CHINATOWN IS NOT FOR SALE: IMMIGRANT AND YOUTH MOBILIZATION AGAINST GENTRIFICATION IN NEW YORK, SAN FRANCISCO, AND BOSTON.

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Cornell University 2019

This study examines the democratic implications of gentrification and displacement in working-class Chinese immigrant communities. In this multisite, multilingual, and multimodal study, I draw from two years of ethnographic fieldwork and oral history interviews with over one hundred individuals including tenants, community organizers, restaurant and garment workers, small business owners, artists, public health workers, nonprofit professionals, and elected officials. This research was made possible by working in close collaboration with grassroots organizations in all three cities. Bridging together literature on Asian diaspora studies, democratic theory, urban governance, race and ethnic studies, comparative immigration, gender and sexuality, and critical geography, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the conditions under which Chinese immigrants and youth are active in the making of urban space and urban politics, shifting way from a common narrative that portrays them as disengaged from democratic processes. From organizing intergenerational conversations on displacement in porcelain shops to amplifying resident voices through cultural production work and establishing tenant associations in tenement walkups to playing street volleyball as resistance, each chapter captures a snapshot of how frontline communities are mobilizing to stay in their homes and underscores the intimacies of home in shaping our political lives. Fundamentally, the research and methods used in this study broadens the scope of how we conceptualize American politics and where it unfolds on the ground, importantly shaping how scholars and practitioners understand the relationship between immigrant communities, democratic citizenship, and political possibilities.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Diane Wong is a first-generation Chinese American educator, cultural organizer, and multimedia storyteller born and raised in Flushing Queens in New York City. Her academic interests include American politics, Asian diaspora studies, urban governance, comparative immigration, race and ethnicity, social movements, democratic citizenship, migration and displacement, gender and sexuality, community studies, and qualitative research methods. Her dissertation focuses on intergenerational resistance to gentrification in New York City, San Francisco, and Boston Chinatowns. Her work draws from a unique combination of methods including ethnography, participatory mapping, archival research, augmented reality, and oral history interviews with tenants, community organizers, restaurant and garment workers, small business owners, public health workers, and elected officials. Her scholarship has received the Byran Jackson Dissertation Research on Minority Politics Award, Susan Clarke Young Scholars' Award, American Political Science Association Best Paper Award on Race, Ethnicity, and Politics, and the Don T. Nakanishi Award for Distinguished Scholarship and Service in Asian Pacific American Politics. Her research has been funded by prestigious grants from the National Science Foundation, Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, Mellon Foundation, New York Public Library, Humanities New York, and Cornell University's American Studies Program. Diane is a member of the Edward A. Bouchet Graduate Honor Society, she has also been a participant and mentor for the McNair Achievement Scholars Program, Leadership Alliance Mellon Initiative, and the American Political Science Association Minority Fellows Program. Her work has been appeared in *Urban Affairs Review*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Asian American Policy Review*, *Push/Pull* and a variety of edited book volumes, journals, anthologies, museum exhibitions, and podcasts.

To the warrior women who taught me everything
Shushi Min, Jassy Min, Eva Min

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when I was growing up, I swore
I would run away to purple mountains,
houses by the sea with nothing over
my head, with space to breathe,
uncongested with yellow people in an area
called Chinatown, in an area I later
learned was a ghetto, one of many hearts
of Asian America.

-Nellie Wong's "When I Was Growing Up"

Introduction

I don't remember how many times I have taken the dollar van from Flushing to Manhattan's Chinatown anymore. Taking the dollar van is nothing like riding the subway into the city. There are no official bus stations or signs that tells you where to go. I remember the first time I took the van after returning to the city for fieldwork, I had to ask several people on the street where the pickup location was since it had moved due to construction. There was a middle aged Chinese man standing outside a white commuter van with a stack of bills in his hand, I asked him if the bus would take me to Manhattan's 唐人街 (translated to English as Chinatown), he nodded his head towards the bus and asked me for three dollars. I paid and got on to see that it was crowded with morning commuters. There were some people with grocery bags and mothers with their children en route to daycare. Everyone on the bus was Chinese, there were men and women, professionals, restaurant workers, and younger Chinese Americans like me. Most people were busy watching videos on their phones or reading the Chinese newspaper, and almost everyone on the bus looked exhausted. As I walked down the aisle to find a seat I realized that they were all taken. I turned to ask the driver who had started the engine where I should sit and he told me to go all the way to the back. I found a wooden tofu crate and sat on it for the entire ride. This was one of my first memories of doing work for this project and in retrospect I think it signaled the unpredictable months that were ahead of me. It was on these

twenty minute rides to and from the city that I realized some of the most visible changes happening in New York City could be seen from the windows of the van. Three years ago the East River skyline still hung low and as a bus rider you could see the sprawling public housing apartments in Two Bridges, a neighborhood two blocks southwest of Chinatown. That same skyline has since been covered by the new eighty four story Extell tower and several others to come.

There are dozens of vans like the one described that take passengers to and from the largest Chinatowns in New York City: Manhattan, Flushing and Sunset Park. These buses leave every ten minutes and take less than thirty minutes to get from one destination to the other — approximately six thousand commuters take the van every day. This large number of riders reflects the importance that Chinatown continues to serve for old and new immigrants. The van I take begins from Flushing Main Street and drops everyone off at Confucius Plaza, which is considered to be the historic heart of Manhattan's Chinatown. The boundaries of Chinatown are nebulous and contested by residents themselves, geographically the neighborhood borders Two Bridges and the Lower East Side to its East, Little Italy to its North, Civic Center to its South and Tribeca to its West. The neighborhood has expanded outward to some areas like East Broadway but has also withdrawn significantly in others. In the last decade alone, New York's Chinatown has changed drastically due to real estate speculation and developments that have led to massive displacement of longtime residents and small businesses. This project explores the politics of gentrification and illuminates these questions: How do Chinese immigrants and younger generations engage politically with gentrification in their daily lives? How do residents with limited resources and access to formal political institutions exert political agency in the context of gentrification and displacement? More specifically, this study focuses on how frontline communities including women, low-income tenants, small business owners, and artists are politically responding gentrification on an everyday basis. From a multidisciplinary perspective, this study weaves together scholarship in political science, ethnic studies, urban politics, and democratic theory.

I begin this study where most scholarship on New York's Chinatown ends: post 9/11. This introduction will be divided into five primary sections. The first provides a general overview of the formation of American Chinatowns from specific immigration, housing, and labor policies at the federal level to neighborhood zoning and land use practices at the city and municipal levels. I offer a historically situated account of how ideas about Chinese Americans and manifestations of racism through the "Yellow Peril" and "Model Minority" stereotypes have spatially constructed Chinatowns over time. At the end of this section I discuss how these tropes have created circumstances that have made Chinatowns ripe for the forces of gentrification. In the second section I offer my own definition of gentrification. I first review the extant literature on gentrification and provide a critical analysis of the studies that have examined its political effects on democratic citizenship. Even though a lot has been written about gentrification and debates have ensured over the specific dynamics of the process in neighborhoods worldwide, I argue that the dialogue has tended to sideline discussions about its political consequences on those most impacted, especially women, elders, and youth in immigrant communities. In the third section I present the theoretical foundation that motivate this project and delineate how a focus on interstitial politics will broaden the scope of how scholars and practitioners understand democratic citizenship in urban immigrant communities. In the final section I provide an overview on data collection and methods used while conducting fieldwork. I also consider what it means to produce academic scholarship that is generative, collaborative, and accountable to the very communities we choose to write about.

I choose to focus on contemporary Chinatowns for several reasons, more than ever they are critical to our understanding of American politics. The first reason is that even as one of the oldest ethnic neighborhoods in the country, Chinatowns remain a key destination for new immigrants from the Chinese diaspora who come from diverse regions in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Malaysia. According to the 2017 Current Population Survey, Chinese immigrants are the third largest

foreign born group in the United States and continue to be one of the fastest growing ethnic groups, there are approximately 4.9 million Chinese Americans in states across the country. In order to understand the dynamics and complexities of such a large and diverse group of immigrants, it is critical to focus on the places in which they settle and how their presence alters the political landscape in which they live. Second, Chinatowns are relevant to our understanding of democratic citizenship and political life for Chinese Americans. Historically, Chinatowns in the United States have been rich in terms of social networks, social support, and social capital, particularly given the sheer number of self-sustaining community and social organizations that continue to exist including the traditional family, district, and village associations. As Chinese Americans continue to grow to become a larger political force in American politics, especially with the rise of Chinese conservative groups across the country that are mobilizing around issues like affirmative action and data disaggregation, a deeper look into existing and new social structures in Chinatown provides a unique opportunity to learn about how immigrants develop their political values, ideas, and attitudes over time. Third, as Chinatowns across the country continue to change due to gentrification, a focus on these neighborhoods will renew our understanding of the relationship between housing, poverty and urban inequality. Given the increasing number of people and families who live in precarious conditions, it is necessary for social scientists to examine how these material conditions influence democratic participation.

