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Transnationalism, Mobility and Identity: the Making of Place in Flushing, New York City

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Flushing, New York City

Shaolu Yu, Ph.D. 2015

ABSTRACT

Drawing upon studies on mobility, transnationalism, migration and ethnic community, this dissertation examines the paradox of transnational mobilities at the cross-national scale and (im)mobilities at the local scale of Chinese (im)migrants¹ in Flushing, New York City, which is currently the largest Chinese community on the East Coast. The project investigates how the paradox is embedded within individual Chinese (im)migrants' everyday routine and rhythm of life, and how it forms their imaginative geographies and impacts their identities and senses of place. I utilize a mixed method approach including: census and immigration data analysis, ethnography, interviews, mental mapping and GIS. The findings suggest that transnational and local mobile practices are simultaneously embedded in the everyday life of Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing. The urban local mobilities, limited by the socioeconomic, linguistic, and spatial-temporal constraints, intersect with and are compensated by the transnational practices, simplify their geographic perceptions of the urban space, enhance their

¹ This dissertation uses (im)migrants to refer to both immigrants and temporary migrants living in Flushing.

attachments to the neighborhood, and form their multi-layered identities and sense of place through a dialectal interaction with place. This study contributes to the conceptualizations of mobility by interrogating the relationships between mobility and place, by taking into account intentionality and by examining the paradoxical relations to immobility. This research also contributes to the study of race and ethnicity, (im)migration and urban ethnic communities from the perspective of mobility and humanistic approach.

The dissertation is formed by three manuscripts, from the perspective of place, people and identity. Chapter 2 constructs and develops the concept of mobilocality, the paradoxical and racialized urban locality that is mobilizing yet anchoring, fluid yet rooted, transient yet static. Chapter 3 introduces *voluntary immobility* to investigate mobility and immobility in relation to intentionality. By analyzing and visualizing the mobile practices in the everyday life of Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing, Chapter 3 examines the socioeconomic, linguistic and spatial-temporal constraints in their everyday travel in urban space as well as their coping strategies. Chapter 4 examines the formation of imaginative geographies of the country, the city and the community through daily mobility embedded within place. In this chapter, I further examine how imaginative geographies impact geographic knowledge, daily language, sense of place, notions of home and identity among Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing.

Key words: Transnationalism, mobility, place, imaginative geographies, identity, home, Chinese immigrants, Flushing, New York City

Transnationalism, Mobility and Identity: the Making of Place in

Flushing, New York City

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Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Transnationalism, Mobility and Identity: the Making of Place in Flushing,
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation project starts from a conversation with Ying, who was 63 in 2012 the first year I met her. She came from Shanghai with her husband to join her son in New York City. She and her husband manage a family hotel in Flushing. I was one of her customers. I was shocked when she said she had never travelled outside of Flushing during the past five years. The only activity beyond the community was during the first week after arrival when her son took her to Times Square, the Statue of Liberty and Wall Street. Flushing provides a Chinese friendly environment. She hangs out with her friends in the senior center; she collects stories of her customers, most of whom are tourists from China or working migrants temporally living in Flushing; she knows what is happening around the world and particularly in China through newspapers and TV. Everyday, she takes a walk to Main Street, two blocks away from the hotel. Main Street has everything she needs: groceries, bank, shopping malls, restaurants, doctors, gym, senior center, and church. She is satisfied with her life; her son lives nearby. Every week, she calls her sister and friends in Shanghai, updating them with life here in the US. After that conversation, I was surprised at how place can influence people's mobility to such extent. It was this conversation that inspired my dissertation about the mobility and immobility of Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing in New York City.

1. Background

1.1 Chinese overseas

Chinese have a long history of migration. Ever since the early 15th century, Chinese began to emigrate to almost every corner of the world. Up until 1963, there were 16 million Chinese overseas (including 3 million in Hong Kong and Macao) (Chang,

1968). They were pushed and pulled in all directions, escaping the wars, famine and poverty in their homeland and starting the adventurous journey in seek of a better life for themselves and their families. They met the needs of labor demands of the receiving countries and contributed to the transcontinental railroad construction, resources extraction, manufacturing, agriculture and businesses. They were the pioneers of earlier cultural diffusion and exchanges, enriching the cultural diversity and changing the cultural landscapes in the receiving countries. The meanings of Chineseness were challenged and diversified as they were forced or chose to sojourn, or settle or re-migrate, as their identities formed and shifted in response to their own mentalities and the environment they were embedded in (Lee, 1960; Takaki, 1990; Zhou, 1992).

Around 1990, almost 37 million Chinese overseas (persons of Chinese ancestry living outside the People's Republic of China and Taiwan) were living in 136 countries (Poston, Jr. et al, 1994). Although the majority of Chinese overseas still reside in Asia, its share has dropped sharply as the Americas, Europe, and Australia have become the trending continents for the new migrants and re-migrants from Asia (Poston, Jr. et al, 1994; Cai and Jiang, 2002; Ma, 2003). The United States was the home for 4 million Chinese (im)migrants, the largest receiving country outside Asia (US Census Bureau, 2014).

In the United States, Asians alone² account for 4.8% of the total population, plus Asian in combination together account for 5.6% (US Census Bureau, 2010). With the growth rate of 43.3% from 2000 to 2010, Asian alone is the fastest growing racial group,

² According to U.S Census Bureau Asian alone means people who identity as having origins in Asia; Asian in combination means people who report more than one racial categories, one of which is Asian.

with an increase more than 4 times faster than the total population (US Census Bureau, 2010). Within the Asian group, Chinese (including Taiwanese) is the largest Asian group, followed by Asian Indian and Filipino. Asia is the largest source region for Legal Permanent Residents (LPR) in the U.S.; China is the leading Asian country (USCIS Yearbook, 2013). China is also the largest source country for refugees in the U.S and is a major source country for illegal (im)migrants (USCIS Yearbook, 2013).

The contemporary Chinese (im)migrants are diverse in their origins, subculture and socio-economic backgrounds. Many are better educated, wealthier and more mobile than traditional migrants (Li, 2009; Li and Yu, 2014). Neither sojourners nor settlers, neither emigrants nor returnees, they are physically in the U.S. while still maintaining transnational connections with their homelands with the help of modern transportation and telecommunication. Their increasing mobilities fluidize and multiply their identities and notions of home, thus change the meanings of place, territory, borders, and citizenships (Ma and Cartier, 2003). It is during the large wave of Chinese immigrants to the U.S. that this research interrogates the everyday mobility and the meanings of identity, community, and place. Since New York City is the major receiving city for Chinese immigrants, the study of Chinese in New York City will be useful for the future comparative study of other racial and ethnic groups in New York City or in other major immigrant destinations in the U.S.

1.2 Chinese in the U.S.: a historical perspective

During the waning Qing Dynasty in the second half of the nineteenth century, China was plagued by natural disaster, political turmoil and government corruption, which led to poverty, social disparity and political unrest. China's status fell from the

most powerful empire to a defeated country after the Opium War. At the same time, the Gold Rush and better economic opportunities in the United States began to reach the Chinese in Southern China, mostly the peasants from Guangdong Province, who were among the pioneers to be exposed to the Western culture. The first large wave of Chinese laborers arrived in the West Coast of the United States in the late 1840s and early 1850s, followed by the large influx of Chinese, to meet the demand for cheap labors in mining, railroad construction, farming and fishing during the westward expansion (Beck, 1898; Leong, 1936; Cheng, 1948; Zhou, 1992; Kwong, 1996).

The exhaustion of the mines, completion of the railroads, and the economic depression in the early 1870s, combined to create a situation in which Chinese laborers became the scapegoats of conflicts between the working class and capitalists. The Chinese were blamed for stealing jobs from the whites and an anti-Chinese Campaign was launched in the West Coast to drive the Chinese out of the country (Wu, 1958; Wong, 1988; Zhou, 1992; Kwong, 1996). The anti-Chinese sentiment turned into verbal and physical attacks and was institutionalized (Wu, 1958; Wong, 1988; Zhou, 1992; Kwong, 1996). In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed to prohibit the entry of Chinese laborers and the naturalization of the Chinese migrants in the United States, with some exceptions for scholars, students, government officials and merchants (Zhou, 1992). This led to both geographic dispersion and occupational adaptation of the Chinese in the U.S. (Cheng, 1948; Heyer, 1953). From 1890s to 1920s, the number of Chinese dropped by almost half. It was during that time when the Chinese in the West Coast began to disperse eastward and many of them chose to settle down on the East Coast of the U.S. (Cheng, 1948; Wu, 1958). They were forced from mines and farms into big cities, where they

clustered into Chinatowns for self-support and engaged in marginal economic activities such as restaurants and laundry businesses (Cheng, 1948; Heyer, 1953; Wong, 1988; Zhou, 1992; Kwong, 1996). Even though the number of Chinese immigrants decreased dramatically after the Exclusion Act, the number of Chinese immigrants in New York City still rose because of the regional migration from the West to the East (Figure 1.1).

During World War II, the alliance of China and the U.S and the labor shortage in the U.S during war time brought the repeal of the Exclusion Act in 1943 and the War Bride Act in 1945, which increased the number of Chinese immigrants as well as changed the demographic composition of Chinatowns (Wong, 1988; Zhou, 1992; Kwong, 1996). The sex ratio became balanced when women began to immigrate to the U.S. and changed Chinatowns from bachelor society into family-centered communities. Moreover, a large number of students and professionals came to the U.S. under training programs, which diversified the profiles of the Chinese population (Lee, 1960; Zhou, 1992). Sojourners decided to stay and became settlers, especially after the Communists won the civil War and took control of China (Cheng, 1948; Heyer, 1953; Wu, 1958; Lee, 1960; Wong, 1988; Zhou, 1992; Kwong, 1996).

The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act brought about even more dramatic changes (Wu, 1958; Wong, 1988; Zhou, 1992; Kwong, 1996). The Act abandoned the immigration policy which favored people of Anglo-Saxon origin and increased the quota for every country in the East Hemisphere regardless of race or nationality to 20,000. A separate quota was later established for the Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan (Wong, 1988; Zhou, 1992; Kwong, 1996). Also influenced by economic prosperity and political unrest in Southeast and East Asia, the number of re-immigrants of Chinese origin from

Vietnam, Indonesia and other countries began to rise dramatically (Kwong, 1996). Since 1960s, the number of Chinese immigrants has doubled every decade. The People's Republic of China opened its market to the world in 1978, which also lifted the bar for the emigrants. From 1980-1989, the Legal Permanent Residents from PRC increased 10 times of the previous decade and for the first time surpassed Hong Kong and Taiwan (USCIS Yearbook, 2013). Chinatowns and other Chinese communities became demographically and socioeconomically diversified in terms of origins, dialects, class, culture and educational backgrounds (Zhou, 1992; Chen, 1992; Kwong, 1996). With the influx of both human and financial capital resources, the traditional Chinatown expanded geographically and several satellite Chinatowns in the outer boroughs and suburbs began to emerge (Zhou, 1992; Chen, 1992; Kwong, 1996; Lin, 1998; Li, 2009).

Since the 1990s, the United States underwent extensive economic structural changes due to post-industrialization and economic globalization. The 1990 Immigration Act was formulated to attract professionals, skilled laborers, entrepreneurs and capital investment in a global competition for human capital (Lin, 1998; Li, 2009, Zhou, 2009). Accordingly, the immigrants under family reunification have declined since 1990 (USCIS Yearbook, 2013). However, the U.S. immigration policy still puts an emphasis on family relationships. In 2013, nearly 66 percent of newly granted permanent residents were under the family relationship category. Employment-based preferences account for 14 percent, 35 percent of which are professionals (USCIS Yearbook, 2013). Despite the fluctuations, since 1989, the general trend of Chinese immigrants admitted to the United States or naturalized has been on the rise (USCIS Yearbook, 2013). New national and regional patterns of geographical distribution of Chinese and new forms of the Chinese

settlements began to emerge (Chen, 1992; Fong, 1994; Li, 2009). The economic activities in Chinatowns began to expand and diversify, adapting to the global, regional and local changes (Lin, 1998). The social stratification and geographical differentiation among the Chinese immigrants deepened, both due to the diversity new immigrants and social mobility of old immigrants (Lin, 1998; Li, 2009, Zhou, 2009). Noticeable is that for the past two decades, while the new Legal Permanent Residents from PRC increased dramatically, those from Hong Kong and Taiwan saw a reverse trend (USCIS Yearbook, 2013). The majority of Chinese immigrants were born in mainland China. The increasing economic power in China and favorable changes to immigration policies in the U.S. mobilize more Chinese from Mainland China to the U.S.

1.3 Chinese in the U.S.: a geographic perspective

Historically, ever since the completion of the railroads and anti-Chinese campaign in the West starting from the early 1900s, the national migration patterns for Chinese in the U.S. are Western-Eastern migration and rural-urban migration. Chinese began to move from the West to the East and from rural to the urban for job opportunities and a more tolerant environment for immigrants. The Chinese have been mostly concentrated in the metropolitan regions and urban centers, especially on the west and east coastal U.S. However, the patterns began to change due to the diversified Chinese immigrants and economic changes across the country, especially after 1965. One of the major changing geographical patterns is decentralization. The emerging gateways such as Texas have seen dramatic increases in the Chinese population because of the economic opportunities in technology and relatively low living expense. Texas has a much higher growth rate of Chinese immigrants than California and New York State (US Census Bureau, 2000,

2010). In 2003, Texas ranked the 8th largest receiving state for legal permanent residents from China, but in 2013, it jumped to the 3rd largest state, right following New York and California (USCIS Yearbook, 2013). Decentralization also happens within the metropolitan area, demonstrated in the decline of Chinatowns and the suburbanization of Chinese immigrants, due to various reasons including: gentrification in downtown, diversity among the Chinese immigrants, and their increasing mobility. The large influx of Chinese immigrants began to bypass the urban center and settle directly in the suburbs (Chen, 1992; Fong, 1994; Li, 2009).

However, despite the decentralization process, the majority of Chinese immigrants still have a strong urban preference, which is attributed to economic opportunities, social networks and transportation convenience in cities, and the family chain migration pattern (Zhou, 1992). The preference for an urban setting as opposed to a rural setting is also due to the rural-urban division in Chinese history and culture, which will be further discussed in Chapter 3. In 2010, 89 percent of Chinese lived in urban areas compared with 81 percent in 2000 (US Census Bureau, 2000, 2010). 95 percent of Chinese resided in metropolitan areas and 69 percent were concentrated in the top 15 metropolitan areas with the largest Chinese population (US Census Bureau, 2010). In addition, Chinese also leave smaller cities for larger ones. Cities with above 50,000 people have seen drastic increases in the past decade, whereas cities with below 50,000 people have witnessed sharp declines. Almost half of Chinese live in the cities with a total population above 100,000 (US Census Bureau, 2010).

In addition, despite the emergence of the non-traditional gateway cities, the places with the largest increase in the number of Chinese are generally in traditional gateway

cities, such as New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco. These cities are still the major concentration areas for new Chinese immigrants. They have a long history of Chinese existence and well-established Chinese communities, which are the niche for new immigrants, especially the non-English speaking Chinese. It is easier for them to start life in well-established communities with easy access to job opportunities, social networks and daily activities.

1.4 Chinese in New York City

New York City has been a traditional gateway city for Chinese immigrants since the early 19th century. As a U.S. global city, it has witnessed how the Exclusion Act, World War II, globalization and transnationalism left their imprints on the Chinese and the Chinese communities. Since 2008, New York State has replaced California as the largest state for the new Chinese legal permanent residents (USCIS Yearbook, 2003-2012). The New York Metropolitan Area has the largest Chinese population, well above the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area by more than 150,000 (US Census Bureau, 2010). New York City has the largest Chinese population among all cities in the U.S. In New York City in 2010, Chinese comprised 6 percent of the total population, 11.4 % of the foreign-born population, and will soon surpass Dominicans as the largest immigrant group (The Newest New Yorker, 2013). However, in comparison with Chinese throughout the entire U.S. and in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area, Chinese in the New York Metropolitan Area tended to have a lower socioeconomic status, as indicated by a lower educational attainment, lower income, a higher poverty rate and a higher percentage of population with limited English speaking ability (US Census Bureau, 2010). Chinese in New York have a disproportionately lower percentage of the population

engaged in the professional occupation, but a higher percentage in the service industry. Although New York and Los Angeles have about the same proportion of foreign-born population, New York Chinese exhibit a higher percentage of recent immigrants and a lower naturalization rate. More than half of the foreign born Chinese came from mainland China, a much higher proportion compared to Los Angeles (31%) and the national average (43%) (US Census Bureau, 2010).

Chinese immigrants are disproportionately high in comprising new immigrants in New York City, especially under the family reunification and the asylee category ³(The Newest New Yorker, 2013). From 2002 to 2011, 24 percent of Chinese new immigrants were under the family reunion category, and 40 percent were under refugee and asylee category (The Newest New Yorker, 2013). The immigrants with lower socioeconomic status and limited mobilities are attracted to New York because of the urban environment, sound public transportation system and a relatively high demand for low skilled laborers. Almost 50 percent of Chinese in New York City depend on public transportation, in sharp contrast with 3 percent among Chinese in Los Angeles. 10 percent of Chinese in New York City walk to work, which reflects a highly concentrated mixed-use residential and business community where people live in close proximity to their place of employment (US Census Bureau, 2010).

Similar to the Chinese immigrants on the West Coast, Chinese in New York City have been going through a decentralization process into the outer boroughs and suburban

³ According to USCIS, the immigrants who enter the U.S. under family reunification include the spouse, children, parents and siblings of a U.S. citizen. Asylum status refers to those who have been persecuted in their original country or fear that they will be persecuted due to race, religion, nationality or political opinion (USCIS, 2015).

areas in Long Island, New Jersey, upstate New York and Connecticut (Chen, 1992; Lin, 1998). Within New York City, Brooklyn and Queens together account for almost 80 percent of the Chinese population in New York City (US Census Bureau, 2010).

However, the decentralization process in New York City is accompanied less by dispersal, but more by re-concentration. The traditional Chinatown could no longer accommodate the increasing numbers of new immigrants, who subsequently bypassed Manhattan and settled in outer boroughs. The decentralization process and the emergence of Chinese communities in outer boroughs are largely driven by the influx of new immigrants with diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, but less by the upward mobility of later generations as among the earlier European immigrants. The process of decentralization and differentiation formed three major Chinese communities in the outer boroughs, which, although socioeconomically better off than the traditional Chinatown, are distinguished from the suburban Chinatown or Ethnoburbs in numerous ways. Despite the better socioeconomic profiles and higher heterogeneity in Chinese communities in New York outer boroughs in comparison to Manhattan Chinatown, the overall socioeconomic status of outer-borough Chinese is still well below the average level in New York City. The outer borough Chinese are far lagging behind the suburban Chinese, as indicated by lower income, lower educational attainment, higher linguistic isolation and lower presence in professional occupations. In addition, rather than a low density and suburban setting where Ethnoburbs are located, the Chinese communities in New York outer boroughs are still within city boundaries and are similar in many ways to the traditional Chinatown. High-rise apartment buildings are seen more often than standalone houses. Housing is overcrowded by sub-renting. Businesses are highly concentrated along Main

Street⁴ in Flushing and 8th Avenue in Sunset Park. All three Chinese neighborhoods are well connected by subways and city buses. The urban feature is further evidenced by the commuting pattern of Chinese in the outer boroughs. The majority of outer-borough Chinese depends on public transportation and walking. It is the feature of high concentration that attracts and absorbs the lower class immigrants. Due to the lack of socioeconomic resources and mobilities, lower class immigrants depend on the concentrations of ethnic resources, providing them with low-wage, low-skilled job opportunities, a Chinese-speaking environment and easy transportation accessibilities. Similar to the traditional Chinatown, Chinese communities in New York outer boroughs serve as the gateways for the new lower class immigrants. Flushing is currently the largest Chinese community in New York City. Most Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing largely depend on public transportation and the ethnic community for mobile resources in their everyday travel and work. So it is an ideal place for conducting research interrogating the relationships among people, place and mobility.

2. Theoretical Framework

The project draws upon the studies of mobility, transnationalism and ethnic community and interrogates mobility in relation to place, in dialectics with immobility and as a social and cultural process. It fills a gap in the literature by discussing the paradoxical relationships between mobility and immobility, the interactions between place and mobility on which the imaginative geographies and identities are materially based.

⁴ Main Street is the major business street that runs through Flushing.

The new mobility paradigm is being formed and has brought the mobility turn both in theory and methods within the social science and humanities (Cresswell, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007; Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006; Cresswell and Merriman, 2011). It has largely expanded the meanings, forms and approaches of mobilities: including the visible movements of people, objects and capital, the invisible movements of information and social networks, the physical geographical mobilities, and the upward or downward socioeconomic mobilities (Cresswell, 2010, 2011). The words transnationalism and transmigrants denote high mobilities and interconnections between the origins and destinations, facilitating a multidirectional and complex migration process that is interweaved with social relationships, way of life, fluid identities, boundaries and territory, sense of place and space. Numerous research has suggested that by increasing mobility and interconnectivity, transnationalism has brought capital redistribution and cultural reproduction, along with social and political reformation (Vertovec, 1999; Vertovec and Cohen, 1999; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007). It also changes the meanings and patterns of individual mobility through everyday practice and the interaction between space and people and the meanings of place, locality and identity (Hannerz, 1996; Foner, 1997; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Vertovec, 1999; Dunn, 2005; Blunt, 2007). The studies on contemporary migration and transnationalism highlight the metaphors of nomadism, liquid modernity, flexibility, cosmopolitanisation, de-territorialization, routes versus roots, ungrounded, and unboundedness (Basch and Schiller, 1994; Hamilton, 1999; Bauman, 2000; Ong, 1999; Ong and Nonini, 1997; D'Andrea, 2006; Levitt, 2009). However, these metaphors romanticize and idealize mobility and transnationalism by downplaying the

importance of borders, locality, place and context and homogenizing diverse population groups.

2.1 Mobility and Place:

This study will investigate the relationships between mobility and place by providing a mobile perspective of place and a local perspective of mobility. The dualism between place and placelessness, fluidity and rootedness, as well as flexibility and authenticity should be re-examined in relation to each other, but not in opposition to one another. Place simultaneously materializes mobility and immobility. Mobility simultaneously de-places people and strengthens their attachment to place. The relationships between mobility and place are especially exemplified in contemporary urban ethnic communities with paradoxical mobility at the transnational scale and immobility at the local scale. On one hand, ethnic concentrations provide social, economic and cultural resources that are proximate to immigrants so that they do not have to travel far. On the other hand, a self-sufficient community produces few incentives for movement beyond its boundaries and paradoxically limits the potential expansion of the activity space and social interactions with the outside world.

