepreneur. *Feminism & Psychology*, *4*(1), 99–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353594041006

Essed, P. (1996). *Diversity: Gender, color, & culture.* University of Massachusetts Press.

Essed, P., Frerks, G., & Schrijvers, J. (Eds.). (2004). *Refugees and the transformation of societies: Agency, policies, ethics and politics*. Berghahn Books.

Eyler, A. A., Baker, E., Cromer, L., King, A. C., Brownson, R. C., & Donatelle, R. J. (1998). Physical activity and minority women: A qualitative study. *Health Education & Behavior*, *25*(5), 640–652. https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819802500510

Ferguson, S. J. (2000). Challenging traditional marriage: Never married Chinese American and Japanese American women. *Gender & Society*, *14*(1), 136–159.

Fincher, L. H. (2016). *Shengnü* shidai [*Leftover women: The resurgence of gender inequality in China*] (2nd ed.) (Li, X., Trans.). Zed Books.

Fincher, L. H. (2018a). *Betraying big brother: The feminist awakening in China.* Verso.

Fincher, L. H. (2018b, February 23). China dropped its one-child policy, so why aren't Chinese women having more babies? *The New York Times*. https://cn.nytimes.com/opinion/20180223/china-women-birthrate-rights/dual/

Fong, M. (2016). *One child: The story of China's most radical experiment*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Freedman, M. (2002). *Prime time: How baby boomers will revolutionize retirement and transform America.* PublicAffairs.

Fromm, H. E. (1965). *Escape from freedom.* Avon Books.

Gao, H. (2017, September 25). How did women fare in China's Communist revolution? *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/25/opinion/women-china-communist-revolution.html?searchResultPosition=1

Gao, H. (2000). *How did the sun rise over Yan'an: A history of the rectification movement*. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press.

Gao, H. (2006). *Why did Mao launch the Cultural Revolution?* [Address]. The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKSuCc_Ir1A

Gao, H. (2010). *Geming niandai* [The revolutionary era]. Guangdong People's Publishing House.

Gardner, J. W. (1995). *Self-renewal: The individual and the innovative society.* W. W. Norton & Company.

Glenn, E. N. (1986). *Issei, Nisei, war bride: Three generations of Japanese American women at domestic service.* Temple University Press.

Glenn, E. N. (1996). Split household, small producer and dual wage-earner: An analysis of Chinese American family strategies. In S. Coontz, M. Parson, & G. Raley (Eds.), *American families: A multicultural reader* (2nd ed., pp. 74–93). Routledge.

Grahame, K. M. (2003). “For the family”: Asian immigrant women’s triple day. *Journal of Sociology and Social welfare*, *30*(1), 65–90.

Guo, Y. (2007, November 19). *Xinling de jitihua: Shanbei Jicun nongye hezuohua de nüxing jiyi* [Collectivization of the mind: Women’s memories of agricultural cooperation in Ji Village Northern Shaanbei]. Aisixiang. http://www.aisixiang.com/data/16601.html

Guo, Y. (2013). *Shoukuren de jiangshu: Jicun lishi yu tizhong wenming de luoji* [*The narration of the peasant: How can suffering become history?*]. The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Guruge, S., Birpreet, B., & Samuels-Dennis, J. A. (2015). Health status and health determinants of older immigrant women in Canada: A scoping review. *Journal of Aging Research.* https://doi.org/10.1155/2015/393761

Hayek, F. A. (1978). *The constitution of liberty.* The University of Chicago Press.

Havel, V. (1978). *The power of the powerless*. International Journal of Politics. https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/wp-content/uploads/1979/01/the-power-of-the-powerless.pdf

Hershatter, G. (2007). *Women in China’s long twentieth century*. University of California, Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520916128

Hershatter, G. (2011). *The gender of memory: Rural women and China’s collective past*. University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520950344

Hersahtter, G. (2019a). *Women and China’s revolutions*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Hersahtter, G. (2019b). Women and China’s socialist construction, 1949–78. *The Asia-Pacific Journal, 17*(12). https://apjjf.org/2019/12/Hershatter.html

Hinton, C., Barmé, G., & Gordon, R. (Directors). (2003). *Morning sun* [Documentary]. Long Bow Group.