1.1 The Racialization of Chinatowns from "Yellow Peril" to "Model Minority"

The story of Chinatown is the story of an American neighborhood, where the past and the present are inseparably woven together. In order to understand the contemporary significance of Chinatowns in the United States it is necessary to contextualize how they were created and what purpose they serve across time and for whom. I suggest that the question of why Chinatowns are relevant must be positioned in the broader socio-historical narrative of immigrant survival and the racialization of Chinese immigrants in the United States. In particular, I argue that Chinatowns were

the result of several overlapping forces: 1) anti-immigrant sentiment that forced Chinese immigrants to cluster together for security 2) state sanctioned regulations on immigration, employment, and land ownership which confined people to particular, undesirable sections of the city and 3) the persistent imagination of Chinese immigrants as the "Yellow Peril" and "Model Minority" which articulates the place identity of Chinatown within the confines of otherness and the racial hierarchies of dominant society. As with the formation of other segregated neighborhoods in America, race and racism has historically been implicated in the creation of Chinatowns (Omi and Winant 2014; Tchen 2014). At their height there were dozens of Chinatowns across the country, in large metropolitan areas like Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco but also in smaller cities like Cleveland, St. Louis, and Oklahoma City. American Chinatowns dispels the myth of ethnic enclaves as a natural phenomenon because the vast majority of these neighborhoods were the product of deliberate exclusionary measures and practices that reinforced the fears of native-born Americans about the Asian immigrant "other" (Takaki 1989; Kwong 1996; Okihiro 2001; Wu 2015). During the Gold Rush and construction of the transcontinental railroad in the mid-1800s, an initial wave of Chinese immigrants settled on the West Coast in California, Washington, Oregon, and Vancouver Island. These Chinese migrant workers or "coolie" contract laborers were paid much lower wages than white workers but contributed greatly to the mining, railroad, lumber, fishing, and agricultural industries (Hu-Dehart 1989; Jung 2006; Yun 2008). However, as the population of Chinese migrant laborers grew on the West Coast so did the anti-Chinese sentiment and resentment (Saxton 1975; Sandmeyer 1991; Kwong and Miscevic 2005). Even after the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, hostile attitudes towards Chinese immigrants spread across cities and states. Since most industries at the time hired Chinese workers as strikebreakers, bitter resentment between white workers and Chinese migrant laborers festered for years before exploding in large scale anti-Chinese riots that led to hundreds of deaths (Roy 1976; Wilcox 1929; Barth 1964; Daniels 1972; McClain 1994). On the West Coast alone between 1870 and

1880, there were 153 documented anti-Chinese riots with some of the worst attacks concentrated in Denver, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Tacoma (Wynne 1978; Daniels 1988; Saxton 1971; Sandmeyer 1991; Pfaelzer 2008). This hostile climate forced the earlier Chinese immigrant bachelors to seek safety in numbers, which led to the creation of the first Chinatowns on the West Coast.

Facilitated by national labor organizations like the Knights of Labor and American Federation of Labor, white workers blamed the Chinese for driving down wages and for taking away their jobs (McKee 1977; Miller 1969; Saxton 1971; Lee 2003). Many labor leaders and politicians played into white workers' anxieties by pointing fingers at Chinese workers for driving down wages. By catering to white anxieties of the immigrant other, those in positions of authority resorted to rhetoric that depicted Chinese migrant laborers as perilous threats and incapable of assimilating into mainstream American society (Wong 2015). In California in the 1870s, labor leader turned state politician Dennis Kearney led a workingmen's campaign coining the slogan "The Chinese must go" to mobilize white workers against the Chinese immigrant community (McKee 1977; Saxton 1971; Lee-Williams 2018). In San Francisco in 1876, a high-ranking lawyer named H.N. Clement stood before the California State Senate Committee and spoke about Chinese immigrants as if he were talking about the bubonic plague: "The Chinese are upon us. How can we get rid of them? The Chinese are coming. How can we stop them? How to protect civilization without infringing upon the rights of the barbarians?" (Lee 2002; Lee and Yung 2010). Public testimonies like this one were deliberate and widely circulated by newspapers in an attempt to nationalize the Chinese threat question in order to influence public opinion and to institutionalize exclusionary policies at all levels of government (Salyer 1995; Tchen and Yeats 2014; Lee 2015). Around the same time, pro-labor editorialist John Swinton brought the "Chinese Question" to New York which led to a series of organized protests by unions and politicians in New York City (Tchen 1999). These efforts culminated in the spring of 1882 when Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act which restricted new immigrants coming in from China and barred Chinese

immigrants who were already in the United States from becoming naturalized citizens (Chan 1991; Lee 2003). The 1882 Exclusion Act marked the first time in history that the government restricted the entrance of an entire group explicitly based on race and class status (Lee 2002; Ngai 2004; Wu 2015). To further preserve the idea of white homogeneity, immigrants from all Asian countries were barred entirely after the Asiatic Barred Zone Act was passed, also known as the Immigration Act of 1917 (Takaki 1989; Ngai 1999). It was through restrictive immigration laws like these that created severe legal and institutional barriers for Chinese immigrants to become full citizens. In response to these barriers and exclusionary immigration measures, the first advocacy ethnic organizations found their start in Sacramento and San Francisco Chinatowns in efforts to provide services to immigrants who were never given the benefits of citizenship.

In addition to anti-Chinese violence and citizenship restrictions, land ownership restrictions and de jure residential segregation contributed to the formation and racialization of Chinatowns. As tensions heightened on the West Coast around the imminent threat of Chinese workers, individual states passed laws that specifically targeted Chinese immigrants from owning land (Okihiro and Jung 2014). For instance, in 1859, Oregon's state constitution article II, section 6 was amended to state that no "Chinaman" could own property while at the same time ensured that "white foreigners" still maintained the same property rights as enjoyed by native citizens. Between the late 1800s and early 1900s, a series of Alien Land Laws were passed in California, Washington, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon, Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, Kansas Montana, and Arizona which prevented Asian immigrants from owning property and prevented them from establishing homes and businesses in certain areas (Aoki 1998; Chin 2001). According to historian Ericka Lee who wrote *The Making of Asian America* (2015), San Francisco's Chinatown was one of the first segregated neighborhood in the United States. In San Francisco as with many other cities and municipalities at the time, property owners had the right to transfer their deed or sell their properties to whomever they wanted to, this was one of the

main strategies used to keep Chinese immigrants and other non-white communities from spreading across the city and outside the designated boundaries (Fisch 1978; Aoki 1998; Szto 2017). This fed into the widespread practice of restrictive covenants which were agreements that prohibited the purchase, transfer, lease, or occupation of a piece of property by a particular group of people solely based on race (Vose 1967; Gotham 2000). These agreements were entered into by a group of property owners, land developers, and homeowners associations, and widely enforced through the cooperation of neighborhood associations and real estate boards (Jones Correa 2000). In the 1930s, American cities became more segregated after the federal government passed The National Housing Act of 1934 to subsidize mortgages for white families and introduced redlining as a tool to steer investments to certain neighborhoods and away from others (Bradford 1979; Plotkin 1998; Schill and Wachter 1995). The Home Owners' Loan Corporation was commissioned to draw maps of entire cities across the country, San Francisco's Chinatown along with hundreds of non-white neighborhoods were outlined in red and regarded as unfit for investment (Harris 1951; Jackson 1980; Gotham 2000: Hiller 2003; Crossney and Bartelt 2005). Persistent discrimination in the form of Alien Land Laws, restrictive covenants, and redlining as legitimized by the federal government kept Chinese immigrants living in some of the most disinvested sections of American cities.

In addition to exclusionary housing policies and practices carried out at the federal, state, and local levels of government, Chinese immigrants were prevented from working in most industries and were forced to find self-employment through hand laundry and restaurant operations (Ong 1983; Jung 2007). According to historical records, Wah Lee opened the first Chinese hand laundry in 1951 in San Francisco. (Yu 1995) In the decades to come, Chinese owned hand laundries proliferated in cities and towns across the country (Bernstein 1999). By 1930, New York had the highest number of hand laundries in the United States, it was estimated that one out of three working Chinese immigrants labored as a laundryman (Yu 1992; Wong and Chan 1998). In one of the most extensive studies on

Chinese hand laundries, historian Renqiu Yu in his book *To Save China, To Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York* (2011) captures the labor conditions of these early laundrymen: "The Chinese laundry men's long working day not only a basic fact of life but was also passed on to the succeeding generations. A Chinese laundry man who inherited his father's laundry shop in the 1950s said in 1988 that the old generation had to work fifteen to eighteen hours a day. They were so busy that they did not even find time to eat [...] some of them used a string to hang a piece of bread from the ceiling and had a bite when they had the time to do so."[1] Even though washing and ironing clothes posed no threat to white male workers, racially targeted measures were still prevalent and affected the lives of these self-employed Chinese workers (Ong 1983; Bernstein 2008; Thach 2015). For instance, in San Francisco the Laundry Ordinances of 1873 and 1876 mandated high licensing fees for anyone who carried laundry without a horse-drawn wagon. In 1933 in New York City, white laundries rallied to pass a discriminatory ordinance that required all self-employed hand laundries to pay a twenty five dollar annual registration fee and 1,000 dollar bond as insurance (Lai, McCunn, and Yun 1998). These ordinances targeted Chinese hand laundry owners who did not have the money for these fees and arbitrary demands. As a consequence, Chinese laborers at the time had no other options but to cluster in Chinatowns to build the infrastructure and mutual support needed to face these obstacles together (Ong 1993). Many merchant associations and organizations for Chinese laborers like the Tung Hing Tong in California and Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance in New York City were established to protect the civil rights of Chinese immigrant workers and to break their isolation in a society that excluded them from all aspects of American life.