The mobility paradigm provides a dynamic and mobile optic through which place and place-people relations can be re-conceptualized (Cresswell, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007). Mobility has long been described as the enemy of locality within a dichotomous framework of place/placelessness, globalization/localization, and fluidity/rootedness. Place is static and sedentary where people pause, dwell, and rest (Tuan, 1974; 1977; Relph, 1976; Buttimer, 1980), whereas mobility prompts placelessness and deterritorialization (Relph, 1976; Harvey, 1996). Being on the move

romanticizes mobilities, undermines place and locality and problematizes identity. However, mobility and locality are not opposite to each other; neither can they be disassociated from each other. The heightened mobility in modern society does not wipe out the meanings of places but rather enriches them. Place is dynamic, progressive and global (Seamon, 1980; Massey, 1996). Thrift argues for the interpretations of place as “*stages of intensity, traces of movement, speed and circulation*” (Thrift, 1996, p289). A “dynamic gaze” on the city is needed (Jensen, 2014, p147). This especially applies to urban ethnic enclaves, which has been depicted as enclosed and static.

2.2 Mobility and immobility-a paradox:

This study further conceptualizes mobility as relational and paradoxical, taking into account of intentionality. What distinguished mobility from movements is *ility*. It is an ability to move, the ability to overcome friction and distance and to decide when, where, and how to move. However, mobility is not absolute. Mobility is relational and relative (Urry, 2002; Adey, 2006; Jensen, 2009). There is never absolute mobility or immobility. The relationships between mobility and immobility are not either/or but rather both/and. Mobility itself is paradoxical: what is, seemingly mobility might in actuality be immobility. Neglecting contextual, relational and embodied lens of mobility leads to the oversimplified dichotomy of mobility and immobility. Mobility is largely conceptualized as positive and voluntary, whereas immobility as negative and involuntary. However, this conceptualization omits the intentional and interactive components of human beings as well as the local context. The concept of voluntary (im)mobility, a discussion missing in the existing literature, is further conceptualized in this dissertation. People who do not move might be people who are not willing to or do

not need to move. On one hand, in the dualism of mobility and immobility, voluntary immobility is easily simplified as immobility by neglecting intentionality. On the other hand, voluntary immobility neglects potential mobility (Kaufmann et al., 2004, p749) that would have been transformed into actual mobility given more resources under certain incentives. Further, people actively create mobile resources to mobilize themselves and extend their social space through technologies. The paradox of mobility and immobility is also reflected in *scale*. Immigrants tend to be perceived with heightened mobility at the transnational scale; at the same time they experience a great deal of fixity at the local scale after arriving at a foreign land. This fixity is due to constraints such as racial discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, language barriers, and immigration status. The paradoxical relations between mobility and immobility are largely reflected in their everyday life, and embedded in the local context. By taking into account of intentionality and the both/and relations between mobility and immobility, this study paves the way for the future discussions of transferring immobility to mobility and hence physical mobility to social mobility.

2.3 Towards a social and cultural interpretation of mobility in everyday life

This dissertation proposes social and cultural understandings of mobility. Movement is not merely relocation from point A to point B. The moving subjects have social and cultural attributes; they are gendered, raced, aged, and classed 'selves'. Intersectionality theory suggests that oppression is more than the sum of factors of race, gender, class and ethnicity, but are interrelated and intersected with each other in the social system (Collins, 2000). The possibilities and constraints of the moving subjects' spatial activities largely depend on intersecting social and cultural attributes, which

determine not only the trajectories and means but also the encounters and interactions with other social actors. Likewise, constraints on mobility do not work separately. The discrete expressions of immobility intersect with and mutually intensify each other within larger social and cultural contexts. Behind the physical immobility in daily life are structural factors including racial hostility and socioeconomic inequality that will eventually hinder the immigrants' social mobility. However, a large body of literature focuses on the spatial-temporal dimension of mobility, but lacks a socio-economic and cultural interpretation. For immigrants in particular, bodily movement is both a factor and reflection of their cultural incorporation. The possibilities of social interactions and outreach might be undermined by easy access to the particular mobile resources, and be further constrained by routinized trajectories embedded within their everyday life. Therefore, it is critical to understand what hinders the translation of physical mobility into social and cultural mobility and transcendence from the willingness to move to ability to move, be it spatial-temporal, socioeconomic, or linguistic constraints.

This research also examines *being* an (im)migrant in a city as an embodied experience. Mobility reflects complex relationships between people and place, self and others, bodies and environment (Jensen, 2011). Every-day travel triggers people's emotions through the people-place interactions and encounters with other social groups. People are not merely corporeal objects, but unique individuals with feelings and experience. They are not only passively constrained in various ways, but are enabled by resources and affordance while interactively engaging with the environment. The collisions between body and environment are particularly intense for (im)migrants who experience an overnight change from familiarity to strangeness. The simple and mundane

mobile activities form their spatial perceptions about the city and the community, how they perceive or are perceived by the other social groups, their identities and attachment to place, and their future social paths into the mainstream society. Therefore, the study of mobility of (im)migrants as embodied experience enriches the meanings of *being* an (im)migrant.

The imaginative geographies among (im)migrants are lived and largely formed by everyday mobility patterns embedded within local context. Geographical knowledge, sense of place, notions of home and identity are created through everyday imagining and living that reflects their daily language and the making of place. The formation and reformation of geographical knowledge of here and there is especially intensified among the recent immigrants due to the everyday collisions between expecting and seeing, knowing and unknowing, self and others, home and away, and insider- and outsider-ness. Therefore, by interrogating the paradox of mobilities and immobilities of Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing in their everyday life at both transnational and local scale, this chapter contributes to further conceptualization of mobility, place and identity.

3. Study area

This research chooses Flushing in Queens, New York City as the study area. Flushing has surpassed Chinatown in Manhattan and become the largest Chinese community on the U.S East Coast in the past two decades. It is still attracting large flows of Chinese (im)migrants from mainland China. Flushing is mobilized by both transnational and local resources. When Flushing became deteriorated during the economic downturn in the late 1970s, it was Taiwanese, later followed by Koreans and Indians, who turned the community back into life. Being resourceful, well-educated and

culturally different from the Chinese in Manhattan Chinatown, the Taiwanese bypassed the urban core and invested both financial capital and human resources in real estate development and businesses in Queens (Chen, 1992; Zhou, 1992; Lin, 1998; Smith and Logan, 2006). When *Chinatown No More* was written in the early 1990s, Flushing was a suburban Taiwanese community, with the majority of Chinese being upwardly mobile or newly-arrived middle class (Chen, 1992). However, the expansion since late 1990s and early 2000s has trended towards another direction, largely driven by the influx of new immigrants from mainland China. Flushing has a local saying of “Shang Qing Tian” (literally means *going to heaven* in Chinese), which designates the three major sending cities in Eastern Mainland China: Shanghai, Qingdao and Tianjin. Zhejiang and Fujian are also major source regions for the new immigrants. Many of these immigrants enter the U.S. under the family reunion category; others enter by tourism or business visas but overstayed their valid visa period and applied for asylum; still others are undocumented entering through the smuggling network that still exists today. Compared with the earlier settlers from Taiwan and Hong Kong, they are less affluent and less skilled and depend on the low wage job opportunities in retail and service industries, such as restaurants, grocery stores and beauty salons. Large waves of recent immigrants from mainland China began to flux into the several blocks of space in Flushing within the last two decades. After settling down, these recent immigrants bring families and friends, who later bring their families and friends. High-rise apartment buildings spring up one by one; each converted into family hotels or subdivided into dorms overcrowded by several workers. Job centers provide short-term and low wage jobs across the New York region. The former suburban Taiwanese community has gradually shown signs of a modern version

Chinatown as a hub and a gateway for working class immigrants, mostly from mainland China.

Roughly bounded by College Point, Northern Boulevard, Whitestone and Long Island Expressway, Flushing has replaced Manhattan China as the new center for the Chinese in metropolitan New York (Figure 2.3, Chapter 2). The name Flushing coincidentally indicates flows and fluidity. Its development encapsulates the history of urban transportation and neighborhood change. Far from the traditional enclosed and isolated Chinatown model, Flushing is well connected to the city, the region and the world. Long Island Railroad, the No. 7 subway and 24 bus lines connect Flushing to Manhattan and Long Island. Two airports are within 20-minute drive from Main Street. The intersection of Main Street and Roosevelt Avenue where No. 7 subway station locates is the third busiest intersection in New York City, following Times Square and Grand Central (refer to Figure 2.2, Chapter 2). Even more remarkable are the ethnic mobile resources concentrated in the community, which provide Chinese-friendly service targeting non-English speaking Chinese, including Casino buses, Chinatown vans, travel agencies and Chinese taxis. Its transnational and local connections, the high concentration of mostly recent immigrants make Flushing the ideal place for the study of (im)mobilities of Chinese (im)migrant at different scales and their interactions with place.

4. Data and Method

Relying on a wide range of sources, this study uses ethnography, semi-structured in-depth interview, mental maps, and archival research. The demographic and socioeconomic data of the Chinese in the U.S, New York City and Flushing at the census tract level were collected from the US Census data and the Yearbook of Immigration

Statistics (2000-2013) from the Department of Homeland Security. However, the lack of community-based mobility research is largely due to the limitations of census data (Blumenberg and Smart, 2014). The study of mobility and immobility at the individual scale depends primarily on qualitative data acquired by in-depth interviews and ethnography. The contextual understanding of mobility is impossible through mapping dots or polylines on the map, but requires thicker narratives that could only be obtained by a qualitative approach.

Ethnography is an important method in the studies of immigrant communities and mobility research (Adey, 2010). It is important in familiarize the researcher with the community environment to complement and contextualize the interviews (Whyte, 1943; Suttles, 1968; Fitzgerald, 2006; Hay 2010). I conducted ethnography by living in the community for five months between 2012 and 2014. By visiting and revisiting Flushing multiple times, I was able to witness its changes over time. Observations of Flushing's daily community life and major transnational and mobile resources were conducted in order to establish the spatial-temporal rhythms of activities and to obtain a good knowledge of the geographic settings. During the trips to the field, I walked every block of the neighborhood at different time of the day and the week; I took several tours with travel agencies; I conducted participatory observations in job centers, family hotels, on Chinatown vans, casino buses and in a nail salon in Long Island.

I also relied on Chinese newspapers, media and archives to trace historical development and current events of the community. They include the *World Journal* (New York version), the *New Flushing Journal*, *Sino Vision* and the *US-Chinapress*. The *World Journal* (New York version) is the most popular newspaper, a subsidiary of a main

Taiwanese news group, among Chinese immigrants in the New York Metropolitan Area. It is in Chinese language and a major information source for Chinese in Flushing. The *New Flushing Journal* has been published every half year since January 2003 and covers major social, economic and political events in Flushing. In addition, brochures, handouts, yellow pages and the websites of the major community organizations and institutions in Flushing also provide important place-based data. The analysis of this textual information helped to contextualize the daily activities and mobilities of the Chinese immigrants in Flushing.

The 35 open-ended interviews were conducted from 2012 to 2014 with Chinese (im)migrants currently living in Flushing. Two rounds of pilot studies were conducted before the final official interview, in order to identify questions and themes to refine interview questions. The participants are chosen to cover the variations of age, gender, socioeconomic backgrounds, immigration status, and length of residency. The sampling of interviewees are foreign-born, recent Chinese (im)migrants aged 18 or older, who have migrated to the U.S within the recent 20 years and are currently living in Flushing. The recent (im)migrants are most likely in the process of building their sense of place and identities and have transnational ties with the home country. They also tend to have language barriers, be confronted with travel constraints and need ethnic and community-based resources. 35 interviews reach the “informational saturation point” where patterns of response begin to repeat themselves and no new information will be obtained by another additional interview (Schensul and LeCompte, 1999, p262). The majority of the initial screening and sampling was conducted on Main Street in Flushing. To ease the

recruiting for participation, chain referral sampling was utilized as I built the connections with local residents (Schensul and LeCompte, 1999).

The interviews were conducted in Mandarin and later translated into English and transcribed before coding. Each interview lasted from one to three hours. The themes of the interviews included: socioeconomic backgrounds, everyday mobile practices, challenges, coping strategies, transnational ties, geographic knowledge and sense of place. During the interview, I paid close attention to gestures, facial expressions and moments of silence, which are important factors that are often forgotten (Hay, 2010). To protect the interviewees' privacy and minimize the risk of undocumented immigrants being identified and deported, participant anonymity has been preserved through the use of pseudonyms. The GIS mapping of every-day activity at the individual level uses the closest intersection of their home and work instead of the actual address.

5. Positionality

Acknowledging my positionality in the field is essential when doing ethnographic research, and analyzing field notes and interviews (England, 1994; Rose, 1997). My cultural and social connections with Flushing provide me with both perspectives and access to the community. During my three years of dedicated research in Flushing I went through the process of becoming a part of the Flushing community, and Flushing becoming a part of me. I experienced unexpected ties to my homeland through the community. During my first year in Flushing, I ran across a woman at the subway station, who turned out to be my neighbor in my hometown Qingdao. She assisted me in finding short-term housing and expanded my circle of friends and acquaintances, some of whom became my interviewees. During my second year in Flushing, I spotted my elementary

school teacher from Qingdao on Main Street. During my third year in Flushing, I interviewed a person whom I found out later was a friend of my dad's best friend. Flushing is a living product of time-space compression and transnationalism, and I experienced this on an individual scale. Flushing is a translocality, and I am part of transnational network. The transnational connections also help me expand my social circle and establish friendships with my interviewees. This gives me the privilege of interrogating the interrelations among transnationalism, mobility, place and scale, through experiencing them as an insider.

Being a native Mandarin speaker originally from China is useful in building connections in the community and gaining access to resources and interviews. While acknowledging the utility of such insider perspective during fieldwork, I understand that they do not provide the unquestionable insider status, as I also occupy the role as a researcher and an outsider. Instead of rejecting "subjective knowledge" (Mansvelt and Berg, 2010, p335), post-structuralist geographers embrace their social, locational and ideological placement that may be influenced by class, gender and race. I recognize that I am observing, collecting and filtering all these data through my own lens of being a Chinese migrant and a female researcher who is away from her homeland but deeply rooted in Chinese culture while having been educated in an American university for five years. This positionality gives me the advantages of being both an insider and an outsider, and essentially occupying a space of betweenness.

The sense of outsider-ness is formed both intentionally and unintentionally. Being a full time doctoral student and part time teaching assistant living in a rural, white-dominated college town in Connecticut, and surrounded by American culture in daily life

for five years, I have experienced my own integration experience. Being a researcher, I practiced reflexivity, reminding myself to keep some distance from my study subject. I spent no more than 2 months each summer during my three-year research period. Living in and living away from Flushing allows me to stand both in and outside it. Entering the field every time with a fresh eye, distanced me from my interviewees and provides the legitimacy and objectivity for my research. To them, I am no different because I am a Chinese who has freshly landed in this country and seeking my own path of migration. However, I recognize that, because of my education, my socioeconomic background, my position as a geographer and a researcher that I am unique in some ways. Much like the study of my research participants, I kept the concept of intersectionality in mind throughout the research process in contextualizing my insider/outsider status. My identity is multi-layered, and my identity in its entirety affected how my interviewees perceived me. Many interviewees perceived me as a harmless, highly educated, female student who shares with them cultural bond and language. Very often the interviews became casual talks with friends, in which rich and useful information was gained. Some interviewees view me as a mobile passerby or stranger that they feel comfortable with relaying their personal experiences to. They ask me the same questions I ask them. “Why do you come to the U.S.? Are you going back to China after graduation? What is home to you?” The interviews turn out to be a two-directional dialogue in which I position and reposition myself among them as well as in the American society. *“Any serious and prolonged intellectual engagement with the world transmutes into a marriage of self and the other, such that as with old married couples, the two may even begin to look alike”* (Tuan, 2002, p340). The interviews have always been an arena where the intersections of gender, class,

age, education immigration status are examined. The process of fulfilling my academic curiosity is intertwined with the process of discovering myself, through the negotiation between academia and real world, between here and there, between my adopted land and my homeland, between transnational and local, between my perceptions of my interviewees and their perceptions of me, and between an outsider and an insider.

6. Dissertation Outline

The dissertation will proceed as follows. Chapter 2 discusses place by conceptualizing *mobilocality* as the mobile perspective of locality and local perspective of mobility. *Mobilocality* is formed by the mobility and immobility at both transnational and local scales. Chapter 3 discusses people. It examines the challenges and coping strategies in the everyday travel of Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing from a place-based approach and introduces *voluntary immobility* by taking account of intentionality. Chapter 4 discusses geographical knowledge and identity. It investigates how (im)mobility patterns of Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing and their relationships with the mobilocality forms imaginative geographies of the country, the city and the community, and how they notions of home and identity among Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing.

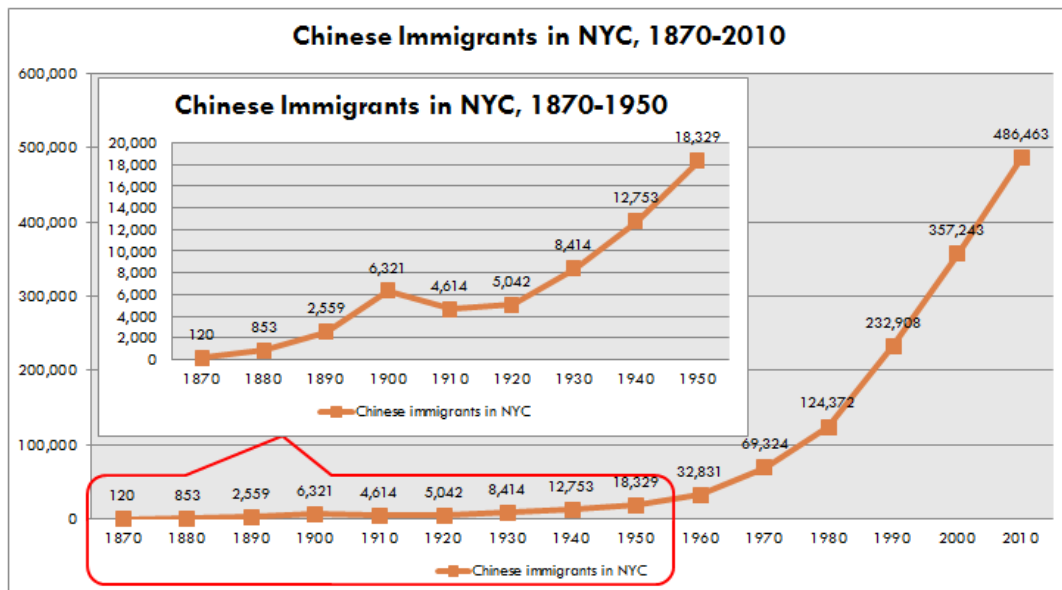


Figure 1.1. The Chinese in New York City, 1870-2010
Source: Wu (1950, 20); Wong (1988, 40); Zhou (1992, 84); AAFNY (2000); 2010 U.S. Census Bureau Demographic Profile SF1 100% Data

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Chapter 2

Mobilocality: a Mobile Perspective of Place

Abstract

Places, especially urban ethnic enclaves, traditionally imply a sedentary and enclosed meaning. Based on ethnographic research and in-depth interviews in Flushing, Queens, New York City, this chapter proposes the concept of mobilocality. Mobilocality suggests a mobile perspective of contemporary urban ethnic communities, formed by the (im)mobilities at both transnational and local scales that are simultaneously embedded in the everyday life of (im)migrants. Mobilocality is mobile yet local, fluid yet rooted, transient yet authentic. In this manuscript, I argue that mobility is not simply the physical ability to move, but more importantly, it is a cultural and social phenomenon. Mobility itself is paradoxical; the seeming mobilities might immobilize people. The failure to translate physical mobility into social and cultural mobility simplifies (im)migrants' geographic knowledge, restricts their spatial activities, and narrows their social interactions. The making of mobilocality is an outcome of the interactions among people, place and mobility, which involves not only spatial-temporal dimensions, but also social and cultural context.

Key words: mobilocality, transnationalism, mobility, urban ethnic enclave, Chinese, Flushing, New York City

1. Introduction

“Places are ‘stages of intensity’, traces of movement, speed and circulation.”
- Thrift, 1996, p289

“Every story is a travel story... Every day, they (travel stories) traverse and organize places, they select and link them together, and they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories.” -de Certeau, 1984, p116.

Flushing became larger, taller, denser and busier every time I revisited it between 2012 and 2014. The neighborhood wakes up around five in the morning on a typical weekday. The airplanes roar by every several minutes. Trucks outside grocery stores are unloading fresh Chinese fruits and vegetables grown in nearby farms in New Jersey and Long Island. The Chinese bakeries are filled with early birds, grabbing breakfast on their way to work. Commuters get off the transit bus and grab a newspaper in the booth before flocking into the No. 7 subway underground or the Long Island Rail Road trains. Elderly Chinese are reading newspapers outside the Flushing library as they wait for it to open so that they can read books from their home country, and attend performances or lectures on Chinese culture. The streets slow down its pace towards noon, while the restaurants become busier. Passerby's gather on Main Street around TV vans that broadcast news and live shows that are simultaneously on in China (Figure 2.1). As the evening rush hour nears, the neighborhood comes to life again as people come home from work. A casual stroll on Main Street is practically impossible, with shoving and pushing by people carrying bags

of groceries and rushing home. Being surrounded by flyers on immigration lawyers, travel agencies, medical services, and bubble tea shops, I do not need to look for information. Information comes to me.

Mobility has long been described as the enemy of locality within a dichotomous framework of place/placelessness, globalization/localization, and fluidity/rootedness. Place denotes a sedentary, singular and static sense, where people pause, dwell, and build a sense of belonging and attachment to (Tuan, 1974; 1977; Relph, 1976; Buttimer, 1980). For some scholars, mobility prompts deterritorialization. Relph (1976) argues that mobility is one of the reasons for placelessness (Relph, 1976). Harvey's time-space compression suggests a tension between place and mobility (Harvey, 1996). Being on the move also changes people-place relations and sense of place from topophilia to "tropophilia" (Anderson and Erskine, 2014, p130). The metaphors of nomadism, liquid modernity, cosmopolitanisation, routes versus roots, and unboundedness tend to romanticize mobilities, problematize identity and undermine place and locality (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc, 1994; Ong and Nonini, 1997; Hamilton, 1999; Ong, 1999; Bauman 2000; D'Andrea 2006).

However, mobility and locality are not the antitheses of each other (Simonsen, 2003). Rather, the mobility paradigm and the temporal dimension provide a dynamic and mobile optic through which place and place-people relations can be re-conceptualized (Cresswell, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007). Seamon (1980) approached the meaning of place through bodily movements in daily life and metaphorize them as "place-ballets" (p163), composed of both time-space routines and a variety of encounters. Place, therefore, is a "dynamic entity" (p163). Following structuration theory and

Hagerstrand's time geography (Hagerstrand, 1970), Pred (1984) argued for a notion of place as a "becoming process" (p279). Massey challenged the self-enclosed, singular, defensive notion of place and suggested an alternative progressive, global and multiple interpretation of place, where local and global integrates as opposed to conflict (Massey, 1996). This resonates with Thrift's interpretations of place as 'stages of intensity, traces of movement, speed and circulation' (Thrift, 1996, p. 289). Place is progressive, practiced and performed. "*What is needed is a dynamic gaze on the city in such a way that it is not the enclave alone*" (Jensen, 2014, p147).