Ho, C.-I., & Card, J. A. (2002). *Older Chinese women immigrants and their leisure experiences before and after emigration to the United States.* In T. Sharon. *Proceedings of the 2001 Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium* (pp. 291–297). U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Honig, E., & Hershatter, G. (1988). *Personal voices: Chinese women in the 1980s*. Stanford University Press.

Hong Kong Memory. (2012). *Land squatters.* https://www.hkmemory.hk/MHK/collections/public_housing/land_squatters/index.html

Hu, J. (Director). (2005). *In search of Lin Zhao’s soul* [Documentary].

Hu, J. (Director). (2010). *The East Wind State Farm* [Documentary].

Hu, J. (Director). (2006). *Though I am gone* [Documentary].

Hu, J. (Director). (2012). *Wode muqin Wang Peiying: yiwei gai bei jizhu mingzi de xundaozhe* [My mother Wang Peiying: A martyr whose name should be remembered] [Documentary].

Hu, J. (Director). (2013). *Spark* [Documentary].

Hu, J. (Director). (2017). *Liaoxi jishi: fanyou zhishifenzi laodong gaizao* [A chronicle of western Liaoning: The "rightist" intellectuals' reform through labor] [Documentary].

Huang, R. (2017, January 9th). After one-child policy, outrage at China's offer to remove IUDs. *The New York Times.* https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20170109/after-one-child-policy-outrage-at-chinas-offer-to-remove-iuds/dual/

Huang, Z., Liang, W., Sun, W., & Zhu, H. (Directors). (2016). *Wenge wushi nian zhuanti* [A special issue on fifty years after the Cultural Revolution] [TV series documentary]. Cable News Limited. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pxZ_6A6qbc

Human Right Watch. (2018, April 23). *China: Job ads discriminate against women.* https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/23/china-job-ads-discriminate-against-women

International Labour Organization. (n.d.). ILOSTAT database on labour force participation rate in China.

Isbister, D. L. (2009). *The "sent-down body" remembers: Contemporary Chinese immigrant women's visual and literary narratives* [Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=osu1259594428

iSunTV. (2020). Yu Luoke and the birth theory (Episode 13) [Web series episode]. *YouTube.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOuz2sH7NvE

Johnson, I. (2004). *Wild grass: Three stories of change in modern China*. Pantheon Books.

Josselson, R. (2014). *Interviewing for qualitative inquiry: A relational approach.* Guilford Press.

Kamal, Z., & Zerkel, M. (2022, March 17). *Standing up to anti-Asian racism*. https://www.afsc.org/blogs/news-and-commentary/standing-to-anti-asian-racism

Ke, Q. (2015). *Zhongguo funü fazhan ershi nian: xingbie gongzheng shijiao xia de zhengce yanjiu* [Women in China since 1995: Policy research from gender justice perspective]. Social Sciences Academic Press.

Kim, E. H. (1990). "Such opposite creatures": Men and women in Asian American literature. *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *29*(1), 68–93.

Knowles, H., Thebault, R., Peiser, J., Armus, T., & Elfrink, T. (2021, March 17). Eight killed, including six Asian women, in Atlanta-area spa shootings; suspect arrested after manhunt. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/03/16/atlanta-spa-shootings/

Knox, S. & Burkard, A. W. (2009). Qualitative research interviews. *Psychotherapy Research*, *19*(4–5), 566–575. https://doi.org/10.1080/10503300802702105

Kong, H., & Hsieh, E. (2012). The social meanings of traditional Chinese medicine: Elderly Chinese immigrants' health practice in the United States. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, *14*, 841–849. http://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-011-9558-2

Kowal, P., & Dowd, J. E. (2001). *Definition on an older person*. *Proposed working definition of an older person in Africa for the MDS Project.* World Health Organization.

Kristof, N. D. (1989, June 4). Crackdown in Beijing: Troops attack and crush Beijing protest; thousands fight back, scores are killed. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/04/world/crackdown-beijing-troops-attack-crush-beijing-protest-thousands-fight-back.html

Laogai Research Foundation & Chinese Information Center. (2008). Background of the conference. In Laogai Research Foundation & Chinese Information Center (Ed.), *A collection of studies on the Anti-Rightist Campaign: The international conference at the 50th anniversary of the Anti-Rightist Campaign* (pp. 1–2).