In what historian Jack Tchen delineates as "political Orientalism" these historical moments helped to articulate the place identity of Chinatown within the confines of the racial hierarchies of dominant society (Tchen 1999; Li 2011). As policies in favor of segregated housing and employment

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[1] Renqiu Yu's *To Save China, To Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York* (2011) page 26.

were being passed at all levels of government, Chinese immigrant communities were simultaneously being depicted by the mainstream media as deviant and dangerous places, populated by prostitutes, gamblers, and opium peddlers (Zhou 2014). The term "Yellow Peril" was first coined by Russian sociologist Jacques Novikow in his infamous 1897 essay "Le Peril Jaune" which depicted China and Chinese men as domestic and international threats to civility. In the United States context, the Yellow Peril narrative has depicted Chinese people as unassimilable, barbaric, intellectually inferior, and diseased (Wu 1980; Saito 1997; Kawai 2005; Lee 2007). The Yellow Peril stereotype played a defining role in the racialization of Chinatowns as a geography because it normalized and legitimized the perception of Chinese immigrants as subhuman and as public health threats who had to be contained in certain spaces (Craddock 2000). Historian Nayan Shah, uncovers in *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* that elected officials, public health workers, and doctors all helped to construct a Chinese spatial identity that was conflated with disease — Chinatowns were promoted as incubators of incurable epidemics like smallpox, syphilis, cholera, and bubonic plague (Shah 2001). In 1885, Thomas Logan who was the Secretary of the California Board of Public Health commissioned a committee to investigate conditions in San Francisco's Chinatown. The committee reported that the Chinese had innate hereditary vices that preordained them to chronic and unusual illnesses that posed an immediate threat to the rest of the city. The committee then produced a detailed series of maps and reports of Chinatown that confirmed poor sanitation and conditions, one report advised: "Your committee were impressed with the fact that the general aspect of the streets and habitations was filthy in the extreme, so long as they remain in that condition, so long would they stand as a constant menace to the welfare of society as a slumbering pest, most likely to generate and spread disease should the city be visited by an epidemic in any virulent form."[2] Logan's investigation in many ways popularized the image of Chinatowns as a geography that had to be isolated and its residents as people who had

[2] Seventeenth Annual Report of the Insurance Commissioner for the State of California (1884) page 83.

to literally be quarantined from the rest of society. This Orientalist imagination of Chinatown was disseminated by writers like William Randolph Hearst and Hollywood movie producers like William Wellman who relied on Yellow Peril tropes to write about the Chinatown underworld filled with villains, dragon ladies, and opium dens (Wong and Sucheng 1998; Denzin 2001). For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries then the spatial construction of Chinatowns was entangled with the Yellow Peril narrative which normalized decades of racial exclusion and enforced isolation.

As historian Madeline Hsu points out, racial stereotypes are subject to change over time in order to better reinforce dominant power relations and to redistribute resources that preserve the existing social order (Hsu and Chan 2008). The yellow peril trope and exclusion of Chinese immigrants began to loosen during World War II as the United States fought abroad in the name of democracy (Kawai 2005; Wu 2013). American liberals feared that the 1882 Exclusion Act and discrimination against the Chinese seemed hypocritical and placed their alliance with China in jeopardy. In response to these political concerns and shifting geopolitics, politicians, public health officials, journalists, and academics conspired to construct another racial stereotype for Chinese in the Americas, this time as docile, industrious, passive, and apolitical (Wu 2013). A group of intellectuals and legislators came together in 1943 to establish the Citizens Committee to Repeal Chinese Exclusion in efforts to recast Chinese immigrants in promotional materials as model minorities who were "law abiding, peaceful, and courteous people living quietly among us" (Riggs 1950; Lee 2016). Once depicted as geographies of deviance, Chinatowns were now reconstructed as redeemable and in need of white intervention. In an effort to sanitize the popular image of Chinatowns as deviant spaces, reformers and social workers corroborated with public health officials to assimilate Chinese immigrants into mainstream society through federally sponsored civic reeducation programs (Shah 2001). In the mid-1950s, dozens of Chinese women and their families who were selected by lottery to live in Ping Yuan, San Francisco Chinatown's first public housing apartments, were mandated to participate in civic programs that

taught them about the norms of American motherhood and nuclear domestic family lifestyle (Shah 2001). According to historian Ellen Wu in her book *The Color Of Success: Asian Americans and Origins of the Model Minority Myth* (2013), she writes that by the mid-1960s, Chinese Americans were widely considered to be models of assimilation and transformed from the Yellow Peril to becoming accepted as citizens who were upwardly mobile and politically non-threatening. This rearticulation of Chinese immigrants as model minorities welcomed them into wealthier white neighborhoods while Black and Latino households remained excluded from doing so. However, in what historian and Asian American studies scholar Gary Okihiro suggests in *Margins and Mainstreams* (1994), the model minority and yellow peril tropes are not opposites and that if one oscillates too far it becomes the other: "The yellow peril and the model minority are not poles, denoting opposite representations along a single line, but in fact form a circular relationship that moves in either direction. Moving in one direction along the circle, the model minority mitigates the danger of the yellow peril, whereas reversing the direction, the model minority, if taken too far, becomes the yellow peril."[3] In the policy realm the perceived successful assimilation of Asian immigrants that comes with the model minority trope evokes the idea that new immigrant destinations like Chinatown have become obsolete, masking the many issues that working-class Chinese immigrants who continue to live in these neighborhoods face on a regular basis such as displacement, poverty, and exploitation. Even though the yellow peril and model minority stereotypes continue to persist and shape how the native-born majority perceive Chinese Americans and the physical geographies in which they live, the wide rent gap that exists from decades of disinvestment and their proximity to the city center have made Chinatowns profitable for gentrification. Ironically, the same Chinatowns that Chinese immigrants were once forced to live in are now facing pressures brought on by gentrification that could lead to their extinction.

[3] Gary Okihiro *Margins and Mainstreams* (1994) page 140.

I choose to focus on gentrification for several reasons. First of all, it provides a useful lens to learn about how those who have limited resources and access to formal political spheres participate in politics that relate to their daily lives. The majority of the scholarship in American politics tends to focus on elections and other visible activities at the expense of other forms of political participation. Given that the individuals who are most impacted by gentrification are those who live in precarious circumstances and have limited access to formal political spheres, a focus on gentrification will allow researchers to expand our conceptions of politics or in the least what counts as meaningful politics. In addition, a more in depth look at gentrification illuminates how the individuals most impacted are politically responding to the process by their own means and are political agents in their own right. Second, a focus on the politics of gentrification sheds light to how government policies and private interests come together to influence housing circumstances, poverty, and inequality in cities across the country. Given the increasing number of evictions and housing displacement in American cities each year due to gentrification, it is imperative that scholars understand how these private and public forces are reshaping local political landscapes and the urban fabric. Third the study of gentrification is the study of local politics. The renewed focus on gentrification will bring the study of local politics from the periphery to the center of disciplinary conversations in political science, which is critical because local contexts shape state and national politics. Finally, the study of gentrification and displacement creates new methodological, theoretical, and practical opportunities for researchers to think about the connectedness between race, class, gender, language, citizenship, place, and how these factors together shape political realities. As cities across the country continue to change due to gentrification and state sanctioned displacement, academic scholarship on this topic can play a key role in shaping the political outcomes and decisions to make cities more livable and equitable.

1.2 The Politics of Gentrification: Destabilization, Mobilization, or Both

Ruth Glass, who is an urban sociologist based in London, coined the term gentrification to describe the housing and class struggle that came from post-industrial demographic shifts (Glass 1964). Since this earliest conception, researchers have spent decades trying to decide what we mean by gentrification. What does it look like as it unfolds in different neighborhoods? What are its key indicators? Does it involve a change in median income, racial demographics, education attainment, housing values, or coffee shop per capita? While Glass coined the term gentrification to describe class inequalities that resulted from capitalist land markets, scholars have since pushed for a broader definition that involves the large-scale social restructuring of urban land (Smith and Phillips 2001; Zukin 1991; Davidson and Lees 2005; Butler and Lees 2006; Zukin 2009). Some have shifted away from a strictly class-based understanding to focus on other forces in society that fuel gentrification such as lifestyle and cultural consumption patterns (Rose 1984; Ley 1996; Butler 1997; Hamnett 2001). A number of scholars have even argued that gentrification has become too complex of a term to accurately understand and have called to abolish its usage completely since it has become devoid of true significant meaning (Beauregard 2010). While these critiques are important, I choose to use the term for this study primarily because gentrification has become widely accepted into everyday language and is commonly used outside of academia by communities who experience it firsthand. However, for clarity purposes and to avoid further confusion, when I use the term gentrification in this study I am talking about displacement which is manifested on the ground in various forms such as through forcible evictions, land dispossession, building demolition, landlord harassment, cultural erasure, and continuous push to force those with less resources into even more vulnerable positions. As a point of departure from previous studies that have often approached gentrification as a single-issue struggle, I conceptualize gentrification as an intersectional issue that cuts across issues of class, race, gender, age, culture, language, and citizenship status.