Ethnic enclaves have long been understood in the dualism of rootedness and fluidity. They were either depicted as an enclosed and racialized town within a city, or interpreted as a node in the network of circulation, suggesting hyper fluidity at the global scale and the inevitable loss of local meanings. However, ethnic settlements need to be re-examined and re-interpreted through the "critical mobilities thinking" (Jensen, 2009, p141) in which fluidity and fixity are relational but not contradictory in conceptualizing place and producing subjectivities and identities. The sense of belongings and attachment to place are varied products of both mobility and immobility (Arp et.al 2013). Following with this trajectory, this chapter proposes the concept of mobilocality where mobility and immobility at both transnational and local scales are paradoxically embedded in the locality, are simultaneously weaved in everyday lives of local ethnic residents, and change their sense of place and identities. The concept of mobilocality suggests that the mobile understanding of locality does not have to be a duel between placeness or placelessness, fluidity or rootedness, mobility or authenticity, insider or

outsider. Mobilocality itself is a paradoxical entity as a result of negotiation between these dualities.

2. Towards a mobile understanding of ethnic settlements

The urban ethnic neighborhoods have long been interpreted as bounded, homogeneous, segregated and exclusive. As early as 1926, the Chicago School compared the urban communities to the plant communities from a human ecological perspective (Burgess, 1926). The city itself is a natural phenomenon divided into natural areas, which are defined and maintained both physically and culturally. They segregate from and compete with each other for urban resources and are subject to invasion and succession. Be it a Jewish ghetto or Negro slum, Chinatown or Little Sicily, they are all portrayed as inferior neighborhoods with undesirable alien groups, low socio-economic status, enforced segregation, and self-regulation (Wirth, 1928; Zorbaugh, 1929; Whyte, 1943; Suttles, 1968; Massey and Denton, 1993). As compared to ghetto, enclave denotes a predominantly positive meaning. Marcus (1997) formally defined enclave as “*spatially concentrated area in which members of a particular population group, self-defined by ethnicity or religion or otherwise, congregate as a means of enhancing their economic, social, political and/or cultural development*” (p242). The ethnic enclaves provide ethnic resources for socio-economic upward mobility of new immigrants (Wilson and Portes, 1980; Wilson and Martin, 1982; Zhou, 1992; Portes and Manning, 2008). However, although more voluntary than imposed, enclaves still suggest a notation of enclosure, boundedness, concealment, exclusivity and immobility within urban space. As Laguerre (2000) put: “*Space serves as a marker to locate the place of non-hegemonic groups, to*

identify their status in society, to delimit their sphere of interaction, and to patrol, control and contain them in their enclaves”(p8).

As a result of globalization, transnationalism and de-concentration of minority groups across North America, new models of ethnic settlements have emerged as a reflection of an unbounded, dynamic, mobile and well-connected immigrant community in contrast with the traditional ghettos or enclaves. Ethnoburb illustrates a multiethnic and socioeconomically improved immigrant cluster in suburbs, weaved into the large flows of international capital, goods and labor (Li, 1998, 2005, 2009). Invisiburb portrays a physically unbounded and inconspicuous immigrant community (Skop, 2002). Although cultural bonds may still be maintained (Ling, 2004, 2012), the invisibility leads to the de-bounded-ness and de-ethnic-ness of ethnic settlements. Both Ethnoburb and Invisiburb reflect the increasing willingness of recent immigrants to incorporate into mainstream society and their heightened residential and socioeconomic mobilities to do so (Skop and Li, 2003).

An increasing body of research on ethnic settlements changed their backdrop from the urban setting to a global stage. The previous predominated focus on local interactions and mobilities has gradually shifted to the global level. Laguerre's conceptualizations of ethnopole and panethnopole emphasize the multiple extraterritorial connections and relations beyond the enclave, with homeland and with other diasporic ethnopoleis overseas (Laguerre, 2000, 2005). This notion implies a high level of mobilities and circulation of people, goods, information and capital at the global scale. Yet, he does not deny the enclosure, physical boundaries and embeddedness of the ethnic communities within the urban and local context. Coinciding with Massey's global sense of place, he

argued for the convergence and integration of globalization and localization, as opposed to conflicts between them. *“By describing the city in terms of global poles, I emphasize the multiplicity of these transnational connections that find their point of departure, destination and intersection in this urban environment”* (Laguerre, 2000, p20).

The time-space compression and mourning for locality and place have been further challenged by transnationalism theory. While both transnationalism and globalization imply increasing spatial mobility and connections, transnationalism distinguishes itself from globalization by insisting on the significance of borders, nation-states, place, ties and identity (Smith, 2001; Levitt, 2001; Ma, 2003). Transnational urbanism bridged the gap between global and local by examining transnationalism from the ground up, and from the everyday life of human agency (Smith, 2001, 2005).

Translocality, first coined by Appadurai (1996), then conceptualized by Smith, who suggests important roles cities and localities play in producing and emplacing transnational ties and flows (Smith, 2001, 2005), which are exemplified in many cases, such as Chinatown in New York City (Lin, 1998), the Dominican transnational community in Boston (Levitt, 2001), and Senegalese translocality as *“a setting for interaction, where people are brought together in bodily co-presence”* (Sinatti, 2008, p62-63).

The mobility optic provides an alternative framework through which ethnic/racial/immigrant settlements can be reexamined. At one end of this spectrum stand the ghettos and enclaves implying the enclosure and immobility. At the other end the ethnopolis and translocalities denote a high level of mobility and circulation. However, mobility itself is paradoxical. The resources that seemingly mobilize people

could eventually immobilize them; what are mobile to some might be immobile to others. This spectrum is further compounded by scale. Transnational and local are not mutually exclusive, but are two sides of one story. The formation and dynamics of the contemporary ethnic/immigrant landscape is a result of negotiation between mobility and immobility at both transnational and local levels, which are embedded in the everyday life of individuals and influencing their social interaction and self-identification.

Therefore, based on the case study in Flushing, Queens, New York City, I propose the concept of *mobilocality* to suggest a mobile perspective of contemporary urban ethnic neighborhoods, to simultaneously examine the mobilities at the transnational and local scales in the everyday life of individuals, and to argue for a paradoxical spatial entity that both mobilizes and immobilizes people. The intersection of transnational and local as well as the paradox of mobility and immobility, together create the *mobilocality* that is simultaneously mobilizing yet anchoring, fluid yet rooted, transient yet authentic, racial yet diverse, and lead to the multi-layered identities and sense of place.

3. Methods

The empirical study is a combination of interviews and ethnography. The 35 semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with Chinese (im)migrants living in Flushing. The participants are chosen to cover the variations of age, gender, socioeconomic backgrounds, immigration status, and length of residency. Each interview lasts between one and three hours and was conducted in Mandarin Chinese. The themes of the interviews included: the migration history, everyday mobile practices and transnational ties, geographic knowledge and perception, sense of place and identity. Participant anonymity has been preserved by referring to them using pseudonyms. The

interviews were later translated into English and transcribed before being coded and analyzed.

Along with interviews, I conducted ethnography for 5 months between 2012 and 2014. Being a Chinese female researcher, who speaks Mandarin and maintains transnational connections to my homeland largely through Flushing, helps me maintain both the insider and outsider positionality. By visiting and revisiting Flushing multiple times during the three years, I am fortunate to witness its changes over time. I conducted observations on several places: on Main Street, in job centers, in family hotels, on Chinatown vans and on casino buses. I took tours organized by travel agencies. I also conducted archival research by tracing the news since on Flushing since 2003, by following the major media including *Sino Vision*, *New Flushing Journal*, *World Journal*, and *US-Chinapress*.

4. Flushing, Queens, New York City: beyond Chinatown

Like other Chinatowns in North American cities, the earlier images of Chinatowns and Chinese communities in New York City were depicted as enclosed, isolated, self-sufficient towns within cities (Beck, 1898; Wong, 1988; Kinkead, 1992; Kwong, 1996). The bounded, static and segregated images of Chinatown were contested when Chinatown and Chinese communities began to change dramatically due to socioeconomic, geographic and political changes at the global, national, regional and local scales. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, globalization trend, China's rising economic status, and the shifting geopolitical power together continue to transform the portraits of Chinese immigrants and the Chinatown landscapes (Zhou, 1992; Lin, 1998; Chen, 1992; Hum, 2014).

Compared to other Chinese communities in New York City and across North America, Flushing is unique. It is currently the largest Chinese community on the US East Coast. In the 1970s, the influx of immigrants and capital from Asia saved the neighborhood from deterioration and economic crisis. After 911, a large influx of Chinese businesses and people left the Chinatown in Manhattan and moved to Flushing, which further stimulated Flushing's growth and development. Roughly bounded by College Point, Northern Boulevard, Whitestone and Long Island Expressway, Flushing today is a diverse and dynamic Asian community, with the majority of residents being Chinese immigrants from Mainland China. Flushing's location, landscapes, diversity, and history make it distinctive from any models of ethnic settlements in past studies. The hyper-connection with the outside world suggests that it is far from the isolated Chinatown depicted in Kinkead's book (Kinkead, 1992). It is no longer a suburban Taiwanese community, portrayed in *Chinatown No More*, more than two decades ago (Chen, 1992). Its geographic location within the city and its high density make it distinguished from the Ethnoburb on the West Coast (Li, 2009). Translocality is not sufficient to describe Flushing since it is not only forged by transnational linkages but also local connectivity. Although dominated by Chinese (im)migrants, Flushing is diverse with different social groups in ethnicity, place of origin, age, class, occupation, and educational backgrounds.

The development of Flushing has been driven by its increasing mobility. Flushing encapsulates the history of urban transportation and neighborhood change. Ever since the late 18th century, Flushing served as a connection between Long Island and Manhattan. In 1790s, the first bridge was built over Flushing creek, shortening its

connection with Manhattan. The Long Island Rail Road opened for business in 1873, later accompanied by trolley lines. In 1928, the extension of No. 7 subway route from Manhattan to downtown Flushing marked the beginning of Flushing's transformation from a small town into a regional center. The No.7 subway was later nicknamed "Oriental Express". The opening of LaGuardia airport and John F. Kennedy International airport connected Flushing to the world. The mobile asset made Flushing an ideal host place for the two World Fairs in 1939 and in 1964. Flushing, portrayed as the "valley of ashes" in the novel *The Great Gatsby* in the early 20th century (Fitzgerald, 2004), has been transformed into a dynamic and vibrant regional transportation hub and an economic, cultural and social center (Schaffer, 1993; Antos, 2010; Li, 2003, 2009). Its mobile resources are still attracting massive immigrants who just set foot in this foreign country. Nearly 100,000 people travel through downtown Flushing on a daily basis (Flushing BID) (Figure 2.2). Major highways encircle the neighborhood. 24 bus lines and the Long Island Railroad connect Flushing with the rest of Metropolitan area.

Even more remarkable are the ethnic mobile resources, which provide Chinese-friendly services targeting non-English speaking Chinese. Chinatown vans connect Flushing with other Chinese communities in New York City. They depart every 20 minutes and more frequently during the morning and afternoon rush hour. The casino companies offer cheap bus tickets to the casinos in Connecticut, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The taxi services offered by Chinese businesses provide door to door transportation both in short and long distance. The drivers are Chinese and they charge cheaper price than the regular city taxi service, which also attracts customers of other

ethnic groups. In addition, Chinese owned travel agencies provide pre-designed travel tours across North America.

Flushing is abundant with mobile resources that facilitate not only the bodily movements but also the flows of capital, goods and information (Figure 2.3). Around 20 banks have their branches set up along the Main Street. Together with more than 20 locations of electronic money transferring offices, they facilitate transnational capital flows. Around 40 logistic shipping branches are scattered across the neighborhood, offering shipping service directly to China, cheaper than the U.S Postal Service. Flushing is also the home base for major Chinese media and newspapers including *Sinovision*, *World Journal*, *Epochtimes*, and *Visiontimes*, which deliver news of both China and the United States. Job centers serve as a portal for short-term job opportunities across and beyond the metropolitan area. Family hotels subdivided room into 6-10 beds leased on a daily basis to the highly fluid migrants.

“Every story is a travel story” (de Certeau, 1984, p116). A casual talk with people I accidentally met around the corner is always related to travel and mobility. Their narratives of migration, connections with the homelands, everyday movement and encounters, efforts in searching for jobs and housing, and their expectations for the future weave into their mobile stories. The new immigrants join their friends and family and start their American journey from Flushing. The tourists from China prefer to stay in the hotels in Flushing because of its Chinese friendly environment and its easy access to the airport and to Manhattan. Chinese students live in Flushing for mental closeness to home and ease of homesickness and nostalgia. The migrant workers in the need of short-term jobs stay temporally in Flushing until they find the next ideal one in the job centers.

During weekends, Chinese all over the metropolitan area congregate in Flushing for food, for entertainment and for community services. Flushing is highly connected by train, by bus, by air, and yet it still keeps its Chineseness. It is fleeting, transient, fluid, and mobile. It is not only a place for pause, but a place that mobilizes people, information, goods and capital to pass through it, and connects them with other places. People visit, stay and live in Flushing for mobility. It mitigates people's immobilities and alleviates their nostalgia in the foreign land away from home.

5. Findings

5.1 "East at Main Street": The sense of simultaneity

The TV vans on the Main Street operated by the Chinese media companies are always surrounded by passerby, watching the news and shows that are simultaneously on in China. Unlike Chinatown in Manhattan, which is more disneyficated⁵ for tourism, the various restaurants and bakeries in Flushing cater to the local Chinese residents. A whole floor in the Flushing public library is dedicated to books and journals from Asia, the majority of which are from China. The pamphlets fly everywhere advertising for cheap international call package. People are communicating with their friends and family overseas using free micro-text app on their phones. Standing at the street corner, I felt as if I were in China.

Originally from Beijing, Lu is a 44 years old hairdresser, who lives in Flushing but works in Manhattan. His wife and parents are in China and he goes back to visit them twice a year. When asked about his feelings living in Flushing, he said:

⁵ Disneyfication means the commercialization of urban space into themed-based places, mostly for marketing and tourism (Ferrell, 2001)

“When I just arrived in the U.S., I missed home badly. Accidentally, I found a Chinese vender selling grilled lamb stick here in Flushing, tasting exactly the same with those I had in Beijing. The moment when I tasted the authentic and familiar flavor, my homesickness suddenly got relieved and healed. You see, nostalgia is just a feeling of your tongue, a sense of the smell or taste of your childhood food.Flushing is good in this sense, it is a miniature China. It looks, smells, tastes like China. It doesn’t give you the strong sense of foreignness.”

For Lu, the familiar taste of food transports him back to China and triggers his childhood memories. This transnational mobility through the materiality of food enhances his emotional attachment to Flushing, as a place to abridge the distance with home and alleviate the feeling of foreignness.

Jiang, 54, has been living in Flushing for 15 years. She owns a restaurant right on the Main Street. Even as a business owner, she works 7 days a week without breaks. Her husband and son have just been approved for green cards and reunited with her. Most of her other relatives and friends are in China. She goes back to China and visits her mom every year. When describing her yearly trip back to China, I was surprised how she simplified and routinized the trip like a daily commute to a neighboring state.

“I go back to China once a year, each time I stay one month or so. I usually take the midnight flight. In the morning, I still come here to work. Around late afternoon, I go back home, take a shower and pack my luggage. The taxi picks me up and about 20 minutes later, I am in the airport, ready to take off. It’s very convenient and quick.”

One of the major reasons for Jiang to live in Flushing is its geographical location and abundant mobile resources. Flushing is a 20 minute drive to the two airports in New York City. For Jiang and other Chinese living in Flushing, being close to JFK airport feels like being close to China. A trip to China is often simplified to two telephone calls: one call to local travel agencies to book flights, the other to taxi service for the ride to the airport. One can travel easily without speaking English. When Jiang speaks about her daily life in the restaurant, she said:

“I feel like living right on the street. We have a TV here, with live shows and news report in China. I am a big fan of the World Journal. While I am taking breaks, I watch the news and read newspapers. Recent years, the influx of tourists from China flocks to Flushing for its convenience and closeness to the airport. I talk to them and learn about what is going on in China...I don’t miss China. Now the connections are so accessible and cheap. When I first came to the U.S. 15 years ago, the international phone calls were so expensive. It was 16 dollars one hour, back then I spent more than half of my monthly salaries for the phone bill. But now, with 10 dollars, you can have hundreds of hours of call.”

Her transnational practices and connections are facilitated by easy access to the mobile resources in Flushing such as ethnic taxi service, cheap telecommunication and Chinese media. These physical transnational facilities in the community emotionally draw her closer to China. Her *body* is bounded in the restaurant, but her *self* is extended through various venues. Therefore, the meanings of her restaurant are multiplied as places not

only to work, but also to live, to socialize, to connect with China, and to build her routine and sense of home.

“After the short visit (in China), I come back to where I am. The moment I land in JFK, I feel so relieved and I think to myself ‘Finally Home!’ My daily life routine is here in Flushing. I am familiar with the surrounding environment here and I am used to the life here.”

Even though her physical mobility is confined in the community, she extends her connections with the homeland through technologies and networks. Her bodily immobility is compensated by the mobility of information, people and goods around her. Adam argued for a divisible model of person separated into self and body by the extensibility and distanced connections in modern communication age (Adam, 1995, 2005). He also problematized the simple dichotomy of presence/absence. The ceaseless mobility is coupled with “indirectness” (Thrift, 1996, p288). The boundaries of the neighborhood are permeated almost everywhere at every moment, facilitated by the ubiquitous transnational resources and connections. They are naturally embedded within the rhythms of everyday activities: when they are watching TV on the street, reading newspapers during breaks at work, socializing in the teashop, dining in the restaurants, or grocery shopping in a Chinese store. Flushing is a place that facilitates their extensibility, triggers the feelings of nostalgia, but at the same time relieves their homesickness and compensates for the strangeness and foreignness of being away from home.

Therefore, the permeations of the community boundaries do not lead to the loss of locality and the meaning of place, but rather paradoxically tighten people’s cultural and ethnic bonds and enhance their attachment to the community. *“Transnational practices*

do not take place in an imaginary third place” (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998, p11).

“Extensibility is a function of location” (Adam, 2005, p276). Transnationalism is grounded in the locality. The absence of body and the presence of self cannot exist without the materiality of transnational resources and networks that must be emplaced. The sense of simultaneity is facilitated by the extensibility and transcended through the materiality of food, media, language, and lifestyles. People congregate in Flushing for the consumption of these transnational resources: Chinese newspapers booths near the subways stations; a variety of authentic Chinese food along the Main Street; tea houses around the street corner where friends gather and socialize; grocery stores where people can buy products from China. These resources are located and concentrated in Flushing, and are not available anywhere else. Localities are not homogenized as a result of time-space compression. The meanings of place do not fade away; rather, they are multiplied and strengthened.

5.2 Mobility: a blessing or a curse

Stone, in her 50s, originally from Tianjin, has stayed in the U.S. for 13 years. She is now settling down with her husband and daughter in Flushing. When recalling her earlier gypsy life style, she said:

“I changed job from time to time, each job in a different state. I worked as waitress, cook, dishwasher, and nurse in Connecticut, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Maryland, Georgia, you name it. Every time when I was tired of one job, I always retreated to Flushing, found a family hotel, rested for a while, and started looking for the next job in the job center. Flushing then was like a home for me.”

For mobile workers like Stone, Flushing is a pause and a transition. A major reason that Flushing has been attracting waves of Chinese migrants is its easy access to the abundant entry level jobs in the service industry, mainly in restaurants, massage & spa, nail salons, grocery stores, and laundry businesses. These job opportunities scatter all across the New York Metropolitan area and beyond. Some jobs reaches as far as Florida. The easy connections between the migrant workers and job markets are facilitated not only by Flushing's geographic location but also by its rich mobile resources. Job centers offer short-term jobs (零工, *ling gong*) with no requirements of contracts or legal status. Job seekers can easily find temporary jobs with a \$10-50 registration fee. With little effort can they move from one job to another. These working migrants in their transitional period between job shifts can simply find temporary housing in family hotels, where the landlords subdivide single rooms into separate beds and sublease them at a cheap price on a daily basis. The renters can easily come and go with all their belongings in backpacks and luggage. The flexible short-term lease, albeit illegal, eases the tensions between working and living by unbinding them from the fixity of long-term lease. Some business owners offer dormitories for the workers, others provide free pick-up and drop-off ride between Flushing to the work site, saving the workers' efforts in obtaining driver's licenses and purchasing vehicles. Therefore, Flushing institutionally mobilizes migrant workers in the job and housing markets.

However, every story has two sides. Chen, in her 70s, had been living in family hotels for two years. Her son leads a middle-class life in suburban Philadelphia. However, she decided to move to Flushing on her own for a Chinese-friendly environment and social life. When I first ran across her in a bakery, the grey-haired woman carrying a

luggage and backpack immediately caught my attention. Seemingly a tourist to me, she was talking to the waitress about her unfortunate story in the family hotel. Her backpack was just stolen in the family hotel, along with all her money and IDs. This is the second time it happened to her. When asked why she chose to stay in a family hotel in Flushing on her own, she said:

“I moved to Flushing because it was a struggle for me to live in suburban Philadelphia. All I could see is forest. When my son and my daughter-in-law went to work, I had to stay at home alone. It was like a prison. I can’t speak English, I can’t drive, and I can’t even talk to doctors when I am sick. So I came to Flushing on my own. Here you have Chinese-speaking doctors, Chinese newspapers and Chinese books in the library.”

“I live in the family hotel because it is convenient. I go to visit my son very often, sometimes I still take temporary jobs outside the City. It is not worth spending money on renting a long lease where I might not stay for long. I have been living in this hotel for two years...There is nothing much you can do for such case. The landlord feared calling the police because family hotels are illegal. I don’t want bother finding another hotel because I am used to this one. Anyway, they are the same everywhere.”

Our conversation ended up with a tour in the family hotel she stayed. The apartment has two separate rooms, one for males, the other for females. The hotel was crowded, filthy and putrid, with roaches and flies everywhere. Up to 10 renters share one kitchen and one bathroom. The 80 square feet room was fully occupied by three bunks, leaving no room for movement. Renter’s beds are the only place where they sleep, eat, read, and chat

(Figure 2.4). The landlord is not held accountable for the renters' properties, so they need to carry their belongings wherever they go. One of Chen's previous roommates has just left after about a week's stay. Another stranger has just moved in, who worked in a farm in New Jersey and stayed in Flushing for two days for a doctor visit.

It has become a common practice that business owners offer free pick-up and drop-off rides for their workers. Between 8-10 am in the morning, Flushing is congested with commuters, buses, and vans. At almost each intersection and parking lot, lines of people are waiting for the vans to pick them up to work. When talking about his daily commuting and working environment, Kevin, 32 years old nail polisher, who lives in Flushing and temporally work in a nail salon in Connecticut, speaks about his daily routine in the salon:

"When I arrive at the salon, I immediately get down to work, there's no time to waste. I have to spend every minute I can to make money and make ends meet. I have never walked around the neighborhood. In some busy days, you don't even have time to eat. ... I don't actually communicate with customers. I speak simple English on pedicure and manicure when I take orders from customers, but when they talk more, I don't understand a word so I just smile."