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., & Davis, J. H. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture.* Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Lee, E. (2003). Exclusion acts: Chinese women during the Chinese exclusion era, 1882–1943. In S. Hune & G. Nomura (Eds.), *Asian/Pacific Islander American women: A historical anthology* (pp. 77–89). New York University Press.

Lee, M. P. (1990). *Quiet odyssey: A pioneer Korean woman in America* (Chan, S., Ed.), University of Washington Press.

Lerner, M. (Director). (1979). *From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China (1979)* [Documentary]. Hopewell Production.

Leong, K. J., & Wu, J. T. (2008). Filling the rice bowl of China: Staging humanitarian relief during the Sino-Japanese war. In S. Chan & M. Y. Hsu (Eds.), *Chinese Americans and the politics of race and culture* (pp. 132–152). Temple University Press.

Levin, D. (2015, March 13.) China's middle class chafes against maze of red tape. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/14/world/asia/chinas-growing-middle-class-chafes-against-red-tape.html

Levy, C., & Torrens, N. (Directors). (1985). *The human face of Hong Kong* (I) [Film]. National Film and Sound Archive of Australia.

Li, B. (Director). (2017). *Leftover Chinese women* [Documentary]. Shenzhen Hantangyun Culture Investment Co., Ltd. & Beijing Doukou Zhuima Film and Television Culture Development Co., Ltd.

Li, J., Xu, L., & Chi, I. (2018). Challenges and resilience related to aging in the United States among older Chinese immigrants. *Aging & Mental Health*, *22*(12), 1548–1555. https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2017.1377686

Li, M. (2008). *Snow falling in spring: Coming of age during the Cultural Revolution*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Li, Z. (2003). *Red-color news soldier Li Zhensheng: A Chinese photographer's odyssey through the Cultural Revolution*. Phaidon Press.

Liang, W., Yuan, E., Mandelblatt, J. S., & Pasick, R. J. (2004). How do older Chinese women view health and cancer screening? Results from focus groups and implications for interventions. *Ethnicity & Health*, *9*(3), 283–304. https://doi.org/10.1080/1355785042000250111

Lin, D. (2011, March 4). *Yi xiaoshi de zhongguo youtairen qunti* [The disappeared Chinese "Jewish" group]. Aisixiang. http://m.aisixiang.com/data/39161.html

Lin, X., Bryant, C. Boldero, J., & Dow, B. (2015). Older Chinese immigrants' relationships with their children: A literature review from solidarity-conflict perspective. *The Gerontologist*, *55*(6), 990–1005. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnu004

Ling, S. (1999). The mountain movers: Asian American women's movement in Los Angeles. In Ng, F. (Ed.), *Asian American women and gender: A reader* (pp. 19–35). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.15.1.f78445r807283lr3

Loewen, J. W. (1988). *The Mississippi Chinese: Between black and white* (2nd ed.). Waveland Press, Inc.

Lü, P. (2018, March 8). *Weiwan de kangzheng—fan jiabao shishi liang zhounian* [Unfinished resistance—The second anniversary of the Anti-domestic Violence Law's implementation]. Amnesty International Chinese. https://zh.amnesty.org/more-resources/two-years-china-domestic-violence-law-struggles-continue/

Ma, P.-W. W. & Shea, M. (2015). Work and gender roles among East Asian immigrant women in the United States. In O. M. Espín, & A. L. Dottolo (Eds.), *Gendered journeys: Women, migration and feminist psychology* (pp. 83–103). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137521477_4

Ma, W. (2016, December 28). *Wu qi gan xiao li de renqing lengnuan* [The human feelings in Wu Qi Gan Xiao]. *The New York Times*. https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20161228/may-7-cadre-schools/

Maben, A. (2006). *Mao, une histoire chinoise* [Mao, a Chinese story] (TV series documentary, episodes a–d). On Line Productions.

Mackinnon, M. E., Gien, L., & Durst, D. (1996). Chinese elders speak out: Implications for caregivers. *Clinical Nursing Research*, *5*, 326–342. https://doi.org/10.1177/105477389600500307

Man, G. (2004). Gender, work and migration: Deskilling Chinese immigrant women in Canada. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *27*(2), 135–148. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2004.06.004

Maynes, M. J., Pierce, J. L., & Laslett, B. (2008). *Telling stories: The use of personal narratives in the social sciences and history.* Cornell University Press.