As urban geographer Tom Slater observed, there has been an eviction of critical perspectives from gentrification scholarship as analyses of neighborhood change continue to ignore the fate of those most impacted (Slater 2006). The research on the topic has shied away from asking questions about politics, and although a few studies have focused on the policy forces behind the process, we know surprisingly little about how gentrification shapes the political lives of those on the frontlines (Michener and Wong 2018). In fact, much of the extant scholarship has continued to prioritize three themes in particular: causes of gentrification, behavior of wealthier gentrifiers, and economic effects of the process. Even though so much has been written about gentrification we still know surprisingly little about how those most affected navigate and interact with displacement on a regular basis. Rather than portray residents in the backdrop with limited political agency of their own, I examine Chinatown gentrification in relation to the themes of democratic citizenship, resistance, and political possibilities. A more intentional focus on how gentrification shapes politics is important because it will illuminate how those most impacted by displacement make sense of their relationship to the political system and act on issues that directly shape their lives and livelihoods. According to census tract data for the fifty largest cities in the country, 20 percent of neighborhoods with lower income and home values have experienced gentrification since 2000 compared to only 9 percent in 1990 (Maciag 2015). In addition, a number of cities have experienced extensive gentrification from 2000 onwards including Portland, Seattle, Washington, Minneapolis, and New York.[4] While gentrification induced displacement is hard to measure, it is estimated that 500,000 households or approximately 2 million people are displaced every year due to gentrification (Sumka 1979). That number translates to roughly 5,500 families a day who encounter displacement and is even higher in certain neighborhoods like New York's Chinatown where there is still a large share of rent-regulated housing stock. The politics of gentrification is about

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[4] For a more thorough report, see data provided by the "Gentrification in America Report" published by *Governing* in February 2015. The data is from 2009-2013 American Community Survey, US2010 Longitudinal Tract Database.

the politics of rootedness and uprootedness — it is about who gets to be at home and what it means to lose a home while at home. In addition to physical uprootedness from home, gentrification leads to cultural erasure and the dispossession of existing cultural institutions, organizations, customs and traditions. As gentrification continues to impact neighborhoods in cities across the country, it is vital to examine what the political effects of the process are for the people who experience it first-hand.

There have only been a handful of studies that have explored the democratic implications of gentrification induced displacement for existing residents (Robinson 1995; Knotts and Haspel 2006; Martin 2007; Newman, Velez, and Pearson-Merkowitz 2016; Hyra 2017; Michener and Wong 2017). The extant studies that do examine the politics of gentrification focus on two competing theories in particular: mobilization theory and destabilization theory. The studies on the demobilization theory side of the debate are abundant. Scholars have for a long time argued that gentrification decreases political involvement for longtime residents. There have been studies that suggest gentrification induced displacement weakens social networks, trust, interaction, and neighborhood institutions such as politically active churches, social service agencies, and community centers (Calhoun-Brown 1996; Flores-Gonzalez 2001). Political scientists Gibbs Knotts and Moshe Haspel's study on voter turnout in Atlanta lends substantive support to the destabilization hypothesis. The authors draw on census data and develop a multilevel model to examine the impact of gentrification on voter turnout in relation to race, education, homeownership, and several other measures (Knotts and Haspel 2006). Their findings reveal that gentrification does not have a significant impact on voter turnout for new residents but that it notably decreases voter turnout for longtime residents. More recently sociologist Derek Hyra shows from his research in the Shaw/U Street neighborhood of Northwest Washington that not only do longtime Black residents suffer from political displacement and also disempowerment but that gentrification fosters resentment and withdrawal from community life (Hyra 2017). While these findings have implications for democratic health and political inequality within the United States,

the vast majority of this literature has been written from a black and white lens which ignores the growing role of immigrants in urban areas and the political implications of displacement on diverse communities. As sociologist Jackelyn Hwang finds in her study of Chicago and Seattle, gentrification has occurred more in cities with higher levels of immigration and specifically in the neighborhoods with higher level of Asian and Latino immigrants (Hwang 2015). These findings have crucial political implications for urban development and racial and ethnic inequality in cities, but at the same time they do not reveal much about the substantive impact that gentrification has on the on political lives of immigrant communities who are often on the frontlines of this neighborhood change.

There is some evidence that gentrification increases political involvement among long-time residents. For example, political scientist Tony Robinson examines the heightened political activism among residents in San Francisco's Tenderloin district in response to pressures from development (Robinson 1995). He chronicles how residents successfully fought against the growth regime in the Tenderloin and in other parts of the city throughout the 1980s and spearheaded a proactive housing movement that paved the way for other grassroots mobilizations. In their respective studies, Estella Habal and Karen Tei Yamashita document the ways in which retired Filipino laborers or *manongs* in San Francisco's Manilatown with the support of Asian American student activists organized against the demolition of the International Hotel. (Habal 2006 and Yamashita 2010). In an article titled "The Right to Stay Put, Revisited," Kathe Newman and Elvin K. Wyly use qualitative interviews with New York City community organizers and tenants in Fort Greene, Williamsburg, Park Slope, Chelsea, and Harlem to show how residents are able to subvert displacement and stay in their homes (Newman and Wyly 2006). They find that 181,000 low-income families are able to reside these neighborhoods with some form of public subsidy, including federal public housing, housing vouchers, Mitchell Lama, and section 8, which offers a level of protection against gentrification led displacement. They also uncover that some residents are able to stay in their homes in gentrifying neighborhoods by sharing their

housing with several other residents or simply accepting poor housing quality. In a number of rare instances, residents were able to pay below market rate rents and remain in their apartments due to their relationship with the landlord. While these studies are important and provide a glimpse into the politic effects of displacement, they tend to also fall within a black and white dichotomy which ignores the ways in which other impacted communities are mobilizing around these issues and finding creative ways to actively shape the future of their neighborhoods.

In a piece that I co-wrote with political scientist Jamila Michener, we attempted to broaden the conversation by investigating the political effects of gentrification on working-class Chinese immigrant communities (Michener and Wong 2018). As a comparative and multimethods study, we found through our analyses that the destabilization theory is inadequate in painting a comprehensive picture and that it should be applied with caution across demographic subgroups and geographical units. In particular, when we looked closely at the relationship between gentrification and political participation using the Chicago Community Adult Health Survey, we found that the demobilization effects were largely confined to the political act of voting in presidential elections and for specific demographic subgroups, mostly for longtime residents who are white women. These findings caution researchers from overemphasizing the demobilization narrative and also indicate that a more in-depth evaluation of mechanisms is required to understand the full range of heterogeneity of the observed political effects. This is especially true for immigrant communities where many people are noncitizens and unable to participate in formal political processes, or their political activities cannot be adequately captured in surveys or large N approaches. Through ethnographic research and qualitative interviews, we found in our study that Chinese immigrant tenants, housing advocates, and small business owners in New York's Chinatown were actively mobilizing against gentrification, even among those most marginalized. This is in line with what I have argued elsewhere, that even with limited resources and access to formal political spheres, marginal actors are able to participate in a kind of politics that exists

alongside elites and are capable of affecting change around immediate material issues like gentrification (Jones-Correa and Wong 2015). This project builds from this previous work to further examine how Chinese immigrant communities are politically responding to gentrification, broadening the scope of how we think about American politics while uncovering new theoretical ground.

1.3 Political Interstices: Politics that Falls Beneath the Cracks

This project does not center electoral politics or formal participation in politics. The kind of politics that I choose to center is the kind that often falls between the cracks. It is the kind of politics that exists between clandestine and formal realms of engagement that political scientists often render as invisible. Largely as a result of theoretical and methodological decisions, the study of politics has become increasingly scientific, quantitative, and empirically oriented through large scale surveys and experiments. The influence of quantitative social science techniques and technologies have allowed researchers to contend with some of the most pressing questions of our time and have pushed the theoretical direction of political science research in new ways. The ability to easily construct large data sets from new applications, social media platforms, aggregations of field experiments, and polling data has encouraged scholars to think more deeply about the contours of political behavior, attitudes, ideas, and values, and to observe previously unseen patterns at the aggregate and grassroots levels. There are now various political scientist run firms that work in collaboration with non-academic stakeholders, policymakers, journalists, and community organizations to conduct large public opinion surveys of traditionally hard to reach communities. These developments have transformed the field of American politics over time, we now know more about how different populations participate in politics across temporal, spatial, cultural, and economic contexts. As more scholars explore the intersection of survey science and big data research, we continue to learn more about the issues that people care about and how individuals are expressing their voice through activities like attending protests, volunteering for a political party, donating money, contacting elected officials, and circulating petitions. However, the

ways in which we approach the study of politics has significantly narrowed our perception of politics or what counts as meaningful politics Largely due to methodological decisions that privilege certain kinds of knowledge over others, political scientists have systematically tended to focus on more visible forms of politics which excludes activities that cannot be easily captured by survey questionnaires.