Every morning he goes to work and comes back home with his boss and co-workers. The routinized familiarity with daily mobilities mingles with the sense of foreignness and strangeness. The route to work becomes simplified as lines, highways, and traffic signs with non-recognizable symbols. The destinations are unknown areas reduced to "white district" (*baiqu*), "black district" (*heiqu*), and "mixed district" (*zaqu*). The judgment of

good and bad neighborhoods is simply based on how much he is tipped. Even though it is the journey they make on a daily basis, they cannot locate the destination or pin it down on the map, nor do they know about the context of the path or the destination. Their bodies easily move beyond Flushing, but the encounters with other social groups are merely work-related communications, constrained by their limited English. The limitations on mobility further lead to biased assumptions on other racial/ethnic groups.

Mobility itself is a paradoxical entity. The mobile resources such as family hotels, job centers and free rides to work mitigate the language barriers and fluidify the circulation of people. These resources heighten the physical mobilities, but at the expense of potential cultural and social mobilities. The seeming mobilities essentially immobilize people by simplifying their geographic knowledge, restricting their spatial activities, and narrowing their social interactions. Job centers provide abundant access to the job markets and the easy movements from one job to another. However, the movements are lateral, not vertical as they are still confined within the pool of entry-level jobs in service industry. The temporary jobs offer no securities for workers or for the employers. The illegal and poor-conditioned family hotel is a source of potential crime. The everyday journey to work becomes simplified, routinized, fixed and yet still foreign. What the mobilities imply here is in reality fixity, insecurity, unlawfulness and foreignness. However, the actual immobilities further strengthened people's attachment to the community, even though with unpleasant experiences, such as in Chen's case.

5.3 Mobility as a social and cultural concept

Everyday mobility is not simply the physical ability to move, but more importantly, has social and cultural consequences that can never be overestimated. The

meaning of movement is far more encompassing than simply bodily relocation of a subject from point A to point B assisted by carrying objects. The moving subjects have social and cultural attributes; they are gendered, raced, aged, and classed 'selves'. The transport facilities, whether it is mobile buses, trains and cars or immobile stations and paths, are meaningful and bear possibilities of social encounters and interactions. It is the social and cultural attributes of people that determine the origins, directions, destinations, trajectories, means, encounters and thus inject mobilities with rich meanings.

Mobility is a form of social inequality (Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye, 2004). It is an asset that is possessed by some but not others. With abundant mobile resources in Flushing, what confines the everyday mobility of its people is not physical, but social and cultural. When asked about the constraints and negative memories in traveling in the city and beyond, all of the 35 interviewees signaled language barriers; five were concerned about their illegal immigration status, and nine experienced ethnic/racial discrimination when they had unpleasant and sometimes confrontational encounters with other racial/ethnic groups. The elderly people have an abundance of time but were confronted with barriers in language and driving. They were also confronted with technology barriers, including computer and phones used for navigation, which further limited their mobility. Younger working age interviewees faced temporal fixities, although they had fewer language and technology barriers.

"I don't have time to go out. On average, I have to work 12 hours a day, 6 or 7 days a week. If I take a day off, I just want to sleep. A popular local saying of weekly life in Flushing goes '6 days cow, 1 day pig'". (Sheng, 50, Cook)

“When traveling beyond Flushing, I don’t know how to drive; I don’t speak or understand English” (Stone, 51, a community organization leader).

“This happened 10 years ago when I first came to the U.S. I still remember it vividly as if it happened yesterday. I was waiting for the No. 7 train that morning. It was rush hour and the station was crowded. A black middle-aged man in his 50s stood in front of me. When the door opened, people were rushing into the train. I was pushed and accidentally elbowed the man’s back. He stared and yelled at me: ‘Fucking idiot! Go back to your country!’ When the train reached Queensboro plaza station, a white man shoved him while getting off the train, the black guy yielded the way without even saying a word” (Lu, 44, hairdresser.)

Above are the examples of constraints that limit the physical mobility of (im)migrants in Flushing *“There are complex relations between elements of physical movement and social mobility”* (Urry, 2007, p8). When it comes to the assimilation and integration of immigrants into mainstream society, a large body of literature examines residential and socioeconomic mobility. However, the physical mobilities in everyday life of commuting and dwelling reflect to a great extent, how they directly or indirectly encounter other social groups beyond their community. The simple and mundane mobile activities, form their spatial perceptions about the city and the community, how they perceive or are perceived by the other social groups, their identities and attachment to place, and their future social paths into mainstream society. Daily mobile practices, such as driving, riding public transportation, or navigating through the city, have been taken for granted.

Yet, they are capabilities that need to be learned in a foreign setting, an indispensable part of cultural incorporation into a new society, through the everyday interaction between people and space.

In addition, mobilities rely heavily on social networks. The large flow of migrants to Flushing is triggered by social networks. When asked why they chose Flushing as their place to stay, 30 out of the 35 interviewees followed their friends and relatives who have already settled down in Flushing. *“It is like a snowball effect. People are drawn to Flushing by their friends or relatives who are already living in Flushing. After they settle down, they will also bring their friends and relatives to Flushing”* (Sun, Freelancer, 56). People also turn to friends and relatives for local mobilities. When needing help for travel, 33 interviewees would ask for rides or directions from their friends and relatives. Some others turn to local community organizations. One of my interviewees still rings me occasionally when needing directions to a place she has never been to.

6. Mobilocality: mobilizing place, placing mobility

“Mobile is a property of things and of people” (Urry, 2007, p7). However, it is also a property of place. Jensen argued for *“an understanding of ‘place’ as constituted by flow”* (Jensen, 2009, p154). The mobility of a place depends on how much it is connected to the outside and how much resources it can provide to mobilize and facilitate the flow of people, capital, information and goods. However, mobility and place are neither conflicting nor exclusive. *Mobilocality* is a hybridity resulting from clashes between locality and mobility, and intersections between transnational and local scales. Countering against Harvey’s time-space compression and Relph’s placelessness (Relph, 1976; Harvey, 1996), I argue that mobilizing place actually multiplies the meaning of

place and enhances people's attachment to locality. In the conceptualization of translocality, Smith captures distanciated, yet situated sense of place (Smith, 2005). What differentiates mobilocality from translocality is its mobility at both the transnational and local scales that are embedded within people's everyday activities. The neglect of either scale leads to a biased understanding of the mobilocality. At the transnational scale, with the help of technology and the materiality of food, culture and media in Flushing, transnational connections with China shorten the migrants' mental distance between the U.S. and their homeland, strengthen their ethnic bonds within the community, and ease the sense of strangeness in a foreign land. At the local scale, mobility is a paradoxical entity. It is a social and cultural phenomenon that highly depends on ethnic resources and social networks that are embedded within the locality, which, along with the temporal, linguistic, socioeconomic barriers, leads to the failure in translating physical mobility into social and cultural mobility. Due to this failure, the local mobile resources and convenience essentially immobilize people by limiting their potential social activities. *"I hardly go out of Flushing. There is no need. It is so convenient and you can access everything you need here in Flushing"* (Cheng, nanny, 53). Therefore, the simultaneity of transnational mobilities and local immobilities in combination produce the *mobilocality* that is paradoxically mobile yet local, transient yet anchoring, fluid yet fixed, where people constantly traverse its boundary but still maintain a strong sense of attachment to.

Mobilocality is a result of a dialectal process between people and place, a two-directional process of emplacing mobility and mobilizing place. People are congregating in Flushing for mobile resources, both at the transnational and local scales, where they could simultaneously maintain transnational linkage to their hometown and connect to

the labor and housing resources in the region. Flushing is a place where they can be mobilized and connected to the outside through a variety of venues, which nurtures a sense of simultaneity of *self* being there but *body* being here. On the other hand, the congregation of people prompts the further agglomeration of mobile resources. Human agencies are not only passive consumers of mobile resources, but also producers in providing a variety of ethnic resources and triggering chain migration through social networks. Transnational companies, small business owners, ordinary residents and migrants, and community organizations collectively participate in the making of mobilocality. It is a reciprocal process between subjects and affordance, between practice and context, between people and place.

As a result of the self-reinforcing dynamic among people, place and mobility, *mobilocality* can also turn to *immobilocality*. As more and more recent immigrants and migrants have been attracted to Flushing for its mobile resources and easy connections, the neighborhood becomes denser, busier, noisier, and dirtier. The working class migrants' "easy come, easy go" lifestyle and the hyper fluidity of people circulating result in the loose and ungrounded social relations and many times a sense of insecurity, as is shown in the case of family hotels. The mismatch between the supply and demand for mobile resources leads to the increasing traffic congestions and pollution, the skyrocketing rent for businesses and housing, the overcrowded educational resources, the fierce competition among small businesses, and the exploitation of cheap labor due to the surplus of labor supply. The quiet suburban residential neighborhood has gradually changed into a vibrant yet crowded business center. The trend has shown that earlier generations of immigrants with greater mobilities have started to seek housing elsewhere,

leaving Flushing to recent (im)migrants who still highly depend on the mobile resources in the mobilocality. The landscapes of this neighborhood are constantly changing in the wake of negotiation between mobility and immobility, and between different social groups.

7. Conclusion and implications

The concept of *mobilocality* proposes a mobile perspective of contemporary urban ethnic neighborhoods. Ghetto and enclave suggest an enclosed and concealed island within a city, whereas translocality and ethnopolis lean towards hyper connectivity at the global scale. However, none of these models fully represent the modern urban ethnic communities like Flushing. Flushing is a hybridity of transnational and local (im)mobilities, which are simultaneously embedded in people's everyday life. The transnational mobilities and the local immobilities work collectively in creating a paradoxical entity that is mobile yet local where people are transnationally connected yet still maintain a strong attachment to locality. Therefore, mobile and local do not stand as opposed to each other. The locality is mobilized and in return mobilizes its people. The changes and development of mobilocality is a self-reinforcing dynamic dependent upon the reciprocal and dialectical interactions among mobility, locality and people.

In this chapter, I also stress a contextual understanding of everyday mobility. A large body of literature focuses on the spatial-temporal dimension of mobility, but lacks a socio-economic and cultural interpretation. The possibilities and constraints of the moving subjects' spatial activities largely depend on their social and cultural attributes, which determine not only the trajectories and means but also the encounters and interactions with other social actors. For immigrants in particular, bodily movement is

both a factor and reflection of the cultural incorporation. Spatial mobility can be enhanced and heightened by technology in transport and telecommunication; social mobility, however, is more complicated. The possibilities of social interactions and outreach might even be undermined by the easy access to the particular mobile resources, and be further constrained by routinized trajectories embedded within their everyday life. Therefore, it is critical to understand what hinders the translation of physical mobility into social and cultural mobility and transcendence from the willingness to move to the ability to move, be it spatial-temporal, socioeconomic, or linguistic constraints and fixity. Mobilocality enhances immigrants' mobility by providing access to work, housing, and daily transportation, yet whether it can become part of the fabric of entire city or the entire country depends on the translation of people's physical mobility into cultural and social mobility.

The mobile perspective of ethnic enclave and a contextual understanding of mobility require not only a meso-scalar perspective of place but also a micro-scalar scrutiny of individual people. The everyday mobility approach that encompasses not only temporal-spatial but also socioeconomic and cultural dimensions is indispensable in the understanding of contemporary immigrants and ethnic communities. How (im)migrants adjust and incorporate into the receiving society has always been the major focus in the study of race/ethnicity/immigration. The traditional assimilation theory predicted the final assimilation of immigrants into the mainstream society and the eventual disappearance of ethnic community. The dichotomy of settlers and sojourners that used to dominate the discussions on immigrant identities is no longer sufficient. The transmigrants connote a high mobility at the global scale but are not necessarily mobile at the local scale. The

large influx of new immigrants from Asia after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, Asia's rising status in the global economy, and the heightened transnational mobilities collectively complicate immigrants' identities and divert the priori trajectory projected by mainstream society on Asian immigrants and communities. Newly arrived (im)migrants have developed unique identities and mentalities that are distinct from the earlier generations. These ideas and mentalities are formed through their everyday mobile practices, including commuting, dwelling, shopping, and running errands. The incorporation has largely been active rather than passive, as they are both the consumers and producers of mobile resources anchored in the community. Therefore, "*the ethnic strategy of the Chinese immigrants is becoming assimilated via the ethnic way and becoming American by becoming ethnic*" (Zhou, 2009, p235). They encounter both transnational mobilities and local immobilities in their everyday life, which are embedded within the community and conversely strengthen people's strong sense of home and feeling of attachment to it in return. *Mobilocality* as such, is a spatial, social and cultural outcome of the interaction between people, locality and mobility.



Figure 2.1, TV van surrounded by passerby on the Main Street in Flushing, Queens, New York City, by the author



Figure 2.2, Busy intersection in the afternoon Flushing, by the author

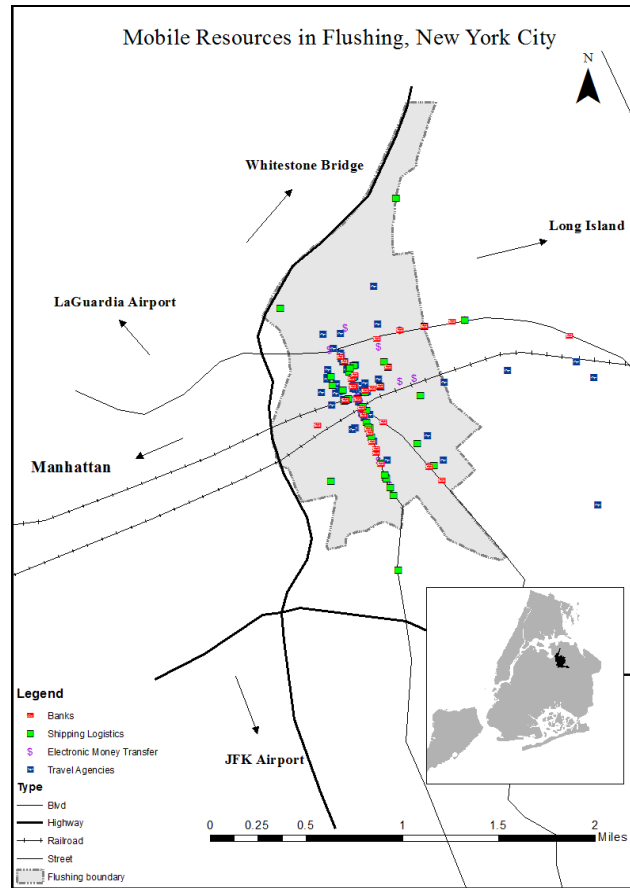


Figure 2.3, The mobile resources in Flushing, Queens, New York City. Data source: fieldwork by the author



Figure 2.4, A room in a family hotel in Flushing, by the author

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Chapter 3

“I am Like a Deaf, a Dumb and a Blind Person”: Mobilities and Immobilities of Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing, Queens, New York City

Abstract

Through community-based research on mobility of Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing, Queens, New York City, this chapter is to explore: 1) mobility patterns of recent (im)migrants in an urban setting; 2) the constraints, resources on everyday mobility and their coping strategies; and 3) the relationships between mobility, migration and ethnic community through a place-centered approach. This chapter contributes to research on daily mobilities of immigrants in an urban environment and expands the conceptualizations of mobility and immobility by embracing locality and intentionality. Without considering locality, stillness is easily mistaken for immobility; without considering intentionality, accessibility is easily equated to mobility. The results show a paradoxical mobility pattern in the everyday life of Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing which is represented by the paradox of mobile place and limited activity space, of transnational connections and local immobility as well as of voluntary and involuntary immobility.

Chinese (im)migrants face various constraints in their daily mobility such as language, time, age, race, and immigration status that intersect with each other within a larger social and cultural context. These challenges trigger discomfort and fear that intensifies their sense of foreignness and outsider-ness. Their coping strategies for overcoming mobility constraints are largely embedded in the locality, including ethnic mobile businesses, social networks and community resources. Their relational and voluntary immobility is compensated by movements and flows of people and information both at the local and transnational scale. Paradoxically, locality provides accessibility but

at the same time hinders the transfer of potential mobility to actual mobility, voluntary immobility to mobility, and physical mobility to social mobility.

Key words: everyday mobility, immigrants, ethnic community, ethnic mobile resource, voluntary immobility, Flushing, New York City

1. Introduction

The complex relations between social equity and mobility is one of the major themes in the study of transport and mobility (Kenyon et al. 2002, Blumenberg 2008; Lucas and Jones, 2012; Urry, 2012). However, there is a dearth of research on immigrants' mobility patterns and acculturation in their daily life from a place-based approach, which studies people's mobility embedded within the community and interrogates the relationships between locality and mobility. The existing literature has indicated that ethnic minority groups are vulnerable to lack of mobility resources. Additionally, barriers to physical movement may hinder access to social and economic resources and opportunities and therefore deter the integration process (Blumenberg and Evens, 2007; Blumenberg and Shiki, 2007; Chatman and Klein, 2009; Tal and Handy, 2010; Lo et al., 2011; Bose, 2014).

This chapter partially contradicts the above observations by taking into account the effects of locality and intentionality on mobility which have been under studied. Ethnic communities produce mobile resources that increase immigrants' daily mobility but simultaneously decrease their potential mobility. While social networks are a major coping strategy for immigrants' mobility (Blumenberg and Smart, 2010, 2014; Lovejoy and Handy, 2014), further explorations on interrelations between locality and mobility are largely lacking. For example: 1) What mobile resources in ethnic community enable immigrants' mobility? 2) How do these mobile resources affect immigrants' travel behavior and mobility pattern? 3) To what extent has proximity and locality contributed to immobility? In addition, echoing to the mobility paradigm that has expanded the conceptualization of mobility as contextual, relational, meaningful and embodied

experience (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Schwanen, 2006; Adey, 2006, 2009; Urry, 2007; Schwanen et al., 2008; Jensen, 2009; Cresswell, 2006, 2010; McQuoid and Dijst, 2012), this chapter further explore mobility by embracing subjectivity, and in dialectics with immobility and locality.

This chapter attempts to problematize and expand the conceptualization of mobility and immobility by embracing locality and intentionality. Mobility has been taken for granted as the ability to move. Accordingly, it is measured and documented by the observed time and distance of trips, facilitated by the accessibility to transport resources such as car ownership and public transportation system. Highly mobile people are defined as those who travel the furthest and most frequently, whereas the spatial mismatch hypothesis tells the stories of immobility amongst disadvantaged population groups, due to the decentralization of employment and lack of trips made between working opportunities and residential locations (Klain, 1968; Liu and Painter, 2011). However, without the consideration of locality and intentionality, *not moving* has been mistaken for *not being able to move*. What if people choose not to move due to accessibility to locally-based resources so that it is unnecessary to travel far? Would the observed immobility be considered as mobility or immobility? This chapter proposes voluntary immobility to examine the intentionality of mobility and its relations to locality.

Drawing on a case study among recent Chinese (im)migrants living in Flushing, Queens, New York City, the largest Chinese community on the U.S. East Coast, this chapter contributes to a community-based approach to everyday mobility pattern of (im)migrants in urban settings, by examining their constraints, resources and coping strategies. The existing literature on migration and mobility mostly focuses on residential

and social mobility and their impacts on acculturation into mainstream society. Less discussed is the actual physical movement in everyday life and its meanings as an embodied experience. Therefore, this chapter also expands research on race, ethnicity and migration by interrogating the meanings of immigrants' daily mobility in their mundane life as they carry national, racial and cultural identity while interacting with the urban environment.

This chapter begins with a review of two veins of relevant literature: the first on immigrant mobility and transportation equity, and the second on the contextual understandings of mobility. The paper then introduces the study area, data collection and methods. The next section presents the paradoxical mobility and immobility patterns and constraints among Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing, followed by the section on coping strategies. Finally, I conclude that ethnic enclaves provide mobile resources, economic opportunities and social network that enable immigrants' relational mobility and voluntary immobility. The resources in the community increase their accessibility to jobs, housing, and healthcare as well as enhance their attachment to place. Paradoxically, the easy accessibility to the ethnic resources also limits their potential physical mobility and hinders their interaction with other social groups. What this study implies in the transportation policy is that transportation equity does not merely rely on access itself, but more broadly in immigration policy, labor market equality and community development.

2. Migration, mobility, and locality

What distinguishes mobility from movements is "ility". It is an ability to move, the ability to overcome friction and distance and to decide when, where, and how to

move; it is a resource that can be accessed by some but not others. Mobility is capital, the variations of which are structured by gender, ethnicity, age and social class (Kaufmann, et al., 2004). Extensive studies have been conducted on mobility and transportation equity and its social impacts (Kenyon et al. 2002; Blumenberg, 2008; Hodgson, 2012; Lucas and Jones, 2012; Milne, 2012; Power, 2012; Sterrett et al. 2012; Urry, 2012). Kenyon et al. (2002) argued for “*a mobility dimension of social exclusion*” (p207). *The Journal of Transport Geography* has a special issue on the social impacts of transport and mobility (Lucas and Jones, 2012). Mobility are both the cause and consequence of social inequality and social exclusion (Kenyon et al., 2002; Kaufmann et al., 2004; Stanley and Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Bocarejo and Oviedo, 2012; Jaramillo et al., 2012; Urry, 2002, 2012). Immobility leads to lack of access to resources, services and social networks. Mobility promotes social interaction, social network and social capital (Urry, 2012; Power, 2012; Kamruzzaman et al. 2014), and it conversely depends on social network (Carrasco and Miller, 2009; Blumenberg and Smart, 2010, 2014; Bose, 2014).

Numerous studies look at the mobility patterns, space-time constraints and social inequality of underprivileged population groups including women, the disabled, the aging, the young, and people in poverty (Kwan and Ding, 2008; Hodgson et al. 2012; McQuoid and Dijst, 2012; Power, 2012; Nordbakke, 2013; Berg et al. 2014). However, the mobility research on immigrants needs further exploration, as “*to migrate during a pressing situation involves substituting a known pattern of constraints for one which is largely unknown*” (Hagerstrand, 1970, p11). Immigrants exemplify the dialectics of mobility and fixity (Urry, 2007). The relocation at the transnational scale reflects mobility. However, their daily travel at the local scale in a foreign environment is restricted. But the studies

of immigrants' physical mobility in everyday commuting and dwelling are largely lacking. Yet it reflects, to a large extent, how (im)migrants directly or indirectly encounter other social groups beyond their community on a daily basis. The simple and mundane mobile activities form (im)migrants' spatial perceptions about the city and the community, how they are perceived by the other social groups, their identities and attachment to place, and their future paths into mainstream society. Daily mobile practices, such as driving, riding public transportation, or navigating through the city has been taken for granted. Yet, these are crucial practices that need to be learned in a foreign setting, and are indispensable part of cultural incorporation into a new society, through the everyday interaction between people and place.