Mazumdar, S. (1989). General induction: A women-centered perspective on Asian American history. In Asian Women United of California (Ed.), *Making waves: An anthology of writings by and about Asian American women* (pp. 1–22). Beacon Press.

Mead, M. (1970). *Culture and commitment: A study of the generation gap.* Natural History Press.

Menkin, J. A., Guan, S.-S. A., Araiza, D., Reyes, C. E., Trejo, L., Choi, S. E., Willis, P., Kotick, J., Jimenez, E., Ma, S., McCreath, H. E., Chang, E., Witarama, T., & Sarkisian, C. A. (2017). Racial/ethnic differences in expectations regarding aging among older adults. *Gerontologist*, *57*(S2), S138–S148. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnx078

Min, P. G. (1992). Korean immigrant wives' overwork. *Korea Journal of Population and Development*, *21*(1), 23–36.

Morrison, T. (2019). James Baldwin Eulogy. In T. Morrison, *The source of self-regard: Selected essays, speeches, and meditations* (pp. 229–232). Vintage International.

Mou, Z. (2018, January 25). Zhongguo nüxing yu jiangchu woyeshi, que zao shencha jinsheng ['Me too,' Chinese women say. Not so fast, say the censors]. *The New York Times*. https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20180125/china-women-me-too-censorship/dual/

Mouton, M., & Pohlandt-McCormick, H. (1999). Boundary crossings: Oral history of Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa—A comparative perspective. *Historical Workshop Journal*, *48*(1), 41–63. https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/1999.48.41

Nagata, D. K., Cheng, W. J., & Tsai-Chae, A. H. (2010). Chinese American grandmothering: A qualitative exploration. *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, *1*(2), 151–161. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019963

National Asian Pacific Center on Aging. (2013). *Annual Report 2012–2013.* https://www.napca.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2013-Annual-Report-FINAL.pdf

National Asian Pacific Center on Aging. (2017). *The emerging needs of Asian American and Pacific Islander older adults: What we know and what we have learned*. http://www.diverseelders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/NAPCA-The-Emerging-Needs-of-AAPI-Older-Adults_Final-Report_Feb2017.pdf

National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2001). *Di'erqi zhongguo funü shehui diwei diaocha zhuyao shuju baogao* [The report of the second survey of Chinese women's social status]. http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/qttjgb/qgqttjgb/200203/t20020331_30606.html

National Council Asian Pacific Islander Physicians. (2015). *The impact of the Affordable Care Act on Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Pakistani, & Vietnamese Americans.* https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/ncapa/pages/110/attachments/original/1437158772/2015_ACA_policy_brief_v13_final.pdf?1437158772

Ngai, M. M. (2004). *Impossible subjects: Illegal aliens and the making of modern America.* Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400850235

Ngai, M. M. (2010). *The lucky ones: One family and the extraordinary invention of Chinese America.* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

NHK. (2006). *The Cultural Revolution: Testimony after forty years* [Documentary]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N00RTaA72g4

NHK. (2016). *Zhongguo: wenhuadageming wushi nian* [China: Fifty years after the Cultural Revolution] [Documentary]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jjtHlu-mk8

Nussbaum, M. C. (1997). *Cultivating humanity: A classical defense of reform in liberal education.* Harvard University Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2000a). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511841286

Nussbaum, M. C. (2000b). Women's capabilities and social justice. *Journal of Human Development*, *1*(2), 219–247. https://doi.org/10.1080/713678045

Nussbaum, M. C. (2010). *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities* (Rev. ed). Princeton University Press. http://doi.org/10.1515/9781400883509

Nussbaum. M. C. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach.* Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674061200

Parreñas, R. S. (2003). Asian American women and globing reconstructing, 1970s–1990s. In S. Hune & G. M. Nomura (Eds.), *Asian/Pacific Islander American women: A historical anthology* (pp. 271–285). New York University Press.

Pascoe, P. (1990). Gender systems in conflict: The marriages of mission-educated Chinese American women, 1874–1939. In E. C. Dubois & V. L. Ruiz (Eds.), *Unequal sisters: A multi-cultural reader in U.S. women's history* (pp. 123–140). Routledge.