The American politics literature has overwhelmingly tended to focus on electoral politics at the expense of other less visible forms of political participation. The act of voting is still considered to be the gold standard of conceptualizing and measuring political participation, as researchers have previously noted and justified: "Because casting a ballot is the most common act of citizenship in any democracy... political scientists devote a great deal of attention to the vote." (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). However, voting is far from the most common expression of democratic citizenship for many communities, especially for those who have been systematically excluded from the ballot box and formal political processes due to language, citizenship, indigeneity, and other factors. Historically, as a result of discriminatory policies and exclusionary practices, the process of systemic exclusion has created differential access to resources and political opportunities for certain individuals and groups to participate in visible politics like casting a ballot (Walton 1985; Omi and Winant 1994; Lipsitz 1998). I argue that narrow conceptions of political life that privileges formal politics precludes the possibility that there are other meaningful forms of political activities that individuals engage in that might relate more closely to the issues in their daily lives. Black studies and third world feminist studies scholars have consistently argued that politics encompasses more than what is apparent to the eye and that our theorizing must include activities that fall below the surface or extend to spaces beyond the ballot box (Lorde 1984; Anzaldúa 1987; Crenshaw 1991; Cohen 2004). While some political scientists have pushed for a more expansive definition of politics, few have grappled with the fact that our current theoretical conceptions of what counts as politics have continued to center the political behavior of whites as normative. In order to attend to rather than ignore deep material and positional differences,

I suggest that political scientists must be conscious of how narrow theoretical conceptions of politics constrain our understanding of how disparate communities become active in politics despite barriers and limited access to formal political channels.

In efforts to work towards a nuanced and multidimensional conceptualization of politics, I define it as a set of articulations, negotiations, and productions of power. This definition recognizes that politics is interstitial. The term interstitial is frequently used to describe transitions, occurrences, or spaces that exist in between structures, objects, or moments — they can be literal spaces such as gaps in between a subway platform or they can be figurative such as the several minutes until the next train arrives. It is useful for political scientists to understand politics as interstitial because it enables researchers to step back and to consider the realm that exists in between the clandestine and formal expressions of politics. In *Between Two Nations*, political scientist Michael Jones-Correa introduces what he calls a "politics of in-between" to describe how first-generation Latino immigrants in New York City participate in a politics outside of the traditional political sphere and navigate tensions between the host country and home country. Even though Latino immigrants are not very involved in formal political institutions due to systematic marginalization on the part of political parties and machine politics, they participate in a kind of unconventional interstitial politics that falls below the radar of what is visible. Through ethnographic and in person interviews, Jones-Correa importantly uncovers how Latino immigrant men and especially women participate in unconventional politics in ways that make sense for themselves and their families here and abroad. Similarly, Kimberly Springer, who is a Black feminist studies scholar, has used the term in her work to talk about the political formations of Black feminist organizations. Springer suggests that most studies on Black feminist organizations tends to focus on the visible forms of movement politics such as large-scale actions or coordinated acts of protest, which ignores all that happens beforehand when it comes to the official formation of groups like the Third World Women's Alliance, Black Women Organized for Action, National Black

Feminist Organization, National Alliance of Black Feminists, and Combahee River Collective. In order to truly capture the interstitial moments of Black feminist politics that often fall through the cracks, Springer traces the origins, ideologies, relationships, conversations, personal histories, and behind the scene operations of these organizations before they are formally established, and more visible politics can take place.

The study of interstitial politics help to reconfigure questions and center the communities that have too often been relegated to the periphery in political science research. As a discipline that appears outwardly concerned with questions related to power, politics, and society, we still know surprisingly little about how the most marginalized groups in our society participate in politics — including working-class communities of color, undocumented immigrants, disenfranchised prisoners, trans and nonbinary people, and those who live in precarious housing circumstances. The study of interstices is critical in addressing this disjuncture because it allows scholars to move beyond conventional studies of politics and traverse between the dichotomies of formality and informality, visibility and invisibility, center and periphery. As a notion, interstitial politics provides a useful lens for political scientists to learn about how those who have limited resources and access to formal political channels manage to disrupt longstanding power structures and participate in politics that relate to their daily lives. Rather than focus on visible political outcomes, the study of interstitial politics means a renewed commitment to observing how events, social interactions, phenomena, and the spaces in between can inform our understanding of political life. A more expansive definition of politics challenges the assumption that individuals who do not participate in the formal political arena are by default indifferent. Rather than dismiss certain individuals as being apathetic to political processes, scholars need to recognize the fact that people have agency in deciding where, when, and how they want to participate in politics. The study of interstitial politics offers a unique theoretical framework for researchers to learn about how marginal actors and other vulnerable populations are able to mobilize resources, build coalitions, and

constitute themselves as political agents. By studying interstitial politics, we are able to learn much more about the political experiences of marginalized actors in society and about American politics, community, citizenship, and possibilities of political engagement beyond existing realities.

1.4 Methodology

As a philosopher and Chinese American activist, Grace Lee Boggs explained with her choice to remain in post-industrial Detroit: "How can you understand change when you are always on the move? The most radical thing I ever did was to stay put." This quote from Grace Lee Boggs lays the theoretical and methodological foundation for this project because it underscores the centrality of place and the intimacies of home in shaping our political lives and motivations. In many ways this project began a decade ago when I was still an undergraduate student in the Asian American Studies Department at Binghamton University and had the chance to work at the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) in New York's Chinatown. I was tasked to work closely with small businesses and local residents to put together a "Ground One: Voices from Post-9/11 Chinatown" walking tour which documented the changes that 9/11 and post 9/11 public policies had on the neighborhood. I incorporated photographs, news clippings, biographies, oral histories into an interactive multimedia archive which was then assembled with the support of Columbia University's Oral History Research Office, September 11th Digital Archive at the CUNY Graduate Center and Asian/Pacific/American Institute at NYU. The task of weaving together diverse narratives for the walking tour encouraged me to think of creative ways to critically engage local residents into the production of knowledge about neighborhood change. My time spent at MOCA exposed me to firsthand accounts of gentrification, which is one of the biggest post-9/11 challenges facing the city and Manhattan's Chinatown. Over the span of weeks and months, I began to notice friends, their families, and small businesses leaving the neighborhood and moving into the rapidly growing satellite Chinatowns in Brooklyn and Queens or out of the city altogether. I became active in local resistance efforts which allowed me to connect with

organizers in New York's Chinatown and other immigrant neighborhoods who were involved in similar struggles to save their communities. After numerous informal conversations and meetings, I was connected to a network of individuals resisting gentrification across North America, including in Boston, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Boston, and Vancouver Chinatowns. These past experiences inform this project which centers New York's Chinatown but will discuss San Francisco and Boston Chinatowns in comparison.

This project is written from the perspective of a scholar activist, as someone who is deeply committed to what happens on the ground and to the individuals this research is about. Being an engaged scholar means for me maintaining a collaborative inquiry between theory, methods, and practice in order to address key issues facing contemporary society. It means being reflective about traditional social science research approaches and how certain methodological approaches have been used to perpetuate inequitable research relationships. During the course of my fieldwork that lasted two years, I used a combination of methods including ethnography, archival research, participant mapping and oral history interviews with over one hundred individuals including tenants, organizers, restaurant and garment workers, small businesses, public health workers, nonprofit professionals, artists, and elected officials. I ground this study in oral history interviews and use the other methods to elaborate, clarify and build on the findings gleaned from the conversations. By using multiple forms of qualitative research methods, I am able to gain a breadth and depth of knowledge while leaving room for the unexpected and the opportunity for co-creation through direct engagement. While some scholars might view my subjectivity and positionality as flaws in research design, I view these factors as inherent and beneficial as it necessitates me to be honest and intentional about my own subjectivities throughout the research process. This level of researcher accountability and transparency is important because it can yield meaningful insights and ensure that the findings produced are precise, credible, and trustworthy. The disproportion of power in the relationships that researchers cultivate with their

participants, especially those who are already from marginalized communities, compels me to pursue an openly subjective approach which has allowed me to co-create knowledge with participants in order to elicit deeper insights and scholarship that has a potential role in transformative change.

I choose to use oral history interviews over structured qualitative interviews because it allows for a more dynamic, longitudinal, and historically situated approach to understanding the ways in which personal recollection and cultural memory can come together to shape the political experiences of people. As a qualitative research method and technique, oral history is an approach to social inquiry that involves dialogue which is bibliographical in nature and historical in scope. American literature scholar Alessandro Portelli writes that orality, narrative form, subjectivity, the differential credibility of memory, and relationship between the interviewer and interviewee should be viewed as strengths rather than weakness, and as a resource rather than a problem. I choose to use oral history interviews over traditional structured interviews in this study to allow space for the role of memory and the present context in shaping how individuals understand and make meaning of their relationship with politics, as Portelli writes: "What is important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus, the specific utility of oral sources lies not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. The first thing that makes oral history different, therefore, is that it tells us less about events than about their meaning [...] oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did." In addition, the practice of oral history creates innovative spaces for knowledge production and democratizes the research process by allowing for collaborative generation of knowledge between the researcher and research participant. As a feminist method, oral histories can produce what Michael Frisch calls shared authority, which not only imparts skills and knowledge to those who are being interviewed, but it leads to substantively a "more profound sharing of knowledges, an implicit and sometimes explicit dialogue from very different vantages about the

shape, meaning, and implications of narrative history." For academic researchers, such a collaborative process can develop into further opportunities and spaces to productively engage with politics on the ground by becoming a better listener, learner, and educator.