Existing literature on immigrants' mobility suggests that travel behavior has been recognized as an important indicator of assimilation and integration (Blumenberg and Shiki, 2007; Tal and Handy, 2010; Lo et al., 2011; Bose, 2014). Recent immigrants, especially those of lower socioeconomic class, often depend on public transportation, and are more vulnerable to fewer mobile resources (Lo et.al, 2011; Blumenberg and Evens, 2007; Chatman and Klein, 2009). The barriers to physical movement may hinder access to social resources and therefore deter the assimilation and integration process (Mitschke, et al. 2011; Bose, 2014). However, the existing research mostly focuses on a person-centered approach; the role of ethnic communities in immigrants' mobility has been understudied. Mobility changes the meanings of community and the landscape of social networks and social capital (Cass et al., 2005; Dugundji et al., 2011; Urry, 2012). However, the effects are two-directional. Locality conversely impacts travel behavior and social interactions. *"The competencies, resource and strategies used to achieve*

connectivity are dynamic and situated” (Hodgson, 2012, p17). Without considering the situatedness in place, *“locality and proximity can be mistaken for immobility”* (Motte-Baumvold, 2012, p69). Ethnic concentrations provide social networks based on which immigrants share transportation resources such as carpooling or informal favors from family and friends (Coutard et al., 2002; Chatman and Klein, 2009; Blumenberg and Smart, 2010, 2014; Lovejoy and Handy, 2014). They also provide proximities to social, economic and cultural resources, so that the immigrants do not need to travel far. On one hand, locality is a partial solution to spatial mismatch, by providing social networks and social capital (Zhou, 1992; Barnes, 2003). On the other hand, a self-sufficient community produces few incentives for movement beyond its boundaries and paradoxically limits potential expansion of the activity space and social interactions with the outside world. Therefore, mobility and immobility are not simple dualisms, but paradoxical and relational, which need further scrutiny within local contexts.

3. Towards a contextual understanding of mobility

This chapter provides a contextual understanding of mobility, in relation to immobility and locality, while also taking into account humanistic dimensions. Hagerstrand’s time geography (1970) highlights individual wellbeing by interrogating the meanings of time and space in everyday life mobility with the intention of improving livability. However, his approach homogenizes individual persons by reducing them to passive bodies with no regards to emotions, feelings and intentions, and independent of social, cultural, historical and local contexts (Giddens, 1984; Rose, 1993). People are not merely corporeal objects, but unique individuals with feelings and experience, carrying with them cultural and social attributes. They are not only constrained in various ways

but are enabled by resources, while interactively engaging with the environment. The neglect of a contextual, relational and embodied lens of mobility leads to the simple dichotomy of mobility and immobility.

First, context matters in understanding everyday mobility (Bissel et al. 2011; Schwanen, 2006; Schwanen et al., 2008). Mobility must be interpreted alongside persons' biological, social and cultural attributes, including their demographic features, socioeconomic backgrounds, family, biography, and neighborhoods characteristics. These attributes largely determine people's paths, directions, activity space, accessibilities, encounters, interactions, and perceptions. The quantitative measurement and documentations of spatial-temporal trajectories in the traditional transport geography approach reduces rich social, cultural and political contexts. Second, mobility is relational and relative (Urry, 2002; Adey, 2006; Jensen, 2009). *"There is never absolute immobility, but only mobilities which we mistake for immobility"* (Adey, 2006, p83). By the same token, there is never absolute mobility. Mobility itself is paradoxical. What is seemingly mobility might be essentially immobility. Mobility needs be understood in relation to fixity. Immigrants tend to be perceived with heightened mobility at the transnational scale, while at the same time experiencing a great deal of fixity at the local scale after arriving at a foreign land. Such fixity might be due to constraints such as racial discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, language barriers, and immigration status. Third, the study of mobility of immigrants as embodied experience enriches the meanings of *being* an immigrant. Mobility is an embodied experience in everyday life, reflecting complex relationships between people and place, self and others, bodies and environment (Jensen, 2011). Every-day travel triggers people's emotions through the people-place

interactions and encounters with other social groups. An increasing literature extends the study of mobility by embracing subjectivities and emotions. McQuoid and Dijst (2012) examined mobility of low-income single mothers in urban settings by integrating the emotional component in the spatio-temporal framework. Berg et al. (2014) explored the embodied experience of retirees' mobility. The collisions between body and environment are particularly intense for immigrants who arrive in a foreign land and experience an overnight change from familiarity to strangeness. Being in unfamiliar surroundings and being perceived by others as strangers, (im)migrants' movements are undoubtedly mixed with feelings of foreignness, adventure, loneliness, discomfort, and vulnerability. The embodied experience of mobility conversely influences immigrants' activity space, mobility pattern, sense of place and identity.

The factor of intentionality in the conceptualization of mobility has been missing. Mobility is taken for granted as positive and voluntary, whereas immobility is perceived as negative and involuntary. However, this assumption omits intentional and interactive components of human beings. Immobility can be voluntary. People who do not move might be people who are not willing to or do not need to move. Further, people actively create mobile resources to mobilize themselves and extend their social space through technologies. On one hand, in the dualism of mobility and immobility, *voluntary immobility* is easily simplified as immobility by neglecting intentionality. On the other hand, the transformation of potential mobility into actual mobility largely relies on the transformation from voluntary immobility to voluntary mobility given more resources under certain incentives. Just as Kaufmann puts: *"The empirical observation and description of actual mobility (past and present) is insufficient to understand the impact*

of a particular social phenomenon” (Kaufmann et al., 2004, p749). Place and local context play a critical role in enabling potential mobility. Therefore, this chapter examines mobility and immobility by embracing subjectivities, within specific local and social context, and in relation to immobility and place.

4. Methods and context:

4.1 Study area:

The word “Flushing” implies flow. Coincidentally, the community is an important transportation hub located in Queens, which is one of the most culturally diverse districts in New York City and in the U.S. It is currently the largest Chinese community on the U.S. East Coast. The majority of Chinese in Flushing are recent (im)migrants from Mainland China, who are getting used to the foreign environment. Long Island Railroad, No. 7 subway and 24 bus lines connect Flushing to Manhattan and Long Island. Flushing is also encircled by major highways. Two airports are within a 20 minute drive from Main Street. The intersection of Main Street and Roosevelt Avenue where No. 7 subway station locates is one of the busiest intersections in New York City. Even more remarkable are the ethnic mobile resources concentrated in the community, which provide Chinese-friendly service targeting non-English speaking Chinese, including Casino buses, Chinatown vans, travel agencies and Chinese taxis. The high concentration of recent (im)migrants in Flushing and its mobile resources make Flushing an ideal place for immigrant mobility research through a community-based approach.

4.2 Method:

The lack of community-based mobility research is largely due to the limitations of census data (Blumenberg and Smart, 2014). The contextual understanding of mobility

is impossible through mapping dots or polylines on the map, but requires thicker narratives that could only be obtained through qualitative approaches. The narratives enrich quantitative measurements of mobility such as time, locations, route and distance by adding contexts and subjectivities such as expectations and emotions.

This research is grounded in ethnography and in-depth interviews based in the Flushing community. The 35 open-ended interviews were conducted with Chinese (im)migrants living in Flushing (Eighteen men and seventeen women). They have all migrated to the U.S. within the recent twenty years. These recent (im)migrants are mostly likely to face challenges in daily mobility and depend on the community-based resources while building their sense of place and maintaining transnational connections with their homeland. Two rounds of pilot studies were conducted before the final official interview, in order to identify questions and themes to refine interview questions. The majority of the initial screening and sampling was conducted on Main Street in Flushing. To ease the recruiting for participation, snowball sampling was utilized as I built the connections with local residents. The participants are chosen to cover the variations of age, socioeconomic backgrounds, immigration status, and length of residency. Each interview lasted from one to three hours and was conducted in Mandarin which is the commonly used language in Flushing. The themes of the interviews included: socioeconomic backgrounds, everyday mobile practices, challenges, feelings, coping strategies, transnational ties, geographic knowledge and sense of place. To protect the interviewees' confidentiality, participant anonymity has been preserved through the use of pseudonyms. The GIS mapping of every day activity at the individual level uses the closest intersection of their home and work instead of the actual address.

Ethnography is critical for the place-based mobility research, familiarizing me with the geographical environment in order to capture the spatial-temporal rhythm in the community and contextualize the interviews. I conducted participant observations for five months between 2012 and 2014. Observations are conducted on the usage of mobile resources in Flushing including Chinatown vans, Casino buses, job centers, family hotels and nail salons. I walked around the community at different time of a day and a week. I took several tours with the travel agencies. Informal interviews were conducted with the mobile service providers. The interview transcripts and fieldwork notes were translated into English before transcribing, coding and analysis. The coding was based on the research questions, identifying the constraints, resources, experiences, feelings related to daily mobility.

5. The paradox of mobility and immobility

5.1 Paradox I: mobile place and immobile people

Flushing is very well connected to the city, to the region and to the world, and provides plenty of ethnic mobile resources. However, the daily paths of its residents are geographically concentrated within the boundaries of Flushing. Jiang, 54, is a restaurant owner. She has been living in Flushing for 16 years. Her restaurant is on Main Street, patronized by local residents and by tourists, the majority of whom are from China. Her apartment is just one block away from the restaurant. Her daily activity is very simple, depicted in her word “*two points and one line*” (Figure 3.1). Even though Jiang is a restaurant owner with approximately ten employees, she still works seven days a week. Chen, 73, retired in China and followed her son to the U.S. four years ago. Initially, she lived with her son in suburban Philadelphia. Unable to drive or speak English, she felt as

though she was “*living in prison*,” despite living together with her son. She moved to Flushing three years ago and has been living on her own since then. She is very satisfied with her life in Flushing due to the Chinese friendly environment and proximity to her friends and resources she needs in her daily life. Her daily routine path is home (rest), library (read), restaurant (eat), senior center (hanging out with friends) and community church (meeting friends and learning English) (Figure 3.2).

According to Hagerstrand (1970), the temporal-spatial constraints in people’s daily life are capability, coupling and authority constraints (Hagerstrand, 1970). The existing literature suggests that immigrants are mostly confronted with authority constraints: lower socioeconomic status, lack of public transit and poor accessibility to resources (Chatman and Klein, 2009; Tal and Handy, 2010; Liu and Painter, 2011; Lo et al., 2011; Bose, 2014). However, the case study in Flushing contradicts these findings. When asked what hindered them from expanding their activity space, what was surprising is that none of the participants have mentioned lack of transport resources or economic barriers.

Most Chinese immigrants in Flushing have intentions to expand their daily activity space but encounter intersections of various constraints other than simply direct authority constraints. These include language, age, gender, race, citizenship, immigration status or a combination of several factors that restrict their everyday mobility. Among all the challenges, language is a major one in the everyday urban life of recent Chinese immigrants living in Flushing, regardless of their education or income. 28 out of 35 of the participants point out language on top of the list of constraints. As recent (im)migrants, some only master simple English, others not at all. The linguistic limitations hindered

them from reading street signs or asking for directions when getting lost in the city. The inability to speak English also generates fear, sense of foreignness and lack of confidence, which further discourages them from traveling. Stone, 51, is the leader of an anti-cult organization in Flushing. She has maintained her simple daily routine for six years, from her home, her organization booth on Main Street and the grocery store right below her apartment. When she talks about her challenges in traveling, she said *“I’m afraid of going outside Flushing. I can’t speak English. I don’t know what the signs are saying. I’m like a deaf, dumb and blind person.”*

The mobility patterns of Chinese immigrants in Flushing are aged. Younger people who are active in the workforce encounter mostly time constraints. Compared to senior people above the working age, they have better physical health, language skill, driving skill, and technology access such as GPS and map navigation applications. Therefore, they are less likely to face capability constraints but are more limited by time. The time constraints are intensified by job insecurity and labor exploitation in the ethnic labor market. Many low skilled entry-level jobs are paid only by the hour, well below the legal minimum wage. Without signing any contract, workers have no job security and can lose their job unexpectedly. Job insecurity and low payment forces many to work long hours without breaks for fear of being replaced at any time and would not be able to make ends meet. Xin, 27, is a part time student and needs to work as a nail polisher to cover her tuition and rent. Xin is young and adventurous, speaks fluent English and is good at using technologies to navigate, Xin is willing to travel and expand her activity space. However, having to balance time between work and study, Xin has little time to go out.

“Mostly, my physical space centers the intersection of Main Street and Roosevelt Avenue, with a radius about 3 kilometers. Time limit is the major challenge I am facing. You are a cheap labor if you work in Chinese circle, so you have to work very intensely. I work every day, except Sunday. Every day I go to work at 8am, get back home at 9pm, and then cook dinner and prepare lunch for the next day. There is very little time left for me to study” (Xin, nail polisher and student, 27).

In contrast, older generations more likely face capability constraints. Migrating to a foreign environment at an older age is challenging. Deteriorating health and memory further hinders their ability to drive, to learn a new language, and to navigate in a foreign space. *“It is too late to learn English or driving for people at my age”* (Fan, Janitor, 60). *‘My memories also began to fade, many times I forgot the way back to Flushing. So now I rarely go out of Flushing’* (Chen, retiree, 73).

Mobility is also raced. Microaggressions (Pierce, 1970), which describes unintended discrimination mostly towards African Americans, are also common experience among Asian Americans (Sue, 2010). Being Asian or Chinese in an urban space often prompts discomfort that further triggers negative emotions such as confusion, foreignness, strangeness or even humiliation and fear that prevents Chinese (im)migrants from their expanding activity space. A number of participants experienced hostilities that are not overt but can be felt from their *“facial expressions, eye contacts, attitudes, and body language”* (Kevin, nail polisher, 32). Being in the U.S for 11 years, Huang is familiar with the urban environment in New York City, but his primary challenge comes from the past negative experience which he believes is *‘discrimination against Chinese*

deeply rooted in the blood and bones in American society'. The sense of being discriminated is further intensified by linguistic barrier. He himself has experienced discrimination and injustice many times, and he has also witnessed similar incidents in public and in daily news. 'Stop and Frisk' and racial profiling have long been controversial issues in New York City, mostly among the African-American and Latino population (Gelman et al., 2007). However, it is also experienced by Asian Americans, which has been missing in the public debate.

"One time I came out of Subway, two men suddenly came up to me and asked me for ID out of no reason. Then they showed me their police badge and asked me to empty my pockets. Why?! Why I was the only one being stopped for ID among many people passing by in the subway station?! Because I am a Chinese!" (Huang, grocery store assistant, 58).

The feeling of *being othered* triggers the feeling of *othering*. The perceptions of other are tinted by the perceptions of being perceived by other. When he travels outside of Flushing, he carries with him the self-consciousness of being Asian or Chinese. This generates a strong sense of foreignness, outsider-ness and clear boundaries between *we* and *other*, which reflects in his everyday language. By *we*, he refers to Chinese; by *other*, he refers to non-Chinese Americans. The negative feelings are intensified by illegal status among undocumented migrants, who fear leaving Flushing and therefore minimize their exposure and risk of deportation.

Intersectionality theory suggests that oppression is more than the sum of factors of race, gender, class and ethnicity, but is interrelated and intersect with each other in the social system (Collins, 2000). Likewise, constraints on mobility do not work separately.

The discrete expressions of immobility intersect with and mutually intensify each other within the larger social and cultural context. Behind the physical immobility in daily life are structural factors including racial hostility and socioeconomic inequality that will eventually hinder the immigrants' social mobility. Underlying the image of cultural diversity and the immigrant-friendly environment in New York City is the hidden division, segregation and biased perception among different racial and ethnic groups. When Liang described her first trip to the welfare office in Jamaica, Queens after arriving in New York City four years ago, her eyes still twinkled with fear:

“When I just got out of welfare office, I was trying to find the bus stop. It was at night. The street was dark everywhere. The dogs were barking. Jamaica is a black district (districts dominated by black population); I couldn't find any Chinese for help. I got very nervous and frightened.”

The discomfort and fear come from the interplay of constraints in language, class, gender, and preconceived understandings of race that influence Liang's perceptions of movement in urban space.

5.2 Paradox II: transnational mobility and local immobility

Ceaseless mobility is coupled with “indirectness” (Thrift, 1996, p288). Adam (1995, 2005) argued for a divisible model of person separated into self and body by the extensibility and distanced connections in modern communication age. He also problematized the simple dichotomy of presence/absence. “Extensibility is a function of location” (Adam, 2005, p276). Although locally, Chinese in Flushing are confined in a limited physical space to varying extents, their transnational mobility stands in large contrast to local immobility. The permeations of the neighborhood boundaries occur at

every moment in every corner of Flushing, facilitated by the ubiquitous transnational resources and connections. Around 20 banks have their branches set up along Main Street. Together with more than 20 locations of electronic money transferring offices, they facilitate transnational capital flows. Around 40 logistic shipping offices are scattered across the neighborhood, offering shipping service directly to China, and are cheaper than the U.S Postal Service. Flushing is also the home base for major Chinese media and newspapers including *Sinovision*, *World Journal*, *Epoch Times*, *Visiontimes*, which deliver news in China and in the United States. The Chinese in Flushing extends their physical reach by negotiating between presence and absence, between self and body, between visibility and invisibility.

Although locally, Jiang's daily physical movement only covers one block from her restaurant to her home, her yearly trip to China is simplified to two telephone calls: one call to a local travel agency to book the flight, and the other to a taxi service for the ride to the airport. When she talks about her trip to China, it sounds as simple as her daily routine:

"That morning I still maintain my routine and come to work. Then I go back home, take a shower and pack my luggage, then the taxi picks me up. About 20 minutes later, I am at the airport, ready to take off. It is very convenient and quick."

Her local immobility is compensated by transnational connections, which are facilitated by easy access to mobile resources in Flushing such as ethnic taxi service, cheap telecommunication and Chinese media. These mobile resources and transnational

facilities are embedded in the locality, emotionally and mentally drawing her closer to China.

5.3 Paradox III: Immobility: voluntary or involuntary

In the age of globalization and heightened mobility, mobility has been considered as positive and voluntary. Immobility, in contrast, has been perceived as involuntary and negative. *Not moving* is often equalized to *unable to move*. Limited activity space demonstrated by quantitative data and GIS mapping usually leads to the conclusion of immobility, and is attributed to lack of transport resources or lower socioeconomic status. However, this observation omits the existence of *voluntary immobility*, which suggests that people do not move because they do not intend to move. The neglect of neighborhood effects or personal intentions leads to the confusion of locality with immobility (Motte-Baumvold, 2012). The reasons for voluntary immobility might be personal or community-based.

“I never go out of Flushing. There’s no need. You can access everything you need here in Flushing: restaurants, bakeries, banks, doctors, libraries, and groceries” (Cheng, 53). In other words, the community provides no incentives or reasons for her to go out due to its agglomerations and accessibility of resources and infrastructures in daily life. Temporal life path planning is another reason for voluntary immobility. Many interviewees want to save mobility for the future. The current decision making of physical mobility and traveling is a result of negotiation between now and future, between physical mobility and social mobility, and between different generations. This is especially the case among Chinese immigrants in their working age who invest their

current time and effort in socioeconomic mobility with the expense of physical mobility, while saving for their own future or their future generations.

“I like traveling and nature. But right now I am still young and I enjoy working. I want to work hard for 10 more years and save enough money, giving a better life to my son and my mom, and in the future I will stop working and go traveling” (Cheng, nanny, 53).

For people like Cheng, Flushing provides her with proximity to work and housing, which enables her voluntary immobility.

However, if without the local resources but given more socioeconomic resources beyond the locality, would Chen and Liang seek to improve their mobility and expand their activity space? The debate is ongoing: locality can be a ladder that provides immigrants with mobile resources but at the same time can be a trap that restrains the possibilities of increasing mobility.

“Flushing makes me lazy.....The information and resources that come to me are all come from Chinese circle..... my communication with foreigners is almost zero. My English is even worse than three years ago when I just came to the U.S. I believe if I pushed myself to live outside Flushing, I would have learned more than I do now” (Xin, 27)

Kaufmann et al. (2004) conceptualized *motility* by embracing potential mobility. It encompasses three elements: *access* (options and context), *competence* (skills and ability) and *appropriation* (choice and action) (Kaufmann et al., 2004, p.750). The three elements are interdependent. Certain venues of access can either motivate or discourage agents’ willingness and action in acquiring skills to further expand their options and spatial

activity. Accessibility alone does not increase mobility, what also matters are the directions and context of the accessibility. Only expanding venues that connect the locality with the broader society beyond can help transfer the potential mobility into actual mobility, voluntary immobility to voluntary mobility and therefore physical mobility to social mobility.

6. Coping strategies

6.1 When getting lost on the way

Getting lost is a common experience among Chinese in New York City, especially among recent immigrants who have recently arrived and are getting used to the foreign environment. Before traveling to an unfamiliar location in the city, they usually look carefully for routes, bus lines, the number of stops and where to transfer. They take two notes with them: one is the destination address, and the other one is their name and home address just in case they get lost in the middle of their trip. They are very creative in developing navigation strategies. Liang, 41, works as a home nurse in a day care center based in Flushing. Very often she is assigned to jobs to take care of seniors in Chinese families scattered across the city. She has been living in the city for four years, but can hardly speak English. She has to force herself to explore the city and get familiar with public transportation and navigation in urban space. She carefully prepares for the trip every time she has a new job assignment. First, she asks her company for directions and then uses google map to double check with the route. She counts the number of stops and writes down the first letter of each stop name. Then she draws circles on a piece of paper in accordance with the number of stops. When she is on the bus or subway, she ticks off one circle for every stop she passes by. Taking buses is more challenging since drivers do

not stop at every station. She usually brings the address note with her so that she could show to the driver or to the by-passers in case she gets lost. Sometimes she also brings a simple hand-drawn map. But she still gets lost very often. When she is distracted, she sometimes loses count of stops. A sudden bus or subway breakdown might also confuse her. When Liang gets lost, she first asks for directions to Chinese looking by-passers. As New York City has an increasing Asian presence, finding a Chinese by-passer especially in Queens and Manhattan is not difficult. In a neighborhood without Chinese presence, she would show by-passers with the address note and use body language and simple English such as where, no or yes. Sometimes, people take her to the destinations; sometimes they draw a map for her. Very rarely does she get completely helpless; if so, she would take the same route back to Flushing and restart the trip.

Her strategies on the road are not unique. Counting stops, drawing maps, looking for Chinese by-passers, using body language and restarting the trip are common strategies shared by many interviewees lost in the foreign urban environment. They are outcomes of interactive relationships between people and urban space, but also illustrate a sense of strangeness, foreignness and outsider-ness which very often cause vulnerability, stress and anxiety.

6.2 Local mobile resources

Besides public transportation resources in Flushing including the No. 7 subway, Long Island Railroad, and 24 bus city bus lines, Flushing also has a plethora of ethnic mobile resources that provide convenient, cheap and Chinese friendly travel experience. These transportation services include Chinatown vans, Casino buses, Chinese Taxi and Travel agencies. Chinatown vans (Figure 3.3) connect Flushing to other Chinese

communities in New York City. They run from 7am to 11pm every 20 minutes. The Chinatown van company has around 60 vans to Manhattan Chinatown and 40 vans to Brooklyn Chinatown. Each van runs 3 times a day. People take vans for daily commuting, visiting friends and relatives, and attending cultural activities. Chinese, especially non-English speaking Chinese usually prefer Chinatown vans to public transportation even though the fare is about the same. It provides direct connections and saves the trouble of transferring and crowds in the subways during rush hours. The casinos scattered in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania offer frequent bus pick-ups and drop-offs directly between Flushing and the casinos. The bus tickets range from 5 to 15 dollars depending on the distance, usually with a coupon for gambling and a free meal. For many Chinese in Flushing, especially those who work six days a week and only take one day off, casino trips are a popular spatial activity to escape the city for their affordability, convenience, frequency, and closeness. Chinese taxi business is developing very fast recently. The fare is cheaper than ordinary yellow cab. These taxis provide both short distance service within the city and long distance service on the East Coast. For the trips on a larger scale, travel agencies provide pre-designed travel packages to popular tourist attractions across North America. The travel packages arrange full services including transportation, meals and accommodation, and bilingual tour guides. The simple ‘hopping on and hopping off’ and Chinese friendly environment become a popular travel mode among Chinese immigrants.