Pascoe, P. (1991a). Race, gender, and intercultural relations: The case of interracial marriage. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies, 12*(1)*,* 5–18. https://doi.org/10.2307/3346572

Pascoe, P. (1991b). Introductions: The challenge of writing multicultural women's history. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, *12*(1), 1–4.

Pascoe, P. (1996). Miscegenation Law, court cases, and ideologies of "race" in twentieth-century America. *The Journal of American History*, *83*(1), 44–69. https://doi.org/10.2307/2945474

Passerini, L. (1992). *Memory and totalitarianism.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203785775

Pfaelzer, J. (2008). *Driven out: The forgotten war against Chinese Americans.* University of California Press.

Phua, V., McNally, J. W., & Park, K.-S. (2007). Poverty among elderly Asian Americans in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Poverty*, *11*(2), 73–92. https://doi.org/10.1300/j134v11n02_04

Piao, V., Huang, A., & Cao, L. (2015, October 30). Liang Zhongtang: yitai shi zhengzhi teshu jieduan chanwu [Liang Zhongtang: One-child policy is the product of a specific political time]. *The New York Times.* https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20151030/cc30liang/.

Pipher, M. (1999). *Another country: Navigating the emotional terrain of our elders*. Riverhead Books.

Pipher, M. (2005). *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the selves of adolescent girls.* Riverhead.

Pipher, M. (2006). *Writing to change the world.* Riverhead Books.

Pipher, M. (2019). *Women rowing north: Navigating life's currents and flourishing as we age.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Qin, A. (2019a, January 4). A photographer's quest to reverse China's historical amnesia. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/01/world/asia/china-cultural-revolution-photography.html

Qin, A. (2019b, July 17). A prosperous China says 'men preferred,' and women lose. *The New York Times*. https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20190717/china-women-discrimination/zh-hant/dual/

Qin, D. (2012). Reintegrating self: Theorizing women's self-transformations in cross-cultural contexts. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *13*(3), 171–183.

Qiu, W. (Executive Producer). (2007a). *Heichao: dataogang sanshi nian fengbo jishi (I)* [The black wave: Thirty years of escaping from Hong Kong (I)] [TV series documentary]. Phoenixtv.

Qiu, W. (Executive Producer). (2007b). *Heichao: dataogang sanshi nian fengbo jishi (II)* [The black wave: Thirty years of escaping from Hong Kong (II)]. [TV series documentary]. Phoenixtv.

Radchenko, S. (2019, March 4). The island that changed history. *The New York Times.* https://cn.nytimes.com/opinion/20190304/soviet-russia-china-war/dual/

Resettlement area. (2021, December 10). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resettlement_area#:~:text=Resettlement%20Areas%2C%20or%20Resettlement%20Estates,Mun%2C%20and%20Yuen%20Long)

Saffo, P. (2010, July 7). *Elise Boulding on the "200-year present."* The Long Now Foundation. https://blog.longnow.org/02010/07/07/elise-boulding-on-the-200-year-present/

Schwartz-Shea, P., & Yanow, D. (2011). *Interpretive research design: Concepts and processes* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203854907

Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. Yale University Press.

Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts.* Yale University Press.

Scott, J. C. (2012). *Two cheers for anarchism: Six easy pieces on autonomy, dignity, and meaningful work and play*. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400844623

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Sen, A. (2004, December 6). *Interview with Amartya Sen* [Interview]. Asia Society. https://asiasociety.org/amartya-sen-more-human-theory-development

Sen, A. (2015, November 3). Amartya Sen: Women's progress outdid China's one-child policy. *The New York Times*. https://cn.nytimes.com/opinion/20151103/c03sen/dual/

Sennett, R., & Cobb, J. (1973). *The hidden injuries of class.* Vintage.

Seven May Cadre Schools. (1968). (n.d.). Chineseseposter.net. https://chineseposters.net/themes/seven-may-cadre-schools

Shen, Y. (2020, August 19). *Tuidong shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhiguan zai jiating luodi shenggen* [Promote socialist core values to take root in the family]. *People's Daily*. http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0819/c1003-31827476.html

Shih, Y. (2005). *Narratives of Chinese female immigrant professionals: Factors that affect their career development and strategies used for career adjustment* [Dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst]. Scholarworks. https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations/AAI3163709

Social Security Administration. (n.d.). *Supplemental Security Income*. https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/ssi/

State Council of China. (1978). *Guo Wu Yuan guanyu gongren tuixiu, tuizhi de zanxing banfa* [On worker's retirement and resignation].