Given the centrality of displacement as a theme in this project, I used a snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling technique to recruit participants for the oral history interviews. As primarily an ethnographic study, I recruited participants from my time working as a community organizer in New York's Chinatown. In November of 2015, I started working as a part-time volunteer with CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities (CAAAV) and their Chinatown Tenants Union (CTU), a pan-Asian grassroots organization that builds the power of working-class Asian immigrants and refugees in New York City. Although I had worked with CAAAV previously on their police violence and accountability campaigns while I was in college, the fall of 2015 marked when I began to work closely with their CTU on anti-displacement and housing related campaigns. As a volunteer I would conduct door-to-door outreach with the CTU tenant leader Ms. Zheng every Monday and Thursday in buildings around Chinatown to see if residents had heat, water, gas, and repairs. We meticulously documented which tenants and in what specific tenement buildings were facing landlord harassment and eviction threats. On occasion I accompanied Chinese immigrant tenants and elders, to housing court to provide language interpretation assistance for individuals who were facing evictions but had limited English proficiency. Through my time as a volunteer I was able to build relationships and trust with tenants and saw firsthand the magnitude of displacement in Chinatown. In the first few months, I interviewed staff members, volunteers, and CTU members who referred me to other tenants in their buildings or other Chinatown residents. I also interviewed the founders of the grassroots organization and several of CAAAV's Asian Youth in Action members.

During my time in New York's Chinatown, I also worked closely with an artist collective called the Chinatown Art Brigade (CAB). CAB is a women run collective of socially engaged artists, residents,

and organizers driven by the fundamental belief that fighting against racial and economic equality is central to the cultural and art making process. Since its founding in 2015 by artists Tomie Arai, Betty Yu, and ManSee Kong, CAB has facilitated a series of Chinatown resident curated responses to gentrification in close collaboration with CAAAV's CTU tenant membership. CAB is most notably known for their direct actions to hold art galleries in New York's Chinatown accountable as agents of displacement and their eight point pledge for artists to stand united against displacement. I first joined CAB in the spring of 2016 as a general member and helped to collect oral histories of tenants and small businesses for a collaborative photo exhibit as part of Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center's CTRL+ALT Culture Lab. I later became more active in the collective through their Here To Stay Placekeeping Campaign, which involved a series of summer workshops, community mapping exercises, tenant curated walking tour, and outdoor mobile projections that visually documented gentrification and community led resistance efforts in the neighborhood. Through their partnership with organizations like Culture Push, Laundromat Project, and Fourth Arts Block, CAB has held various forums and public discussions to address the role of artists and artwashing as symptoms of displacement in New York's Chinatown. From my frequent and ongoing collaborations with CAB, I had the opportunity to observe how essential cultural production is for movement building around displacement and how it makes space for ordinary people to become involved in the issues that most closely affect their lives. Over the span of three years, I interviewed all three of the CAB co-founders along with their core members and volunteers, many whom recommended others for me to conduct oral history interviews with.

In November of 2015 I met Mei Lum, who is the fifth-generation shopkeeper at Wing On Wo & Co. (永安和), the oldest continually run store in New York's Chinatown. When we first met her family was about to sell their building along with the porcelain store that had been in Chinatown since the mid 1920s. Instead our conversation about neighborhood change led to a series of oral

history interviews with neighbors and a year of community dialogue that later became The W.O.W. Project. Inspired by the conversations her family had of selling their building and porcelain business, Mei founded The W.O.W. Project out of the desire to bring concerns about gentrification into a shared space for dialogue and grassroots action. The W.O.W Project has since organized a series of intergenerational conversations, founded an artist-in-residency program, curated public programs for young women in Chinatown, and sustained relationships with residents in other Chinatowns facing similar gentrification led changes including San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Vancouver. As a frequent collaborator I would provide support for their youth workshops and panel discussions held at the store including the inaugural one titled "(Re)generation Not Gentrification of Chinatowns" in May of 2016. Through my work with The W.O.W. Project, I was able build close relationships with Mei and her family including her father Gary Lum, mother Lorraine Lum, grandma Nancy Eng, and Aunt Betty. Through my involvement with The W.O.W. Project daily operations and conversations with Mei and her family members inside the porcelain shop over the span of two years, I was able to learn about how a younger generation of residents are responding to gentrification. I still continue to work with The W.O.W. Project, our most recent collaboration titled "Homeward: Memory, Identity, and Resilience across the Diaspora" was supported by the Citizens Committee for New York City in the spring of 2018 and involves a series of public events and photo installation that explores narratives of diasporic resilience in Chinatowns around the world.

It is important to note that this project centers New York's Chinatown but I will discuss San Francisco and Boston's Chinatown in comparison. In June of 2016 I paused my fieldwork in New York City to do four months of research in San Francisco's Chinatown. I worked with Chinatown Community Development Center, (CCDC) a place-based community development organization that primarily serves Chinatown but also other surrounding areas like North Beach and the Tenderloin. CCDC was founded in 1998 after six grassroots organizations in San Francisco's Chinatown merged

to tackle affordable housing, transportation, and education issues in the immigrant neighborhood. CCDC operates several roles including as neighborhood advocates, organizers and planners, and developers of affordable housing. During my time with CCDC, I worked as a part time staff member with their housing policy team on statewide and local campaigns. At the state level I worked with a group of housing advocates on a campaign to oppose California Governor Jerry Brown's "By Right" bill. Given that it was with a statewide coalition of twenty housing organizations from Los Angeles, Santa Monica, San Francisco, and Sacramento, our interactions were mostly through conference calls despite several in person planning meetings. At the city level I worked with longtime housing organizer Gen Fujioka as well as with other CCDC staff members and housing advocates on local ballot campaigns. We were campaigning around four ballot measures in particular that would have major policy implications and change the housing landscape in San Francisco forever. Most of the city-wide campaign work was done on the ground in the span of two months. My role was to help secure the necessary signatures for the ballot argument forms for the measures that CCDC was supporting and to ensure community allies knew how the measures would impact their constituents. I worked closely with the Chinatown Tenants Association (CTA) and their tenant leadership to develop a bilingual outreach strategy that would communicate how the specific measures would impact San Francisco's Chinatown limited English speaking residents. CTA works closely with CCDC and is San Francisco's largest tenant organization with a membership of one thousand tenants based out of Chinatown.

In October of 2016 I decided to also include Boston's Chinatown as part of this project. I learned about the mobilization efforts in Boston through conversations I had with organizers in the other two cities and wanted to see how residents were organizing on the ground myself. My time in Boston was much different as compared to the other two cities because I did not do any direct on the ground tenant work with organizations. I made five visits to Boston in the span of three months and I stayed for two weeks each time. While I did not do ethnographic research in Boston's Chinatown, I

partnered with the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) to transcribe oral histories that they had already conducted with tenant members. CPA was established in the late 1970s out of a series of grassroots campaigns around school segregation, urban renewal, historic preservation, and affordable housing, the organization strives for the full empowerment and equality of working-class Chinese immigrants in Boston. By collaborating with CPA on these oral history interviews I was able to contextualize several of the high profile eviction cases in the neighborhood including one that involved Pei Ying Yu and Yan Non Yu or the Yu sisters. Through my networks from the other two Chinatowns, I was able to connect with a handful of tenants, organizers, artists, residents, and small shop owners. Many of the Boston Chinatown residents I interviewed were mobilizing around issues related to privatization of public land and specifically around the redevelopment of Reggie Wong Memorial Park where the community 9-Man volleyball court is located. The oral history interviews I had with the head coaches and youth sports players of the Boston's 9-Man team called Boston Knights revealed critical intersections between gentrification, testimonies, and resistance.

Most of the oral history interviews were conducted in English or Mandarin. Since I am only able to speak Mandarin and Shanghainese, I had to hire an assistant to provide language assistance and interpretation for several conversations where the respondent spoke only Cantonese, Fujianese, or Toisan dialect. The transcription and translation process took five months after I completed fieldwork in February of 2017. Inspired by Paulo Freire's Liberation Pedagogy and thinking about how academic research can be a vehicle for transformative change, I hired a transcription team of fifteen women of all age ranges from New York's Chinatown to ensure that residents themselves lead knowledge production and that knowledge remains within the community.[5] I trained all of the women on the transcription protocols and organized monthly conversations where the transcribers could

[5] Specifically referring to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), and the ways in which research can be used as a political means to empower communities in and outside of classrooms.

discuss themes that resonated with their own experiences as residents or challenges they faced along the way. As New York's Chinatown continue to change and longtime residents are displaced due to increasing rents and forced evictions, it is important that neighborhood narratives that are at risk of being displaced with the people are well preserved for future generations. Historian Jack Tchen reminds us, in order for research to be truly transformative it has to be collaborative and dialogical: "The key to being collaborative is to be dialogue-driven, to earn trust and sustain engagements. Engagement and dialogue must be something that is deeper, sustained, and systemic."[6] Throughout the data analysis and interpretation process, I continued to maintain relationships and collaborate with many individuals and grassroots groups that I connected with since they importantly hold my research accountable as a scholar and push me to think critically about the connection between academic scholarship and sustainable social change. To ensure accessibility and to overcome language barriers, I made parts of this project multimedia based and digitized in various visual formats including a series of interactive 360-degree VR videos and translated into Chinese as part of New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project.