The concentrations of Chinese in Flushing provide ethnic bonds and social networks. New immigrants are drawn by the agglomerations to take advantage of the social network and ethnic resources, not only for their socioeconomic mobility (Zhou,

1998) but also for physical mobility. When needing help to travel, 33 out of 35 interviewees would ask for rides or directions from their friends and relatives, which is similar to coping strategies employed by other racial and ethnic groups (Blumenberg and Smart, 2010; Bose, 2014). Community associations and organizations such as the Chinese Planning Council also provide help to new immigrants with linguistic barriers. Many visit the association asking for help with directions. Some of my interviewees still call me occasionally asking for directions to places they have never been to. In addition, the ethnic labor market is largely facilitated by free commuting service provided by employers. There are hundreds of beauty salons, Chinese restaurants, laundries scattering across the Metropolitan New York that create large demands for low-skilled labor force among Chinese. For those who live in Flushing and work in Connecticut, Long Island, and New Jersey, public transportation is inconvenient, time-consuming and expensive. Learning to drive and purchasing a car are mostly likely difficult for new (im)migrants due to economic and linguistic barriers. It becomes a common practice that employers offer free pick-up and drop-off rides for their workers. Between 8-10 am rush hours in the morning, Flushing is congested with commuters and vans. At almost each intersection and parking lot, lines of people are waiting for their boss to pick them up to work. At night they would be dropped off at the same spot.

Chinese living in Flushing largely depend on ethnic mobile resources, social network and community resources for their daily mobility. However, these local mobile resources are not perfect. Behind the scenes of cheap fare and convenience are intense competition, labor exploitation, poor riding conditions and safety issues. The famous Fung Wah bus company, running a fleet of buses from New York to Boston was taken

off the road because of failure to pass safety guidelines. This also causes concerns among the Chinese riders:

“I don’t feel safe taking casino buses with Chinese drivers. It is very scary.

The bus is very often overloaded. They add more seats so that they can sell more tickets. The drivers work several shifts with no break. They work very long hours without enough sleep” (Fan, janitor, 60).

The easy access to local mobile resources also hinders potential social interactions and simplifies people’s geographic knowledge. The free commuting provided by the employees’ saves time, money and effort for both sides. It also gives a social dimension to daily mobility as sharing rides with the employer and other employees for 1-3 hour daily commute often becomes their only interacting with outside world. However, free rides give employers more control on working hours and daily schedule and therefore leave little flexibility for employees. In addition, even though working outside Flushing expands their physical activity space on a daily basis, free commuting limits their chances of active interactions with other social groups and surroundings. The geographical knowledge at the national and local scales is limited and biased with inaccuracy. Only 8 of 35 interviewees accurately identify where New York City is on a map of the United States. Confusions with street names, geographical relationships between places, and the mismatch between names and locations are very common among Chinese immigrants in Flushing. Their geographic knowledge of daily paths is largely simplified into the number of highways, exits, time, racialized districts and unidentified street signs.

6.3 “Living on the street”: multiplying space and time

Even though Jiang’s daily routine is a “two point one line” from home to her restaurant one block away, she tries her best to multiply her working space and time. Her restaurant is right on the Main Street in Flushing. *“I’m like living on the street!”* Jiang said. Customers come and go, the majority of which are Chinese. Some are local residents and her acquaintances, some are tourists from China and from other parts of the U.S. Jiang talks to them, and learns about their stories in the U.S. and in China. Her restaurant is also a place for her friends get together and hang out. Her son, who has just arrived in the U.S, and reunited with her after 15 years of separation, is also working in the restaurant. She has a TV right in the dining space, with Chinese channels for news and TV shows that are simultaneously shown in China. She subscribes to Chinese newspapers so that she would catch up with what has been going on at homeland, U.S. and the community during breaks. Once in a while she would call her mom in China. Her restaurant is not just her working space. Its meanings have been multiplied by the flows of people and information. It is a place for Jiang to socialize, to rest, to enjoy family time and to connect transnationally. The restaurant is also a window through which she communicates with the outside world and witnesses and the changes in China, in the U.S and in the community. Physically, her *body* is bounded in the restaurant, but her *self* is extended through various venues. *“Mobility and immobility are profoundly relational”* (Adey, 2006). Her relational stillness in the restaurant is compensated by the movement of others and her interactive space is extended by media and technology. The multiplication of space and time is not limited to Jiang’s case. Similarly, for hairdresser Susan, artist Yu, or nanny Cheng, their working place at the street intersection, hair salon

and Central Park are spaces where they work, interact with people and the environment, and maintain transnational connections. The time on their way to work is also multiplied by newspaper, social media, internet and phones.

7. Conclusions and discussions

This chapter contributes to the conceptualization of mobility and immobility from a place-based mobility approach. The consideration of local context and intentionality problematizes mobility and immobility as simple dualism. It is neither lack of transport resources nor lower socioeconomic status that challenges daily movement of Chinese immigrants in Flushing. As a matter of fact, the majority of participants are well-educated, and many are wealthy business owners. Unlike the old timers who migrated to the U.S. in the pre-1965 era, recent immigrants land in the U.S. with both human and economic capitals (Li, 2009; Zhao, 2010). What limits their activity space are various combinations of constraints in language, race, time, age, and immigration status that affect their perceptions of urban space in foreign land while othering and being othered. These challenges in physical mobility essentially originate from obstacles in mainstream society for translating their human capital into social mobility. The immobility in daily life prompts fear, stress, and sense of confinement and outsider-ness which further discourages them from moving. Therefore, they have to depend on local resources for both physical and social mobility.

Flushing is well connected to the outside world and provides immigrants with not only mobile infrastructures, but also economic opportunities as well as social networks and cultural resources. The relational mobility of immigrants in their everyday life is enabled by the materiality of various resources at both local and transnational scale

embedded in the locality. Further, the people-place dialectic induces voluntary immobility and conversely enhances people's attachment to place. It also weaves a picture of *place-ballet* where people congregate for collectivity and affordance (Seamon, 1979). Relational mobility and voluntary immobility are easily mistaken for immobility if locality effects and humanistic interpretations of mobility are not taken into account. Paradoxically, Flushing also hinders immigrants' potential mobility. Ethnic labor market and local mobile resources offer easy accessibilities to work and housing for new immigrants, but on the other hand limit their chances of encounters with other social groups and simplifies their geographical knowledge and eventually deters the acculturation process and social mobility. In this sense, locality is both mobilizing and constraining. Accessibility alone does not increase mobility, but accessibility channeled to resources in the broader society do. Therefore, without locality, stillness is easily mistaken as immobility; without intentionality, accessibility is easily equalized with mobility. Mobility needs to be understood in relation to immobility, as an embodied experience, and embedded within local context

However, mobility can be improved over time, which is exemplified in Helen's case. When Helen came to the U.S eight years ago, she could only speak simple English and find a part-time job in a Chinese restaurant and a nail salon. She used to be afraid of going out of Flushing on her own because of her language barrier. She began to take English classes in the Flushing library. Later, her English improved a great deal. With her bachelor degree and teaching experience in China, she was able to find a summer tutor position in a local elementary school. Working in a non-Chinese environment further

improved her English. She later applied for her driving license, which expanded her physical activity space and even changed her life.

“When I first came, I could only speak simple English. I felt very afraid of going out. I need to ask someone to come with me, just in case of possible troubles. After I learned English and driving which increased my mobility, I became very confident.Life becomes better. My daughter is also much happier” (Helen, teacher and part time real estate agent, 37).

As is exemplified in Helen’s case, the solutions for her physical mobility are language skills and economic opportunities in the broader society, which increase both her physical and social mobility. While providing public transit is important in increasing immigrants’ accessibility and enhancing their physical mobility, perhaps transportation policymakers also need to consider broadening the scope of accessibility in order to transform potential mobility to actual mobility, voluntary immobility to mobility and physical mobility to social mobility. A local approach is also needed in supporting ethnic businesses and immigrant entrepreneurship, providing community language programs and further education programs as well as enhancing equality in labor market.

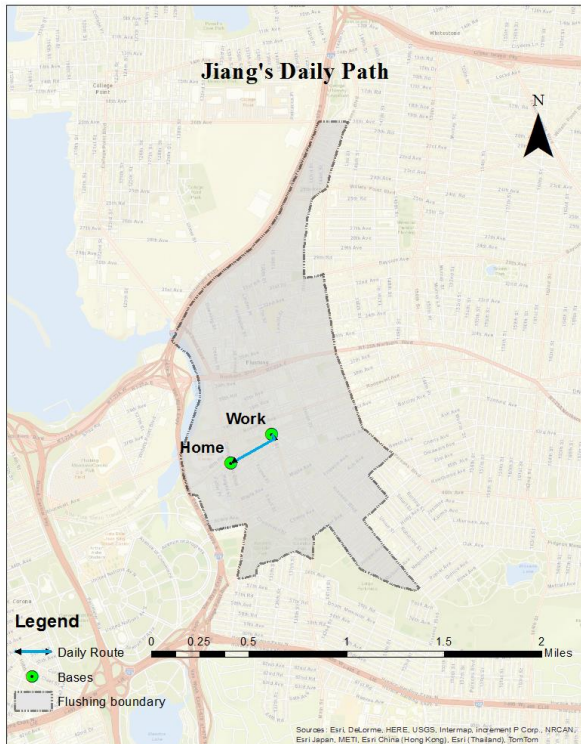


Figure 3.1, Jiang's daily routine

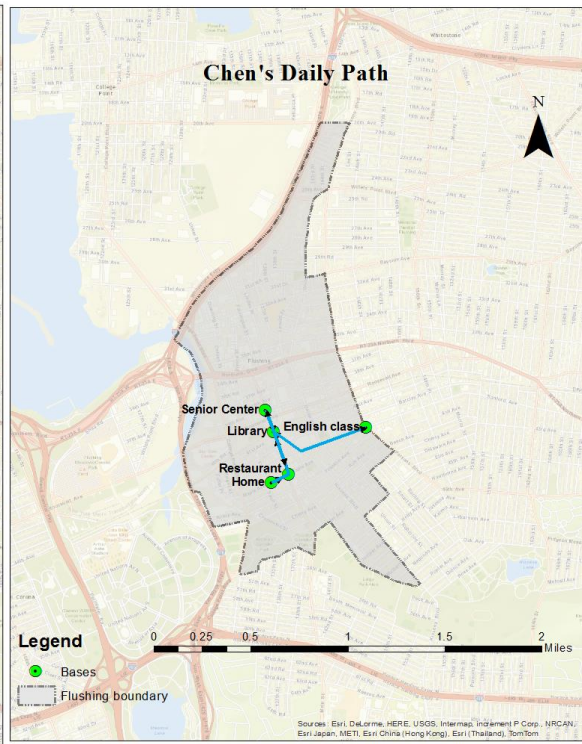


Figure 3.2, Chen's daily routine



Figure 3.3. Casino bus and Chinatown van

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Chapter 4

“That is Real America!”: Imaginative Geography among the Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing, New York City

Abstract

Imaginative geography is lived. The formation and reformation of imaginative geographies are intensified among (im)migrants due to the collisions between expecting and seeing, knowing and unknowing, and between living and imagining. This chapter will explore the imaginative geographies of Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing, New York City in their everyday life and traveling. It will contribute to the understanding of lived imaginative geographies from a humanistic approach by examining how the formation of (im)migrants' imaginative geographies are materially based on ethnic resources within the community, and how that conversely influences their knowing of the receiving countries, their sense of insider-ness and outsider-ness, notions of home and their identity. The study demonstrates that physical distance is replaced by the social and cultural distance across which imaginative geographies are formed among the Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing. The easy access to ethnic mobile resources leads to a superficial exposure to the world outside Flushing, so that (im)migrants' geographic knowledge of the U.S. and New York City remain limited and biased. The imaginative community nurtures a sense of insider-ness within the community that stands in large contrast with the sense of the outsider-ness beyond the community, reflected in their daily language and the making of place. The multi-layered imaginative geographies of America, the city, the community, compounded by the notions of home that are both materially founded and ambiguous, lead to flexible and complex identities among the Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing.

Keywords: Imaginative geography, insider-ness, outsider-ness, home, identity, Chinese immigrants, New York City

1. Introduction

*“If you love him, send him to New York, cause that is where Heaven is. If
you hate him, send him to New York, Cause that's where Hell is.”*

-----Cao, Beijinger in New York, p56.

The popular verse in the TV soap opera *Beijingers in New York* portrays the real life of the large wave of Chinese who came to New York City in the 1990s. The paradoxical images of New York reflect the mental gaps between living and imagining. Imaginative geography, derived from Said's (1979) criticism of Orientalism, refers to the representations and knowledge of space that are formed and dramatized by power and perceptions (Said, 1979; Gregory, 1995). The existing literature on imaginative geography lies in the discourse of the power of the *colonizers* over the *colonized* or the West on the East. Seldom discussed is the imaginative geography of the West by the East that equally exists and influences economy, culture, and movement in the contemporary world (Beech, 2014).

The formation of imaginative geography not only results from a sociocultural consequence from above, but also a lived process from below. In other words, the process of knowing is both from imagining from “the outside in” and living from “the inside out” (Marcus, 2011, p22). The collisions between imagining and living and its effects on the formation of imaginative geography are largely exemplified among (im)migrants. After (im)migrants overcome the physical distance between their homeland and adopted land, their imaginative geography of the latter is created across social and cultural distance in everyday practices of life, facilitated by ethnic resources provided by ethnic communities. It is also reflected in their daily language, perceptions, and knowledge and materialized in

the making of place, containing rich meanings and interpretations about their senses of place and identities.

However, no studies have examined the imaginative geographies of receiving countries by (im)migrants. By focusing on Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing in New York City, this chapter will explore their imaginative geographies of the receiving country before and after arriving, the knowing of geographic knowledge in everyday life and traveling, the imaginative community that is contested between insider-ness and outsider-ness, and notions of home and identities. This chapter will contribute to an understanding of lived imaginative geographies in everyday life, its relation to place, its material foundations and its humanistic outcomes. It will also contribute to the studies of immigrants and urban ethnic enclaves as it approaches the immigrant experience from a humanistic approach at the individual level by exploring their mentality, senses of place, identity and sense of belongings.

2. Imaginative Geography

Terra incognita implies the unknown world, the geography, which is beyond human knowledge. There is neither absolute *terra incognita* nor absolute *terra cognita* (Wright, 1947, p3). Imagination and subjectivities, once viewed as the illusion and error and the antithesis of objectivities, bridge the gap between *cognita* and *incognita*. The embracement of subjectivities in geographical knowledge leads to imaginative geography that takes into accounts both socio-cultural contexts and human emotions, prejudices, feelings, and cognitions in the production of subjective geographic knowledge.

The behavioral and cognitive approach is one tread of imaginative geography. The acquirement of geographical knowledge lies in individual spatial ability through

environmental perception, navigating, processing, reasoning, learning and decision-making in traveling and daily life (Pocock and Hudson, 1978; Stern and Leiser, 1988; Bovy and Stern 1990; Golledge et al. 1992; MacEachren 1992; Golledge, Dougherty, and Bell 1995; Golledge, 1999). Cognitive mapping is the major tool and technique that decomposes and deconstructs the environmental images in the human mind (Lynch, 1960; Pocock and Hudson, 1978; Evans, 1980; Kitchin, 1994; Curtis, 2012). The environmental image approach focuses more on individual-environment relationships and its implications for human behavior. It also acknowledges the limits of a positivist approach. However, studies utilizing the behavioral and cognitive approach are mostly carried out on an urban scale and usually neglect the social, historical and political setting in broader contexts.

Social theory, mainly the interrogation of power and materiality, is another approach of imaginative geography. Power, be it political, social or economic, constitutes geographic knowledge through the representation of space in literature, academic writings, reports, travel diaries, and mass media (Said, 1979; Foucault, 1984; Jarosz, 1992; Gregory 1995(a), 1995 (b)). The social and political power relationships between the *colonized* and the *colonizers* formulate the imaginative geography of the East *by* the West (Said, 1979; Gregory 1995(a), 1995 (b)). The Eurocentric hegemony also shapes the imaginative geography of the East *in* the West. The construction of imaginative geography has been instrumental in the social inclusion and exclusion, as well as the consumption of ethnicities and exotic urban culture, which is well exemplified in Chinatowns in the U.S. (Anderson, 1991; Gregory, 1994; Tchen, 1999). The continuing influence of the imaginative geography has also been utilized as a tool in tourism

development in the eastern countries to attract tourists from western countries (Cater, 2001; Chang and Lim, 2004). The colonial and imperial power relationships also work conversely, forming the imaginative geography of the *colonizers* by the *colonized* with the equally ethnocentric constructions, which has received scant attention in existing literature (Beech, 2014).

However, imaginative geography is not constructed solely by the power from above, but is based on material foundations and has material consequences (Harvey, 1990; Valentine, 1999). Images of Orientalism are founded on imperialism, and represented and shared through media (Said, 1979). Harvey argued that the geography of space and time are social constructions by the production and reproduction modes, along with social relations (Harvey, 1990). Thrift's non-representational theory (1996) emphasized the social knowing through practices that are situated in space and time. "*The subjects' understandings of world come from the ceaseless flow of conduct*" (Thrift, 1996, p37).

Built on the materiality of imaginative geography, this chapter argues that imaginative geography is lived. It is produced through daily practice and interactions with the environment. Imaginative geographies at different scales are made, remade, contested through seeing, thinking, learning, traveling, and eating. However subjective the learning of geographical knowledge, the formation of geographical images and the building of sense of place are grounded in the environment and facilitated by various media and infrastructure that connect people to the environment, by paradoxically mobilizing and distancing them. They are also grounded in the place and the contexts where the people and media are embedded. Imaginative geography conversely has its material consequences reflected in the production of physical and social distance and

boundaries (Pacione, 1983; Harvey, 1990; Rose, 1990, May, 1996, Valentines, 1999).

The collective imaginative boundaries between *self* and *other*, between outside and inside are materialized in the making of lived space.

Imaginative geography is not only lived but also an embodied experience. Both the cognitive approach and social theory approach bypass humanistic factors. The poetics of space (Bachelard, 1969) does not contradict with the politics of knowledge (Said, 1979; Gregory, 1995 (a)). *“There is an interaction with, rather than response to, place, in effect a sense of relatedness”* (Pocock and Hudson, 1978, p81). The construction of the relatedness of the person with place is a personal and humanistic process. Tuan’s topophilia captures the connections between human emotional ties with the material environment (Tuan, 1974), which lays the foundation for humanistic geography. Imaginative geography is a reflection of whoever is imagining and his/her social attributes that determines his/her everyday involvement with place. It is conversely internalized into people’s social, cultural and spatial identity, sense of place and belongings at different scales (Tuan, 1974, 1977; Relph, 1976; Seamon, 1979), by distancing self from other, differentiating home from away and is contested between insider and outsider.

This chapter will explore the imaginative geography that is grounded in everyday practices of life and embedded within local contexts. The formation of imaginative geography is simultaneously active and passive. It is neither formed alone by the power from above nor is it formed by the individual from below. Both layers converge into the making of imaginative geography through daily lived experience. Conversely, the imagined space is materialized in the making of place and internalized in

identities and sense of place. (Im)migrants are perfect examples of establishing and re-establishing the imaginative geographies of distance, boundaries, home and away, and self and other during uprooting and relocating. Upon arrival at the foreign land, the im(migrants) imagined far away place suddenly becomes their lived place. The physical distance is replaced by social and cultural distance. Their imaginative geographies of the country, the city, the community, the homeland, and home are negotiated and contested through the everyday practice of life. The formation and reformation of imaginative geography of *here* and *there* are especially intensified among recent immigrants, due to the collisions between expecting and seeing, living and imagining, knowing and unknowing, and self and other.

3. Study area, data and method

This chapter chooses Flushing as the study area. Located in Queens, one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the U.S., Flushing has surpassed Chinatown in Manhattan and become the largest Chinese community on the U.S. East Coast. Post-1965 immigrant policy has driven large influx of Asian immigrants to Flushing (Chen, 1992). Flushing today is a diverse and dynamic Asian community, with the majority of its residents being recent Chinese immigrants from Mainland China. Far from the traditional enclosed and isolated Chinatown model, Flushing is highly connected with the rest of the city, the region and the country by subways, highways, buses, and railroads. It is also proximate to the two major airports in New York City. The community provides Chinese-friendly mobility resource service targeting non-English speaking Chinese, including Casino buses, Chinatown vans, travel agencies and Chinese taxis. Due to its connectivity and mobility, Flushing has become one of the most popular destinations for the recent

Chinese (im)migrants to the U.S. who are experiencing the collisions between the West and the East, while forming their imaginative geographies before and after arrival at America. Being the center for Chinese (im)migrants in the metropolitan New York and the hub for the flows of people, goods and information, Flushing is an ideal place for the study of imaginative geographies of (im)migrants.

The studies of imagined geographies in everyday life and its relations with place require a humanistic approach at the individual scale. In order to obtain subjective data about geographic knowledge, identity, sense of place and notions of home, this chapter employs qualitative methods of ethnography and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Mental mapping is also used to gain a deeper understanding of the mental images of Flushing among the research participants. Mental mapping is the major tool and technique that decomposes and deconstructs the environmental image in the human mind (Lynch, 1960; Pocock and Hudson, 1978; Evans, 1980; Kitchin, 1994; Curtis, 2012). In combination with narratives of experiences, emotions and memories in daily travel, it allows a more creative medium for individuals to express their sense of place. Additionally, ArcGIS and wordcloud online software Tagxedo are used to visualize geographic knowledge.

The 35 open-ended interviews were conducted with Chinese (im)migrants living in Flushing (Eighteen men and seventeen women). All the chosen participants have migrated to the U.S. within the recent twenty years. Being recent (im)migrants who still maintains transnational connections with China, they are in the middle of building their sense of place, identities and forming the imaginative geographies. The participants are chosen to cover the variations of age, gender, socioeconomic backgrounds, immigration

status, and length of residency. Each interview lasted from one to three hours, and was conducted in Mandarin. The themes of the interviews included: socioeconomic backgrounds, everyday mobile practices, transnational ties, geographic knowledge and sense of place. Each participant was asked to draw a map of Flushing in their minds, including streets, boundaries and places, in combination with narratives and contexts in order to understand their complexities beyond maps. How the interviewees are drawing the maps is as important as the maps themselves. The order, time, pause and narratives while they are drawing the maps were recorded either by audio recorder or by taking notes.