Status of Women in the States. (2013). *Spotlight on immigrant women: Poverty & opportunity data.* https://statusofwomendata.org/spotlight-on-immigrant-women-poverty-opportunity-data/

Tatlow, D. K. (2012, September 17). The ending legacy of China's great famine. *The New York Times.* https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20120917/c17tatlow/dual/

The Chinese Historical Society of America. (n.d.). *Towards equality: California's Chinese American women curriculum guide*. https://chsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Towards-Equality-Curriculum-Guide-.pdf

The Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. (1981, June 27). *Guanyu jianguo yilai dang de ruogan lishi wenti de jueyi* [The resolution on several historical issues of the Party since the founding of the People's Republic of China]. http://www.people.com.cn/item/20years/newfiles/b1040.html

The New York Times. (1994, January 23). *Asian American women struggling to move past cultural expectations.* https://www.nytimes.com/1994/01/23/us/asian-american-women-struggling-to-move-past-cultural-expectations.html

Trang, A. (2009). What older people want: Lessons from Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese immigrant communities. *Immigration in an Aging Society*, *32*(4), 61–63.

Tsai, D. T., & Lopez, R. A. (1998). The use of social supports by elderly Chinese immigrants. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, *29*(1), 77–94. https://doi.org/10.1300/J083v29n01_06

UN Women. (2020, July 1). *Intersectional feminism: What it means and why it matters right now.* https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/explainer-intersectional-feminism-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters

U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *2010 Census*.

U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *About the foreign-born population*. https://www.census.gov/topics/population/foreign-born/about.html#par_textimage

Wallace, J. (2015, February 22). Q & A: Jeremy Wallace on China's rush to urbanize. *The New York Times.* https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20150222/c22qawallace/dual/

Walzer, M. (1985, November 13–14). *Interpretation and social criticism: The Tanner lectures on human values*. https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_resources/documents/a-to-z/w/walzer88.pdf

Wang, J. (Executive Producer). (2012). *Dao huo zhe: Zhang zhixin* [Fire stealer: Zhang Zhixin]. [TV documentary]. Phoenixtv.

Wang, N., & Zhang, L. (Directors). (2019). *One child nation* [Documentary]. Next Generation, ITVS, WDR/Arte, Motto Pictures, & Pumpernickel Films.

Wang, Y. (2004). *Victim of the cultural revolution: An investigative account of persecution, imprisonment and murder.* http://ywang.uchicago.edu/history/victim_ebook_070505.pdf

Wang, Y. (2021, October 12). 'This drop came so quickly': Shrinking schools add to Hong Kong exodus. *The New York Times*. https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20211012/hong-kong-population-drop/dual/

Washington, Z., & Roberts, L. M. (2019, March 4). Women of color get less support at work. Here's how managers can change that. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2019/03/women-of-color-get-less-support-at-work-heres-how-managers-can-change-that

Wei, Y., & Qiao, Q. (2012, March 16). *Xu Xing: xunzhao fangeming zhe* [Xu Xing: Looking for the anti-revolutionaries]. Southern People Weekly.

Wolff, J., & de-Shalit, A. (2007). Introduction. In J. Wolff & A. de-Shalit (Eds.), *Disadvantage*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199278268.003.0001

Wong, K. S., & Chan, S. (1998). *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American identities during the Exclusion Era.* Temple University Press.

Wong, K. S. (2008). From pariah to paragon: Shifting images of Chinese Americans during World War II. In S. Chan. & M. Y. Hsu (Eds.), *Chinese Americans and the politics of race and culture* (pp. 153–172). Temple University Press.

Wong, S. T., Yoo, G. J., & Stewart, A. L. (2006). The changing meaning of family support among older Chinese and Korean immigrants. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, *61*(1), S4–S9. https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/61.1.s4

Wu, H. (2003). *One man, two stories: Thunderstorm in the night*. Laogai Research Foundation.

Wu, J. Y.-W. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). *Asian American studies now: A critical reader*. Rutgers University Press.