If I said at this point that this dissertation was written impartially and without any obstacles that would be false. This project was largely shaped by my own experiences as a community engaged scholar and positionality as a first-generation Chinese American woman born and raised in Flushing, Queens. Throughout the fieldwork process, I found myself thinking often about the impact of my own presence on the neighborhood and how to balance my two distinctive roles as a researcher and a community organizer. My age and gender certainly shaped the nature of some conversations and also determined the amount of access I had to certain individuals and spaces in the neighborhood. Although not as much as before, the Chinatown power structure is still dominated by traditional

[6] John Kuo Wei Tchen "Homeland Insecurities: Teaching and the Intercultural Imagination" Position papers from *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life* (2005).

family, village, and district associations that are conservative and patriarchal in nature. The fact that I am a woman and worked with several of the more progressive organizations I mentioned earlier by default shaped my access and experience. My organizational affiliations and partnerships with certain groups undoubtedly shaped how residents perceived me as a researcher. As historian Peter Kwong explains through his own activist research, Chinatown is not neutral ground. The more time I spent in New York's Chinatown the more I realized how politics and *guanxi* shapes all interactions between people, places, and organizations.[7] I still vividly recall how during the first months of fieldwork, I was angrily denied contact with tenants from one community organization because one of their staff saw me attend an event for another community group in the neighborhood. I also should mention that some of my fieldwork in New York's Chinatown was shaped by unforeseeable changes in the political environment including the Peter Liang case in November 2014 and post-Trump politics in November 2016.[8] During my two years of fieldwork, I kept fieldnotes and have incorporated over two hundred pages of observations and reflections that I have gathered from personal interviews, demonstrations, organizational meetings, community board hearings, and other encounters to be the backbone of this project. The innovative combination of ethnography, oral history interviews, and fieldnotes provide a deep, complex, and systematic account of how gentrification shapes the political lives and experiences of those most impacted.

Each chapter captures a snapshot of how frontline communities are fighting to stay in their homes and to be rooted in their neighborhoods — there is a role for everyone to play. From long-time tenants and housing organizers to small shop owners to local artist collectives, and in porcelain stores, tenement walk ups, courthouses, street corners, and volleyball courts, the next chapters will

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[7] Guanxi in Chinese means "networks" or "connections" that is often used in business interactions to open doors or opportunities.

[8] In November 2014, a Chinese American police officer Peter Liang shot and killed a Black man named Akai Gurley who was a lifelong resident of Pink Houses in Brooklyn. The case divided the Chinese American community across the nation between those who wanted the officer to be held accountable and those who felt that he was treated as a scapegoat by the criminal justice system.

capture how those most impacted are politically responding to gentrification and its implications for democratic citizenship and political possibilities. In the next chapter "From Past to Present: Refuge, Resistance, and Resilience in Manhattan's Chinatown" I document several key moments of political activism in the neighborhood which I argue have profoundly shaped the political trajectory and has helped to contextualize the significance of the current changes happening in the neighborhood due to gentrification. The third chapter "Regeneration Not Gentrification of Chinatowns" will examine how the oldest continually run store in New York's Chinatown uses what I call "shop talk" to encourage younger generation small business owners to be proactive about change and strengthen community relationships in the face of displacement. I demonstrate that by actively listening to what residents talk about in shop spaces on a regular basis provides tremendous insight and perspective on how ideas about gentrification are formed or negotiated over time in Chinese immigrant communities. In the third chapter "The Eviction Machine, Tenant Mobilization, and Growing the Grassroots" I chronicle the housing justice work of CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities and their Chinatown Tenants Union and in particular the process of how several tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street took their predatory landlord to housing court. I illustrate that grassroots organizations like CAAAV play a vital role in mobilizing working-class Chinese residents and in developing the leadership capacity of tenants to manage their own building campaigns through self-governed tenant associations. In the fourth chapter "Artwashing, Cultural Production, and the Politics of Placekeeping" I shed light on the ways in which artists in New York's Chinatown have used cultural, aesthetic, and material modes of production to combat artwashing and cultural erasure from gentrification. Though the work of the Chinatown Art Brigade, I highlight the ways in which cultural production has been a powerful tool used to resist cultural displacement and rearticulate where politics happens and what democratic participation can look like on the ground. In the final chapter "City Hall, Ball Courts, and the Local Politics of Gentrification" I shift our attention from New York's Chinatown to both San Francisco and Boston

Chinatowns for comparison. I document how residents in both neighborhoods have fought to preserve affordable homes and green space from the threat of development through local government action. Towards the end of the final chapter, I discuss the broader implications of this research for residents, community organizers, academics, public agencies, elected officials, city planners and others who are invested in making cities more livable for everyone.

Chapter 2: Narratives of Refuge, Resistance, and Resilience in Manhattan's Chinatown

In 1960, urban sociologist Rose Hum Lee wrote a book titled *The Chinese in the United States of America,* which was inspired by her dissertation on Rocky Mountain Chinatowns. Largely influenced by the work of sociologists Robert E. Park and Louis Wirth, her academic training was rooted in the Chicago school tradition which relied on the ecological method of "natural history" to interrogate the urban environment. Lee applied this method of inquiry to examine Chinatowns and the Chinese American experience, and more specifically how different groups of Chinese immigrants assimilated to American mainstream culture (Lee 1942; Lee 1949). Throughout the book and her career as an urban sociologist, Lee was a staunch proponent of total assimilation, a theoretical framework which dates back to the Chicago school in the 1920s. Lee often used her own personal family experiences as examples of successful integration of Chinese immigrants, she believed that social acculturation and assimilation were the only viable options to ending racial discrimination: "The Chinese in the United States of America are but a small segment of the Overseas Chinese. Chinese emigrants live scattered throughout the world. Many of them have become so integrated in the societies where they themselves or their ancestors settled that they are indistinguishable from the local population: that is the ultimate ideal to which overseas Chinese should aspire."[9] Lee found American Chinatowns to be problematic and separatist because they had "clannish" tendencies with their own family associations, businesses, institutions, and customs that required limited interaction with those outside. As Chinese immigrants assimilated into American mainstream society, Lee predicted that Chinatowns would eventually become obsolete and disappear over time: "Many old immigrants are left in isolated areas in this country where Chinatowns once existed, to await the end of their natural existence. The number of Chinatowns will decrease almost to vanishing point. As Chinese Americans become acculturated and strive for higher status through education and higher professions or become employed by American

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[9] Rose Hum Lee *The Chinese in the United States of America* (1960) page 12.

industries, their dispersion will be similar to that of any other small minority group already an integral part of American society. With acculturation among members of larger society, amalgamation will increase and in time assimilation will be attained."[10] As a pioneer in Chinese American studies and urban sociology, Lee continued to observe Chinatowns and Chinese immigrant communities until she passed in 1964. Although her desire for Chinatowns was that of eradication, the opposite occurred in the following decades when they actually expanded in size due to an influx of new Chinese immigrants from different parts of China.

Beginning in the mid-1960s onwards, policy changes in the United States and China opened a new era of Chinese immigration that led to the expansion of American Chinatowns. In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, significantly altered the course of immigration in the United States. As a result of the combination of domestic and international pressures, Congress passed and President Lyndon Johnson signed the 1965 law to level the playing field for all immigrants (Martin 2011; Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2015). The law eliminated the use of discriminatory national origin quotas which were put into place by the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 to restrict the number of new immigrants entering the country, especially from Asia and Africa. The new law enacted an immigration system based on family reunification and skills, it increased the annual quota for Eastern-Hemisphere countries including China from 105 to 20,000 (Ngai 2014). A decade later in 1978, the People's Republic of China under President Deng Xiaoping loosened its control over migration and normalized U.S.-China diplomatic relations (Kirby, Li, and Ross 2006). The number of Chinese immigrants in the United States nearly doubled from 299,000 in 1980 to 536,000 in 1990, and then again to 989,000 in 2000 to 2.1 million in 2016 (Hooper and Batalova 2017). Many of these Chinese immigrants did not come from the same rural provinces of mainland China as the earlier immigrants who came in the 1800s and 1900s. Instead they were Mandarin and Fujianese

[10] Rose Hum Lee *The Chinese in the United States of America* (1960) page 14.