Along with the interviews, I conducted ethnography in Flushing for five months between 2012 and 2014. The fieldwork deepened my understandings of mobile contexts in everyday life of the Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing. The participant observations were conducted on Main Street, on the Chinatown bus, Casino Vans, in the job center, in family hotels and in a nail salon. I also traced the major news media since 2003, including *Sino Vision*, *New Flushing Journal*, *World Journal*, and *US-Chinapress*. They are the major source in forming geographic knowledge among Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing. The interview and field notes were translated into English before coding and analysis. The coding was based on the research questions, identifying daily mobility, geographical knowledge, identity and notions of home.

4. Findings

4.1 “That is real America!”

For every Orientalism (Said, 1979), there is Occidentalism. While most studies have focused on the imagined geography of the East by the West, discussions on the

images of the West by the East are largely lacking. The latter also originates from power relationships between the two regions during colonial and post-colonial era. In the case of China, its defeat in the war against western countries during the late Qing Dynasty that directly led to its economic degradation and retreat from global power (Zhou, 1992; Kwong, 1996). China suddenly dropped from an empire to one of the semi-colonized and suppressed countries. To the colonized, the colonizers suggest power, civilization and superiority (Beech, 2014). The collective admiration and curiosity about western culture, especially the United States, grew stronger during WWII when the United States became an ally with China in defeating Japan and its rising global status after the war. Ever since 1980s, the increasing transnational interchange of people, goods and culture between China and the United States has been facilitated by China's economic reform, relaxing migration policies in China and immigration policies in the U.S., as well as the heightened mobility of individuals. The United States is currently the largest receiving country for Chinese outside Asia (Pew Research Center, 2013). With the increasing outmigration to the United States and the popularity of technology and communication, the collective images of the United States are both strengthened and colored by internet, film, television, and social media. American popular culture, daily news, TV shows began to enter the everyday life of Chinese. The increasing flows of people, goods, information, and culture between the two countries have mentally drawn Chinese closer to the U.S. and transformed the unknown to known. Simultaneously, the imagined images of the United States among Chinese are intensified via the filters of access and media, further distancing the imaginative U.S. and the living U.S.

“To many Chinese, America is paradise” (Stone, 51)! The imaginative geography of the U.S. as a paradise is created by history and media. Interestingly enough, the Chinese naming of the United States (美国, *mei guo*) which is a phonetic translation of “America”, literally means “beautiful country”. There is a popular saying among Chinese that “the moon in foreign countries is always fuller than in China”. Being able to migrate to the United States has been viewed as a step-up in life. The Chinese (im)migrants in the United States share their experiences abroad with their families and friends in China via social media, which often creates the chain migration effect that attracts more Chinese migrate to the U.S. Many of the interviewees came to the U.S. because they heard from the TV and social media that life in the U.S. is good. As China has gained its economic power in the world and people’s living conditions have gradually caught up with western countries, the major pull factors for new immigrants are not solely economic factors. Instead recent (im)migrants are attracted to a clean environment, medical services, food safety, democracy, freedom and better education for future generations (interviewees, 2014).

Similarly, choosing New York City as their destination largely originates from the imaginative geography of the city as the economic headquarter of the United States., the center of global wealth and western culture. For many Chinese, Manhattan is the symbol of capitalism, cosmopolitanism, fashion, power and modernity. New York City has the largest Chinese population among all the cities in the U.S. When speaking of his reason to come to New York City, the 44-year old hairdresser Lu came with his passion to learn more about fashion in order to build his career. *“It is New York City! Whenever you speak about fashion, you first think of New York City.”* New York City, nicknamed as

the “Little United Nations” among the Chinese in New York, also boasts its multiculturalism and immigrant-friendly environment. New York City has just launched the municipal ID program, in which the undocumented immigrants can apply to obtain a bank account, driver’s license and residential benefits (New York Times, 2015). The immigrant-friendly images are further spread and shared by media and transnational connections, drawing more Chinese to migrate. When asked why he chose to migrate to New York City, Fan, 60 year old home care worker, said *“When I was in China, I heard it all the time from the people who had migrated to the U.S. that New York City is an easy place for Chinese to survive. That’s why I also came.”* For many Chinese in Flushing, the migration to New York City is also a movement from rural to urban setting. The preference for cities in comparison to the countryside is largely due to the urban-rural differentiation and inequality in Chinese history that has evolved into urban superiorities in Chinese culture. During the past several decades, China has witnessed its largest rural-urban migration wave. For Chinese, cities are symbols of modernity and fashion, with more economic, social and cultural resources and better living conditions and infrastructures than the countryside. In contrast, suburbs (郊区, *jiao qu*) and countryside (乡下, *xiang xia*) are considered as places of backwardness that lack civilization. “郊” (*jiao*) and “乡” (*xiang*) literally mean outskirts, wild, and edge. “下” (*xia*) means *under, below, backward, and inferior*, containing a negative connotation. So many Chinese, especially those originally from rural China, are also driven by the urban and cosmopolitan life experience in the global city.

The Chinese who uproot themselves and migrate to New York City carry with them the imaginary images of a powerful global city with skyscrapers, large houses,

prosperity and modernity in a democratic, advanced and wealthy country. However, after they land and begin to actually live in New York City, many feel the mental gaps between their imagination and reality in everyday life experience.

“Before I came to the U.S., I have the U.S. as a prosperous empire, a global power in my mind. But after I landed (in JFK airport) and on my way to Flushing, I was so shocked. Is this America? The airport is so old, couldn’t even be compared to airports in China. Streets are so narrow. You could barely see skyscrapers which you always see on TV” (Cao, driving coach, 53).

The images of the U.S. in Cao’s mind are skyscrapers and modern infrastructure that represent the empire and power. He became surprised when what he saw did not match with what he expected to see. This is not uncommon among the Chinese in Flushing, most of whom are taken directly to Flushing after landing in JFK airport and are confined within Flushing thereafter. Interestingly, when they had the chance of being exposed to environment beyond Flushing, they are still looking for the images that match with what he imagined rather than what he has seen, and consider the former as the real U.S, the latter fake. *“When I traveled beyond Flushing to wai zhou (the states beyond New York) where streets are clean and air is better, I feel that is real America! The real America in my mind before arriving” (Cao, driving coach, 53).* When the imaginative images have been built, people still tend to stick with them even though the realities do not live up to the pre-imagined images (Cater, 2001). When Cao talks about *“real America”*, he is referring to the observable physical features, such as wide streets, cars, large houses with big lawns, clean air, and skyscrapers in downtown. These images are in reality his

imagination and are romanticized. It is the imagined America in his mind that originally pulled him to migrate. However, being physically in America does not turn the imaginative geography into reality. His day-to-day life in Flushing is distant from the “real America”.

The power dynamics in the colonial and post-colonial history, the modern images portrayed in the media, indirect experiences shared by social networks via technology and social media, together formed an idealized, romanticized image of the U.S.

“Imaginative geographies are constructed across distance, creating distorted ‘realities’ where that which is imagined differs to that found when in situ” (Beech, 2014, p175)”.

After Chinese (im)migrants are able to overcome the physical distance, the imaginative geography is then constructed across social and cultural distance. Similar to Cao, for the restaurant worker Bo, the U.S. was a paradise in his mind before arriving. However, his first night after arriving in the U.S. was full of loneliness, confusion and homesickness, followed by the pressure to find jobs for survival. The “paradise” gradually became a mirage for him as he was immersed by the daily routine between home and work and his daily activity space was confined within Flushing. Flushing creates a bubble, which is socially and culturally connected with China even more than Flushing is connected with the rest of New York City. Flushing becomes the major activity space for the everyday lives of many Chinese immigrants. The major channels to the outside world beyond Flushing in daily life are mostly through ethnic resources, which further make the imagined geographies more imaginative.

4.2 Becoming knowledge

The continual process of the creation of the “stocks of knowledge” is a recursive process that is a result of practices (Thrift, 1996, p97). It echoes with what Valentine said: “...geographies are as lived as they are constituted” (Valentine, 1999, p57). The knowing process of geographic knowledge is more practiced than representational. It is the result of the interactions in everyday life among people, place and media. The actual physical movements and interactions of Chinese in Flushing with the outside world are largely facilitated by ethnic resources such as ethnic media, travel agencies, casino buses and free commuting provided by employers. Travel agencies provide streamlined travel package, including route plans, Chinese tour guides, hotel and meal arrangement, and transportation between tourist sights. The travel agencies arrange tours across North America, mostly covering the popular tourist destinations on the West and East coast. These tours range from one day to two weeks, led by Chinese tour guides who speak both Chinese and English. The tours are based on themes, such as historical tour covering D.C., Philadelphia and Baltimore, New England cultural and educational tour, and the Las Vegas casino tour among others. The theme-based tours are mixed with tourist attractions along the route mostly national parks and Ivy League Universities. Travel agencies provide accessibilities to the popular travel destinations across the United States, which is a convenient means to learn more about U.S. geography and culture, especially for non-English speaking Chinese. However, the simple hop-on, hop off and semi-passive travel mode also narrow the ranges of people-environment interactions. The tight travel schedule is designed to reduce the cost and meet with the collective demands of the whole group, which usually ranges from 20-40 people. The majority of the trip is

normally spent on the vehicle, which moves the passengers from site to site while the tour guides introduces anecdotes about the places. Tourists are given limited time at each site, only enough to take pictures, leaving no time for further exploration or interactions with the local surroundings. It is an exotic experience carried out by a Chinese friendly environment.

Casino buses are another popular travel mode among the Chinese in Flushing. They directly connect Flushing to the casinos in metropolitan New York covering Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Upstate New York, and New Jersey. Many people take the advantage of the cheap bus tickets and free lunch coupons as the way to escape the urban setting for a one day trip outside the city. However, the geographic knowledge remains superficial and even biased. Some participants mistake casino names for state names. In addition, media serves as an important filter in shaping people's environmental images especially the "far places" (Pocock and Hudson, 1978, p96). Among the Chinese in Flushing, ethnic media plays an important role in gaining geographical knowledge. However, the places that ethnic media covers are mostly regions and cities where Chinese are concentrated, such as Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle. Other places where there are no Chinese clusters tend to be blank and unknown among the Chinese in Flushing (Figure 4.1).

Places are seen and known through the filters of travel agencies and ethnic media. These resources mobilize people and bridge the outside and inside, while at the same time they create a bubble around the travel routes. It is passive knowing. There are participants who have been living in Flushing for 20 years but have not looked at the map for once. The geographical knowledge at the national and local scales is limited,

simplified, biased and inaccurate. Only 8 of 35 interviewees accurately identify where New York City is on a U.S. map. 7 identify where Flushing is on a New York map. Confusions with street names, geographical relationships between places, and mismatch between names and locations are not uncommon among Chinese in Flushing. Some interviewees think Queens is a district within Flushing. Some consider Canada as part of the U. S. Many cannot match the Chinese naming of streets and places with their English naming. The places the participants are most familiar with are popular tourist destinations in the travel package plans provided by travel agencies, such as Washington D.C, California, and Florida (Figure 4.1). Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Upstate New York are well known thanks to the casino buses. Other well-known places are mostly Chinese concentrations, where friends and relatives live, such as Los Angeles and San Francisco on the West Coast, as well as Boston and Philadelphia on the East Coast. The emerging immigrant gateway states such as Texas and Florida are also better known among Chinese, due to the increasing Asian presence in the South. They become the major labor market where Chinese (im)migrants could find jobs in the Chinese circle. They also appear frequently in the ethnic media that covers news about Chinese immigrants and Chinese communities in the U.S.

The knowledge of New York City beyond Flushing is also limited. The most well-known places are the famous tourist destinations such as the Statue of Liberty, Wall Street, Times Square, 5th Avenue, and Long Island beach (Figure 4.2). *“Among all the places I know in New York City, I like the Statue of Liberty best. It is the symbol and icon of the U.S. It represents freedom, freedom of speech, religion, and sexuality, which I mostly appreciate of this country”* (Fan, Janitor, 60). Places such as the Statue of Liberty

carry symbolic and aesthetic meanings rather than functional meaning for Fan. It is important to him because that is the symbol of American value and culture in his imagination, which originally draws him to this country. When they visit these places, they carry with them the imagination of a global city that symbolizes power and wealth. They see these places from a visitor's perspective. As Tuan notes, *"It is an outsider's view. The outsider judges by appearance, by some formal canon of beauty"* (Tuan, 1974, p64).

Besides the famous tourist attractions, the other well-known places in the city are concentrations of entry-level jobs such as restaurants, laundry, and nail salons that are spread across the metropolitan area. While interviewees go to work at these places on a daily basis, their geographic knowledge still remains simplified and racialized. When talking about his daily commuting and working environment, Kevin, a 32-year old nail polisher, who lives in Flushing and works in a nail salon in Connecticut, cannot specify the exact location of the store, or pin it down on the map. He is picked up and dropped off by his boss every day. Right after he arrives at the Salon, he immediately gets into work, barely having any time left to explore the surrounding area.

"Every morning the boss picks me up right at the intersection two blocks away from where I live. I am not sure about the exact location of the salon I am working for, but I know it is somewhere in Connecticut, about one and a half hour drive from here. It is a white district (bai qu, a white dominated district), sort of an upper middle class residential area because the tips are good..., I used to work in black district (hei qu, a black dominated district) and mixed district (za qu, a racially/ethnically diverse

district)... The tips are not nearly as good as in white district, some customers don't even give tips."

His daily commute from Flushing to the nail salon was made possible with the aid of ethnic mobile resources. However, the trip appears to him as terra incognita formed by a disconnected set of images. His geographical perceptions of his daily route become simplified into the number of highways, exits, non-recognizable traffic signs, and racial districts. His body easily moves beyond Flushing, but the encounters with the outside world are superficial, constrained both by time and language inability. The superficial exposure with other social groups fails to transcend the physical closeness into social closeness. The social character of the part of the city along the daily route he traverses every day is blank, narrow, and homogeneous. Being physically in New York City does not bring him socially closer to the U.S. The imaginative geography of the city is racialized. The city image has become patches of racial districts, combined with judgments based on superficial communications and experience with customers and the surrounding environment. Simple judgments of good or bad districts are biased by how much tips they earn and how safe they feel. "White districts" are perceived with wealth and safety, whereas "black districts" with poverty and danger. When talking about his experience in working in the restaurants in different districts, Zheng, the 64-year old restaurant worker said:

"I used to work in a restaurant in black district in Upstate New York, it was very dangerous... The restaurant was designed like a prison. The windows are all bullet-proof....I quitted after three days and later I learned that the store has moved to a white district.....I also worked in

restaurants in Long Island and in New Jersey. They are white districts.

There was not a single robbery happened. You don't need to have large

iron gates, you can just lock the door and keep the lights on inside."

The everyday working, commuting, and interacting determine their venues of knowing and formation of spatial knowledge. *"The (city image) is a partial and simplified representation... acquired and sustained by an underlying network representing the individual's movement field or activity space"* (Pocock and Hudson, 1978, p33, p52).

Ethnic mobile resources such as travel agencies, casino buses, free commuting, and ethnic media are the major ways to acquire their geographic knowledge beyond Flushing. The accessibility of these resources facilitates their movement so that they do not need to actively search for routes and navigate by themselves. But at the same time, the passive travel modes limit their knowledge and create a barrier between people and place. In other word, the ethnic resources and mobile practices bridge the gaps between unknown and known, while simultaneously building a wall between them. The way of seeing and knowing determines the set of geographical knowledge which reflects a perspective of an outsider looking at the city and the country from a distance, more cultural and social than physical.

4.3 Imagined community: the sense of outsider-ness and insider-ness

"To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is this identity with the place.From outside you look upon a place as a traveller might look upon a town from a distance; from the inside you experience a place, are surrounded by it and part of it" (Relph, 1976, p49).

The sense of outsider-ness in the world beyond Flushing stands in sharp contrast with the sense of insider-ness in Flushing. The collective sense of center and insider-ness is formed in dialectics to outsider-ness. Inside is where people get away from outside. For every outsider-ness, there is insider-ness, the center where people feel a deep sense of attachment, belonging and existence. The exposure to the outside world that is foreign to them increases their awareness of insider-ness and identity with their local community. This spatial identity with the community reduces their awareness of being a minority and sense of marginalization in the outside world. The sense of insider-ness and center upgrades to the intimate attachment to place-the sense of home. For (im)migrants in a foreign land, the sense of home is overlaid and intensified by the attachment to homeland. Flushing serves as an imaginative anchor for Chinese (im)migrants to transcend their attachment to homeland, as well as sense of rootedness and nostalgia. Despite its geographical location in the foreign land, Flushing to its residents is the imagined home far away from home that stimulates their insider-ness and mitigates outsider-ness. There is even a local saying that going outside Flushing is “going abroad”, whereas coming back to Flushing is “coming back to China”.

Many interviewees choose to live in Flushing simply because of its proximity to the airport, which makes them feel closer to China. Flushing becomes an imaginative home and imagined homeland. *“For Chinese here, Flushing is the second home. It is a home that is not home”* (Bo, 50, restaurant worker). Flushing, to the Chinese, is the center, the inside and the home, where they dwell as an individual with their family and as members among other Chinese. The sense of home is also reflected in the deep care and concern about the place, especially among the old timer Chinese immigrants in

Flushing who have witnessed the development and growth of the community. To care about a place is the ultimately profound rootedness in that place (Relph, 1976). “*Flushing is like my child I have been looking after and watching her to grow up*” (Stone, 51, community organization leader). When she used to work in the states outside New York, she always came back to Flushing because that is where she considered as her center and home.

The imagined community is socially and culturally constructed and materially grounded (Rose, 1990). Flushing is space of *inside* created in the land of *outside*. The sense of insider-ness is founded on the materialization of the places that are functional and meaningful to the everyday practice of life, mostly grocery stores, bakeries, library, restaurants, subway stations, and shopping malls. It is also materialized by transnational connections that are ubiquitous in the community. “*Flushing is a miniature China. It looks, smells, and tastes like China. It doesn’t give you a sense of foreignness. ... Every time I come back to Flushing from wai zhou (states outside New York), I feel like coming back home*” (Lu, 44, hairdresser). The sense of home is created by the making of the space of Chineseness where they speak Chinese, consume Chinese culture, and connect with China by the “look, smell and taste” in the everyday practice of life. The liminal space is created both materially and imaginatively, bridging the mismatch between the inside and the outside, between body and self, between physical distance and mental distance.

The imaginative geography of community is reflected in the daily language and perceived boundaries among the Chinese in Flushing, which results from the dialectal relationships between outsider-ness and insider-ness, and the social boundaries between

other and us and an ethnocentric perspective. The word “外 (*wai*)”, literally meaning *outside* in Chinese, is frequently used in the communication of Chinese in Flushing and reflects a strong sense of spatial and cultural identity at different scales. “外 (*wai*, outside)” reflects a mismatch between physical and imaginative locations. What is actual physical inside is the imaginative outside. 外国 (*wai guo*, foreign countries) refers to countries outside China including the United States. Similarly, 老外 (*lao wai*, foreigners) mostly refers to non-Chinese, signifying a strong cultural solidarity and national identity. “外州” (*wai zhou*), literally means “states outside”, refers to those states outside of New York state. The word “外面” (*wai mian*, outside) refers to the world beyond Flushing. When speaking of “going outside”, they mean going outside Flushing, both physically outside Flushing and culturally outside of Chineseness.

This collective awareness of insider-ness and outsider-ness is also reflected in the imagined community boundaries. None of the interviewees identify Flushing boundaries with the administrative boundaries (Figure 4.3). The imagined boundaries align more with cultural connections and solidarities rather than with physical borders. They define Flushing boundaries by its Chineseness, represented by the presence of Chinese people and Chinese signs in residential, commercial and cultural landscape. The mental boundaries of Flushing are between the Korean community on the North and East, the Jewish and the Black communities on the South and the Latino community on the West.

In addition, the imagined community exists in time as much as in space. The narratives and knowledge about Flushing is limited to the most recent two decades, during which Chinese began to cluster in Flushing. The former layer of Flushing history

before 1980s when Chinese began to concentrate turns out to be missing in the mind and knowledge of Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing. There is a lack of temporal continuity of the knowledge of Flushing. The historical buildings to the recent immigrants are more functional and aesthetic than meaningful and historical. Liang takes walks in the park near Queens Historical Society every day. To her, the building of the Society is only a symbol of western culture and exotic architecture where she walks by and takes pictures of, but she has no knowledge about its meaning in Flushing and the U.S. history.

The imagined space and lived space are mutually constitutive. The imagined community is materialized by the lived community, and is reflected in the daily language, time and perceived boundaries. The lived community serves as a bubble that conversely nurtures the imaginative space of insider-ness and increases the cultural and mental distance between the outside and inside, and between *we* and *they*, between *unknown* and *known*, manifest both in time and space. This makes the imagined space more imaginative and distant and strengthens the sense of segregation and confinement.

“Flushing is a ‘gated city’. You can see the mirage of Manhattan through your dilapidated window. Once you are in, it is hard to get out” (Vicky, radio broadcaster, 26).

Many interviewees have expressed the paradoxical sentiment of the willingness of moving out of Flushing despite the comfort of the sense of insider-ness. But the intention of crossing the boundaries between the lived and the imagined space is usually unfulfilled due to the linguistic, cultural or economic immobilities.

4.4 Identity and imaginative geographies of home

“Home is profound centers of human existence.... the foundation of our identity as individuals and as members of a community, the dwelling-place of being” (Relph, 1976, p39).

Home is imaginative, plural and multi-layered space among Chinese. The Chinese character 家 (*jia*, home) has different layers among the Chinese, ranging on a scalar spectrum. On a large scale, it could mean 国家 (*guo jia*, home country) and 家乡 (*jia xiang*, homeland); on a smaller scale, it could mean 家庭 (*jia ting*, family) and 家业 (*jia ye*, family and career). Home is paradoxical among Chinese. On one hand, home and sense of rootedness have been highly valued in Chinese culture, reflected in the old Chinese saying: *“Fallen leaves return to the roots”* (落叶归根, *luo ye gui gen*). For those recent immigrants who spend most of their life in China and still maintain transnational connections with their home country, home is still their homeland to a large degree, where they were born and raised. Being far from China triggers the sense of rootedlessness. *“I never feel a strong sense of rootedness here in the U.S. the way I feel in China, because China is where I grew up and spent my childhood ”* (Kevin, nail polisher, 32). On the other hand, the increasing waves of Chinese immigrants uproot and resettle all over the world. China is one of the most emigrating countries in the world. We also have a saying that is cosmopolitan and unrestrained: *“Feel at home wherever one goes”* (四海为家, *si hai wei jia*). This paradox is solved by the transcending, transferring and negotiation between various notions of home and by the materiality of home. However subjective and imaginative home is, home is also material and lived (Miller,

2001; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). It is to be established and re-established. The Chinese character 家 (*jia*, home) itself is a symbol of a roof with the material belongings under it. For most of the young immigrants, *what* is home matters more than *where* is home. In Chinese culture, home and security largely depend on the housing ownership. Sense of home has been materialized by their mundane life, job, house and family. Being far away from their homeland is compensated by pursuing a career, owning a house or having a family in the foreign land. For Lili, home is where family is. *“Home is where my family is, before my husband and son came to the U.S. and joined me, I felt homeless, like a dust in the wind. After they came, I began to feel settled”* (Lili, *masseuse*, 42). Jiang has been in the U.S. for 16 years. Most of her family and friends are still in China, including her 80-year old mom. She still maintains the transnational connections with China by making daily calls, annual visits and following the news in China through ethnic media. But she considers the U.S. as her home because this is where her job, apartment, social security, and most of all, where her daily routine life is. *“Every time I landed in JFK after visiting my mom in China, I feel so relieved and think to myself ‘Finally home!’”* (Jiang, restaurant owner, 54). China used to be home for Jiang, but now home is the U.S. where she felt a sense of relief and belonging, because it is where she works and lives.