Xiao, E. (2013, December 28). The NPC abolishes the re-education through labor system that has been in place for more than 50 years. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/china/2013/12/131228_china_politics_rights_justice

Xiaowu. (2018). *Feng Yuan: fandui xingbie baoli shi yibeizi de shiqing* [Feng Yuan: Opposing gender violence is a lifelong effort] [Interview]. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/1T4O1arNM27uWhoLWUoDjA

Xiaozhuang (n.d.). *The years during the cultural revolution.* The Chinese University of Hong Kong Service Centre for China Studies. http://mjlsh.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/Book.aspx?cid=12&tid=3501

Xie, H. (Director). (2013). *Juvenile laborers confined in Dabao* [Documentary].

Xin Hua News Agency. (2013, November 16.) *Feizhi laodong jiaoyang zhidu: renquan sifa baozhang qude zhongda jinbu* [Abolishing the re-education through labor system: The significant progress made in judicial protection of human rights]. The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2013-11/16/content_2528472.htm

Xiong, J. (2018). Yishiweijian kan wenge [Looking at the Cultural Revolution with history as a mirror]. In J. Xiong, Y. Song, & G. Yu (Eds.), *Zhongwai xuezhe tan wenge* [Chinese and foreign scholars talk about the Cultural Revolution] (pp. xxv–xxxv). The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press.

Xu, K. (2020, July 20). Geng guangfan de cujin jiating guanxi hexie fazhan [Promote harmonious development of family relationships more broadly]. *Beijing Daily*. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-07/20/c_1126259261.htm

Xu, X. (Director). (2014). *Summary of crimes* [Documentary].

Yamanaka, K., & McClelland, K. (1994). Earning the model-minority image: Diverse strategies of economic adaptation by Asian-American women. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, *17*(1), 79–114. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1994.9993814

Yang, J. (2012). *Tombstone: The great Chinese famine 1958–1962* (S. Mosher & J. Guo, Trans.). Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Yang, X. (2009, March 23). *Interview with Yang Xianhui* [Interview]. http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2009-03-23/111217463402.shtml

Yang, Y. (Writer & Director). (2016). *Wenge wushi nian (I)* [Fifty years after the Cultural Revolution (I)] [TV series documentary]. RTHK.

Ye, J. (2021, February 1). Hong Kong BNO immigration wave: The reasons for Hong Kong people to "go out" after the war. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/world-55874253

Yip, A. (2006). Countering complacency: An interview with OCA director Daphne Kwok (1996). In J. Yung, G. H. Chang, & H. M. Lai (Eds.), *Chinese American voices: From the gold rush to the present* (pp. 388–394). University of California. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520938328-065

Yung, J. (1986). *Chinese women of America: A pictorial history*. University of Washington Press.

Yung, J. (1990). The social awakening of Chinese American women as reported in Chung Sai Yat Po, 1900–1911. In E. C. Dubois & V. L. Ruiz (Eds.), *Unequal sisters: A multi-cultural reader in U.S. women's history* (pp. 195–207). Routledge.

Yung, J. (1995). *Unbound feet: A social history of Chinese women in San Francisco.* University of California Press.

Yung, J., Chang, G. H., & Lai, H. M. (Eds.). (2006). *Chinese American voices: From the gold rush to the present.* University of California Press.

Zhou, M., & Nordquist, R. (1994). Work and its place in the lives of immigrant women: Garment workers in New York City's Chinatown. *Applied Behavioral Science Review*, *2*(2), 187–211. https://doi.org/10.1016/1068-8595(94)90013-2

Zhou, M. (2009). *Contemporary Chinese America: Immigration, ethnicity, and community transformation.* Temple University Press.

Zhuang, Q., & Yang, X. (2013, September 11). Daxue zhaosheng nannü youbie shexian xingbie qishi; nü lüshi shenqing zhengfu xinxi gongkai tao shuofa [College admissions are suspected of gender discrimination; female lawyers demand public government information]. *China Youth Daily*. http://zqb.cyol.com/html/2013-09/11/nw.D110000zgqnb_20130911_7-10.htm

Zong, J., & Batalova, J. (2017, September 29). *Chinese immigrants in the United States.* https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/chinese-immigrants-united-states-5

Zou, Y. (2018, June 21). *Nü Quan Zhi Sheng bei xiaoyin de yibai tian* [One hundred days after Feminist Voices was suspended]. Duanchuanmei. https://theinitium.com/article/20180622-mainland-women-voice/