The notion of home among (im)migrants is very often a negotiated and ambiguous concept between imagining and living, between mobile and immobile, between here and there. Unlike hyper-mobile transmigrants who claim multiple homes (Rapport and Dawson, 1998; Al-Ali and Koser, 2002), the (im)migrants in Flushing with

less mobility more often experience the sense of homelessness⁶. The sacrifice of the *big home* (home country or homeland) for the sake of *small home* (family or career), and the ambiguity between what *used to be* home and what *is* home triggers a sense of melancholy. What used to be their home only exists in their memory and imagination with the passage of time and physical distance. When asked about what and where home is, sighing and pausing are always the first reactions among the interviewees. For taxi driver Zhang who have been in the U.S. for 18 years, “*Being so far away from China for so long, China is no longer home, it only exists in my memory, but America is not my home either, I can never feel fully acculturated into the U.S. culture.*” The uprooting and relocation bring Zhang to the space of in-betweenness and the status of homelessness. But the reunion with his family, house ownership, job security and the materialization of the community that transnationally and mentally connects him to the homeland provide him a sense of at-homeness, which echoed what was discussed in section 6.

The imaginative geographies of home, community and boundaries transcend themselves to identities. “*Mapping imaginative geographies can be said to constitute a ‘cartography of identities’because there is a sense in which ‘knowing oneself’ is, in part, a matter of ‘mapping where one stands’*” (Gregory, 1995 (b), p447, p475). The multi-faceted imaginative geography also reflects flexible and complex identities. Wang chronologically traced the modern history of Chinese migration into the trader pattern (huashang), coolie pattern (huagong), sojourner pattern (huaqiao) and re-migrant (huayi)

⁶ In this article, homelessness means the feeling of unrootedness in humanistic geography (Seamon, 1979; Tuan, 1974, 1977). In many cases, a person with a house can still feel homeless due to various reasons. A common reason that triggers a sense of homelessness among the (im)migrants is being far away from homeland and ambiguous identities.

pattern (Wang, 2000). However, this spectrum no longer captures the whole range of identities of new migrants. Neither sojourners nor settlers, neither emigrants nor returnees, they are physically in Flushing while actively maintaining their connections with their homeland in everyday life with the assistance of modern transportation and telecommunication. The imaginative boundaries between here and there, between self and body, between home and away are dynamic. For Fan, the transnational mobility and cosmopolitan exposure to diverse culture in New York City fluidify his sense of home.

“New York City is like a miniature world, people come from all over the world. This global village makes me feel my home is not a single country with boundaries but the earth as a whole” (Fan, janitor, 60).

On one hand, their increasing mobilities at the transnational scale fluidize and multiply their identities and notions of home, thus problematizing the meanings of place, territory, borders, and citizenships. On the other hand, flexible citizenship (Ong, 1999) is just an idealized concept; the immobilities at the local scale strengthen their attachment to place and locality.

5. Conclusion

The formation of imaginative geographies of Chinese (im)migrants living in Flushing is a result of negotiation between imagining and living, between knowing and practicing, between here and there, between home and away, between us and others. The Chinese (im)migrants' carry with them the images of the U.S. and New York City prior to arrival. When their expectations and imaginations collide with the realities, the imaginative geographies of the city, the U.S. and the community are re-established in everyday practices of traveling, seeing and knowing. The imaginative geography is lived

and the formation of imaginative geographies is a material process. It has material foundations including the ethnic mobile resources, ethnic media and transnational connections that are geographically grounded in the community (Figure 4.4). With the help of these agencies, Chinese (im)migrants can easily access certain images and experiences in everyday practice of life that shape their geographical knowledge. But at the same time these agencies also lead to superficial exposure to the world outside Flushing and thus a limited, simplified or even biased geographic knowledge. Flushing acts like a bubble, further distancing people from the outside world. The transnational connections of the community to the homeland and cultural solidarities draw them socially and culturally closer to China than to the U.S. The locality and transnational connections combined create an outsider and ethnocentric perspective through which they look at the world beyond Flushing. As Tuan notes, “*seeing and thinking creates distance from the world being and the world ‘out there’*” (Tuan, 1977, p146). The physical distance across which the imaginative geographies were formed is replaced by social and cultural distance. The distance forces them to redefine the geographies of the receiving country, city and the community. The imaginative geographies of the country, the city, and the community further make and re-make the sense of insider-ness and outsider-ness, notions of home and identity.

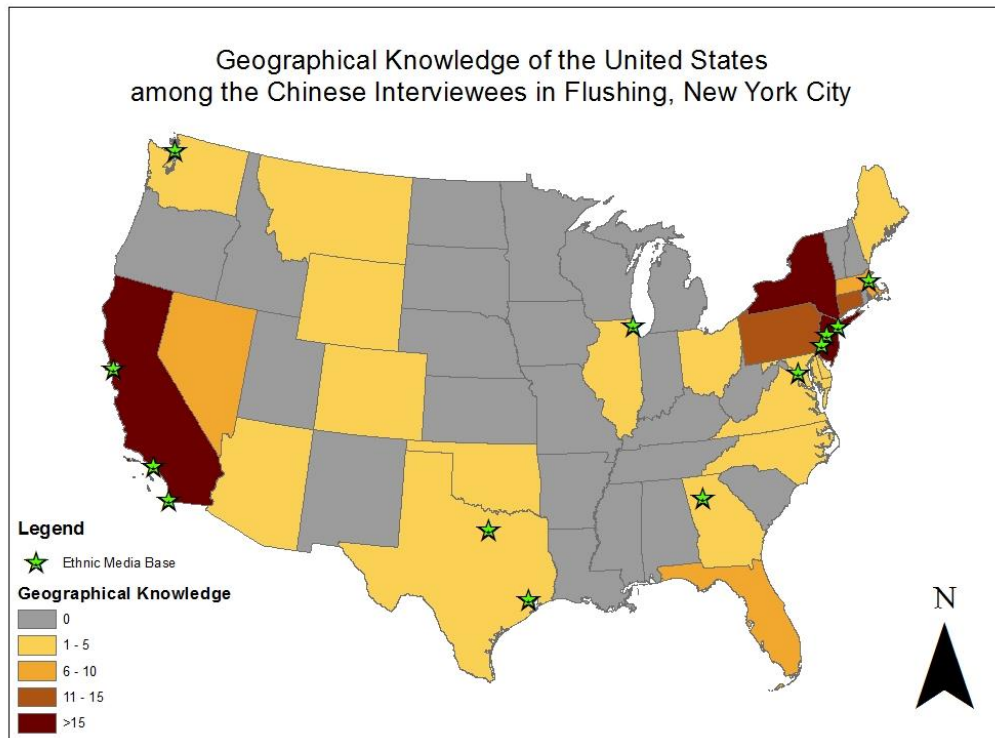


Figure 4.1 The Geographical Knowledge of the United States among the Chinese interviewees in Flushing, New York City and the Major Base Cities of Chinese Ethnic Media (Data Source: Interview)

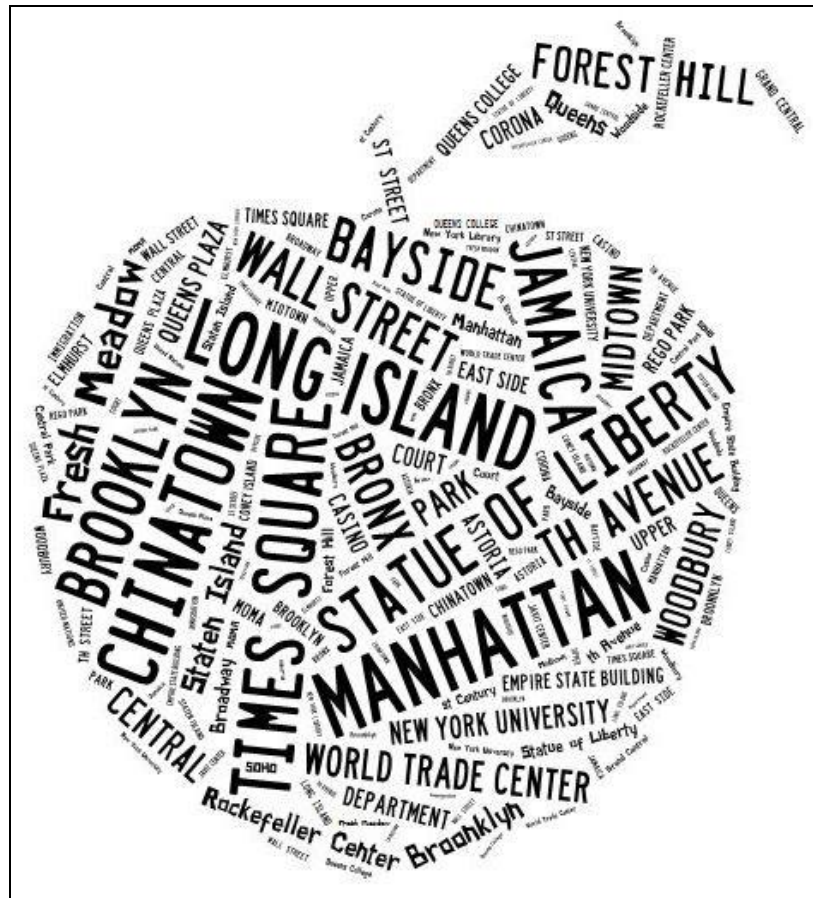


Figure 4.2 The Geographical Knowledge of New York City among the Chinese interviewees in Flushing, New York City (Data Source: Interview)

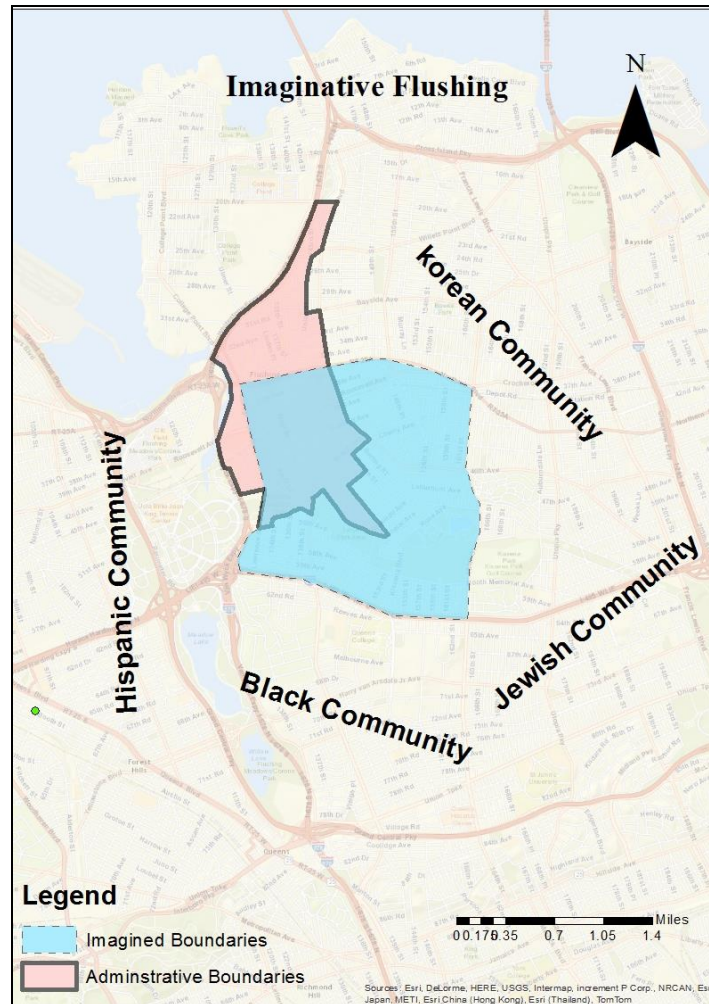


Figure 4.3 Imagined Flushing among the Chinese interviewees in Flushing (Data Source: Interview)

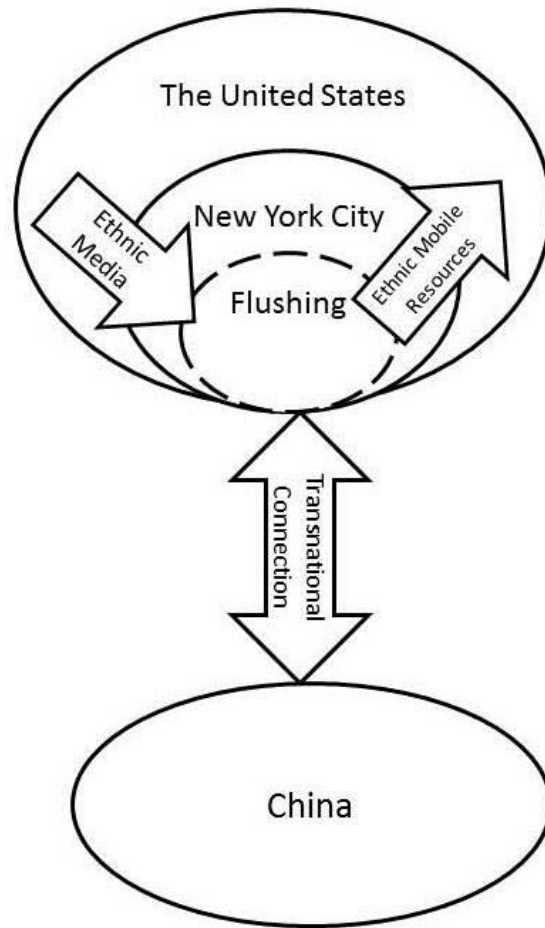


Figure 4.4 The formation of imaginative geographies among the Chinese interviewees in Flushing

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Chapter 5

Chinatown Once More?

Flushing first started to emerge as an Asian community in 1980s. Chen, an anthropologist from Taiwan, wrote the book *Chinatown No More* (Chen, 1992), which was based on his research in Flushing during late 1980s and early 1990s. Chen's description of Flushing is in sharp contrast to the discussion of traditional Chinatown as a closed, static and hierarchical urban ghetto. Instead, Flushing was an open, diverse, family-oriented and mobile Taiwanese community. Two decades later, Flushing has changed dramatically. The number of (im)migrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong has declined and (im)migrants from mainland China are beginning to increase due to the rising economic power of mainland China and the relaxed border-crossing and immigration policies in the U.S. Many of new (im)migrants choose Flushing as their first stop because of its geographical location, transportation convenience and abundant ethnic resources in employment and housing. More people bring more businesses; more businesses bring more resources, which subsequently attract more people. Flushing has replaced Manhattan Chinatown as the new gateway for recent (im)migrants from mainland China. Flushing has also emerged as the new center for the Chinese in the city and in the region.

Once the new (im)migrants came to Flushing, they depended on the community and ethnic network for their daily life. Job centers, family hotels, ethnic mobile resources provide easy access to jobs and housing but at the same time constrain their activity space and vertical mobility so that their imaginative geographies of New York City and the States still remain imaginative. Flushing mobilizes them as much as immobilizes them. It seems that *Chinatown no more* has again become the *Chinatown once more*.

However, unlike the historical Chinatown depicted as an enclosed and self-sufficient urban ghetto due to anti-Chinese discriminations that had long existed in the American history, Flushing is different. It has the components of historical Chinatown due to people's immobility at the local scale. However, it is no longer the Chinatown in history that was forced into formation as a self-defensive ghetto against the racial discrimination in the American society. The formation and development of Flushing are largely attributed to the transnational mobility and connections with China, which brings both human and financial capital resources to New York City. Therefore, race alone no longer fully explains the spatial formation of contemporary ethnic community and immigrants' experience. In addition, the racial dynamics have been changing both at the institutional and individual level due to the changing geopolitical landscape at the global scale. The rising economic power of China, the relaxing border policies and increasing exchange between the U.S. and China change the mentality among Chinese (im)migrants and the perceptions towards the Chinese in the American society.

In addition to race, mobility provides an analytical tool to study the contemporary ethnic community. Mobility makes place, and place makes mobility. Scholars have debated on whether or not ethnic enclaves mobilize or immobilize immigrants. Some scholars argue ethnic enclaves are a trap (Kwong, 1996; Guest, 2003). Others argue that these enclaves provide ethnic resources for socio-economic upward mobility of new immigrants (Wilson and Portes, 1980; Wilson and Martin, 1982; Zhou, 1992; Portes and Manning, 2008). Both Ethnoburb and the Invisiburb reflect the increasing willingness of recent immigrants to incorporate into mainstream society and their increasing residential and socioeconomic mobilities to do so (Skop and Li, 2003). Laguerre's

conceptualizations of *ethnopolis* and *panethnopolis* implies a high level of mobilities and circulation of people, goods, information and capital at the global scale through the multiple extraterritorial connections and relations beyond the enclave, with homeland and with other diasporic ethnopolis overseas (Laguerre, 2000, 2005). At one end of the mobility/immobility spectrum stands the ghettos and enclaves, which indicate enclosure and immobility. At the other end stand the ethnopolis and translocalities which denote a high level of mobility and circulation.

Theoretically, this dissertation contributes to mobility research by interrogating the relationships between mobility and place, as well as the subsequent imaginative geographies that are internalized into identity and sense of place. Mobility itself is paradoxical and relational. In this dissertation, I propose the concept of *mobilocality* that is simultaneously mobilizing yet anchoring, fluid yet rooted, transient yet authentic. Certain accessibility actually immobilizes people by suppressing their potential mobility. The mobility pattern in the everyday life of Chinese (im)migrants in Flushing is reflected in the paradox of a mobile place with a limited activity space, of transnational connections and local immobility, as well as of voluntary and involuntary immobility. Flushing provides social network and mobile resources that facilitate daily mobility, such as family hotels, job centers, travel agencies, ethnic media, casino buses and Chinatown vans. These social networks and mobile resources enhance people's mobility as they navigate the city and the region for economic and social resources. Simultaneously, these resources confine people's activity space and potential mobility. The romanticization of mobility metaphorized as nomadism and cosmopolitanism does not apply evenly to everyone. What transnationalism differs from globalization is the stress on unevenness,

border and identity. Even though transnational mobility of the Chinese (im)migrants is enhanced by modern transportation and communication, their local mobility is fixed due to the intersect of the various constraints including language, race, time, and socioeconomic status . These constraints increase (im)migrants' attachment to the community because they are confined to several blocks of space that they depend on for their everyday life and employment. Their imaginative geography of the country, the city and the community remain imaginative are formed more across social and cultural distance than physical distance. Their imaginative geographies are materialized in daily language, geographical knowledge, and the making of place. It also generates both a sense of outsider-ness and insider-ness and multi-layered identities. The formation and dynamics of the contemporary ethnic/immigrant landscape is a result of negotiation between mobility and immobility at both transnational and local levels, which are embedded in the everyday life of individuals, influencing their social interaction and self-identification.

This study interrogates the relationships between mobility and place by taking into account intentionality. Without considering place, proximity can be mistaken as immobility. But without considering intentionality, accessibility can be mistaken as mobility. Intentionality is crucial in the study of mobility and sense of place. *“The meaning of places may be rooted in the physical setting and objects and activities, but they are not a property of them-rather they are a property of human intentions and experiences”* (Relph, 1976, p47). Intentionality explains the past and predicts the future of both people and place. It opens up the discussion of potential mobility which has been neglected in the past research. This research takes a qualitative approach beyond GIS

mapping in order to obtain data on experience, feelings, emotions and expectations in everyday mobility. The process of obtaining and analyzing qualitative data for this research is rigorous, recursive and reflexive accounting for both etic themes that have been constructed during the two rounds of pilot studies and emic themes that rise throughout the analysis (Hay, 2010).

In summary, this research examines the relations between mobility and place from three perspectives covered by three separate chapters: place, people and imaginative geographies. However, this research is the beginning of future exploration of place, people and mobility. It paves the way for the future research in exploring the longitudinal changes of mobility of people and temporality of the place, and interrogating the complex relationships between physical and social mobility.

The temporality of ethnic community is also largely explained by the temporality of mobility, as is reflected both in evolution of Flushing and changing trajectories of its people. As more recent (im)migrants arrive into Flushing, old-timers who used to live in the core of Flushing are pushed away from the center. Recent (im)migrants tend to depend on mobile resources that are concentrated in the center where the subway, bus stations and Chinatown vans are located. The old-timers out-migrate to the outskirts of the community, due to the car ownership and affordability of the housing as they gradually climb up the socioeconomic ladder. The landscape of Flushing is expanding and is also layered. The pattern of spatial differentiation of the community is characterized by the inner-layer, which contains less mobile people who have to depend on centrality and an outer-layer with more mobile people who can afford decentralization but still remain attached to the community. Each year that I return to Flushing, the community becomes

younger as the old-timers have settled down and brought their children, most of whom are in their 20s and 30s. What changes will this community go through as this cohort builds their own family with children? Will they remain attached to Flushing or move out? Flushing has already shown signs of gentrification as the existing businesses are pushed out by rising rent (New York Times, 2014). The rent of land in on Main Street in the center of Flushing has already surpassed that in Manhattan. Will Flushing still serve as the center for the Chinese in nearby region or will it be replaced by another emerging Chinese community in a different location, and repeat the history of Manhattan Chinatown? Will Flushing become a “Chinatown no more” again?

There are complex relationships between social and physical mobilities (Sheller and Urry, 2006), but these two themes have been studied separately. This theme is beyond the scope of this dissertation but is worth further research. Although social dimensions of physical mobility has been a topic of discussion in transportation geography, a thorough examination of the relationship between physical and social mobility is largely lacking. The study of mobility of immigrants mostly focuses on social mobility. Assimilation is measured more by socioeconomic and residential mobility rather than actual daily movement. However, physical mobility in everyday life reflects a great deal of how immigrants directly or indirectly encounter other social groups beyond their immediate community on a daily basis. Physical mobility is the essential part of cultural incorporation. The capability to move throughout a city largely determines immigrants’ social mobility. Kaufmann et al (2004) coined *motility* as the link between the two mobilities. The study of physical mobility needs to be placed within broader

social and cultural contexts. The key is to interrogate the translation of potential mobility into actual mobility and physical mobility into social mobility.

The population sample drawn in Flushing mostly represent recent Chinese (im)migrants from mainland China, who lacks economic and social resources, evidenced in the relatively lower socioeconomic status than the average in New York City. But this study serves as a contrast with other Chinese (im)migrants of different classes and other racial and ethnic groups. There are commonalities among the (im)migrants across the U.S. and the world who relocate, acculturate, overcome immobilities, maintain transnational connections with homeland, and build their own sense of place and identities in the receiving land. But there are also differences in mobility and immobility patterns among different social groups. Therefore, future research will engage in comparative studies of mobilities among different racial and ethnic groups.

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