speaking and came from larger cities including Shanghai, Fujian, Beijing, and Guangdong (Kwong 1998; Chin 1999; Liang and Ye 2001; Liang and Morroka 2004). Rather than settle in entirely new neighborhoods, many of these new Chinese immigrants settled into existing Chinatowns across the country where there were already active social networks, services, and job opportunities in place. This influx of post-1965 Chinese immigrants brought large-scale changes to the social and economic structure of Chinatowns across the country in terms of gender, age, and employment dynamics (Lin 1998; Bao 2006; Kwong and Miscevic 2007). Until the mid-1900s, Chinatowns were predominately a bachelor community controlled by male dominated village and district associations that determined the social, political, and economic order of the entire neighborhood (Lai 1987; Lai 2004). Traditional gender relations from the homeland were transplanted into American Chinatowns and upheld through social organizations that reinforced male privileges (Lui 2005). It was only after the 1965 immigration reform that the uneven male to female ratio began to shift and thousands of Chinese immigrant women entered Chinatowns. Many of these new immigrant women were channeled into workforce and specifically into the garment factories in Chinatown, which contributed to the growth and revitalization of certain industries including garment, retail, and restaurant. According to the special census of Chinatown administered in 1957, the median age in Chinatown was 37.1 but in 1969 the median age dropped to 27.6 largely due to children who were migrating with their mothers.[11]

Contrary to Lee's prediction that Chinatowns would eventually become obsolete and vanish, they have continued to persist and play a critical role in the lives of contemporary immigrants and their families. Although new Asian immigrants do not face the same restrictions as immigrants from the 1800s, many have continued to settle in Chinatowns because of the already existing connections, resources, associations, and collective histories that are associated within these neighborhoods. For Chinese immigrants, Chinatown is more than physical location, it comes with what environmental

[11] U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Annual Report, 1966, Table 12B, 1960-1969.

psychologist Herbert Schroeder terms "place attachment," which involves the emotional connection between person and place over time. This personal bond stems from meaning which he identifies as "the thoughts, feelings, memories, and interpretations evoked by a landscape" and preference which he defines as "the degree of liking for one landscape compared to another."[12] For Schroeder, place attachment is more than the physical occupation of space, it involves complex human emotions, experiences, memories, and values that are carried across generations. American Chinatowns have persisted in significant ways due to place attachment, they have become more than a location for immigrant survival but also for intergenerational intimacies and imagined futures. This attachment to place has resulted in the continued growth of Chinatowns and has fueled decades of political activism and resistance from immigrants and younger generations to preserve these neighborhoods as home for future generations. This chapter importantly provides a nuanced historical understanding of the conditions under which working-class Chinese immigrants are active in the making of urban space and politics, shifting away from a common narrative that portrays them as disengaged from democratic processes. In New York's Chinatown, there have been several significant moments of political activism in which I argue have profoundly shaped the political trajectory of the neighborhood and strengthened its place identity as home for older and younger generation Chinese Americans. The first is the national liberation movement in the 1930s, second is the movement for community self-determination in the mid-1960s, and third is the labor organizing in the early 1980s. I demonstrate in the next section how Manhattan's Chinatown was formed by these moments and how they continue to inform neighborhood identity and political mobilizations around displacement post 9/11. Most of the scholarly literature on New York's Chinatown ends in the 1990s. Recognizing this disjuncture, I

[12] Herbert Schroeder "Preference and Meaning of Arboretum Landscapes: Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Data. Journal of Environmental Psychology. 11: 231-248, page 243.

suggest in the final section of this chapter that one of the most critical moments of resistance that will shape the future of the neighborhood is the fight against gentrification.

1.1 Place Attachment and Key Moments of Political Activism

In one of the most seminal books on New York's Chinatown *Chinatown, New York: Labor and Politics* (1979), historian Peter Kwong identifies the first significant moment of political activism in New York's Chinatown history to be between the 1930s to 1950s when there was a rise in nationalist political mobilization. Inspired by both domestic and international forces at the time, working-class residents in Chinatown mobilized around the issue of imperialism and Japanese occupation of China. After Japan invaded China in 1931, the Kuomintang Party (KMT) which was in charge of China then led by Chiang Kai-shek took a passive approach towards the Japanese government. Many overseas Chinese Americans including those in New York's Chinatown vehemently opposed KMT's passive tactics and the subsequent United States policy of non-recognition so they formed their own political organizations to support and to fundraise for China. Through interviews with residents and reading through local Chinese language newspapers, Kwong recounts the significance of these leftist political organizations that emerged around the same time like the Chinese Anti-Imperialist Alliance, Chinese Women's Patriotic Association, and Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance. In May of 1938, over twelve thousand Chinese Americans traveled from New Jersey, Newark, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Boston to New York's Chinatown, and marched through the streets of Lower Manhattan in public support of China (Kwong 1979). One of the newly formed organizations called the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance (CHLA) coined the slogan "to save China, To save ourselves" in appeals to the broader American public and they raised over 4,300 silver dollars in donations from their customers to support military resistance against the Japanese imperial army (Yu 1992). These actions marked the first organized demonstration in the history of the neighborhood and provided an opportunity for Chinese immigrant workers to develop a deeper level of political engagement. CHLA extended a platform for

Chinese Americans and new immigrants to connect struggles against imperial occupation abroad in China to their own battles for civil rights and self-determination on the home front.

Although the CHLA is no longer active, this mobilization movement marked a significant turning point in New York's Chinatown political trajectory because it represented the first attempt of Chinese immigrants in the neighborhood to openly mobilize on the streets and to organize around issues that impacted their families here and abroad. While the Japanese occupation of China was a primary international issue of concern for Chinatown residents, the 1930s also ushered in the Great Depression which left 15 million people across the country unemployed including 7,000 people in Chinatown (Binder and Reimers 1995). In 1932, a group of unemployed Chinese immigrant workers backed by the Chinese Anti-Imperialist Alliance established the Chinatown Unemployment Council which was the first social welfare program in the neighborhood (Kwong 1996). The Chinese Anti-Imperialist Alliance not only tackled unemployment issues through direct assistance programs but they also put pressure on elected officials for their neglect of the community and challenged the role of traditional neighborhood associations like the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association for being ineffective in their advocacy for immigrants. However, by the mid 1950s this politically active era in Chinatown came to a sudden halt after the Chinese communists won the civil war against the US backed KMT and fears of communism spread across the United States. In Chinatown, the KMT rode the wave of anti-communism and colluded with the federal government to use red-baiting tactics to scare the entire Chinatown community into submission (Kwong 1996). The KMT and CCBA aligned together and formed the Chinatown Anti-Communist League, which turned in any organizations or individuals in the neighborhood that refused to join their league to the U.S. Justice Department and Immigration Office for surveillance or deportation. These developments led to the decline in radical political organizations in Manhattan's Chinatown for two decades which affected the quality of life for working people who relied on these organizations for basic services. Nevertheless,

the formation of groups like Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance and Chinese Anti-Imperialist Alliance paved the way for future alignments and resistance opportunities where organizers from the 1940s era linked up with younger generation Chinese American organizers to demand more accessible resources and self-determination around issues of health, housing, employment, and police violence.

The second critical moment of political engagement in New York's Chinatown began in the mid-1960 and was led by second generation Chinese Americans through the late 1970s. Influenced by conversations with other racial and ethnic groups around Black Power, Third World Liberation, and 1965 immigration reform, young Asian Americans activists, students, and residents saw the need to create their own political alliances and radical platforms (Hsiao 1998). By the 1960s, there were 20,000 Chinese Americans living in Chinatown (Wu and Wong 2000). During this time there were a series of social, economic, and material issues that affected the Chinese immigrant community ranging from inadequate health care services and overcrowded tenement to disinvestment and police violence. Many of the existing organizations at the time like the Chinatown Planning Council which provided child day care and the Chinatown Youth Council which sponsored English language classes and job placement workshops were under-financed and under-staffed. In an *Amerasia Journal* piece titled "New York Chinatown Today: A Community In Crisis," civil rights attorney and organizer Rocky Chin reflected on the many issues that inflicted the neighborhood in the 1970s: "Chinatown has always had a critical housing situation. Today is no better and indeed much worse. The lack of housing and the excessive demand caused by massive new immigration is driving up "key money" rates encouraging landlords to let their buildings fall into despair, forcing the doubling and tripling up of families in one apartment. About 35.2 percent of the dwellings have rats, and 76.5 percent have roaches. The crumbling tenements only provide more places for such pests to hide, more openings through which

to invade apartments."[13] Chin also noted in his reflection piece: "There are more young people in the schools, and on the streets. There are more people looking for work, and more people working. There are more families seeking low income housing. New problems are thus being added to problems Chinatown has always had."[14] To address these issues that plagued the neighborhood, several radical grassroots organizations formed during this time including the Basement Workshop, I Wor Kuen, Chinatown Health Fair, Worker's Viewpoint Organization, Amerasia Creative Arts Program, and Asian American Resource Center, all different in their approaches but committed to improving the living conditions for Chinatown residents. These radical organizations were significant because they represented the first time in which young Chinese Americans and residents were directly organizing against the larger systems and structures that left their neighborhood disinvested. Inspired by the Black Panthers and Young Lords, several student members of the Marxist inspired group I Wor Kuen opened a storefront on Market Street to organize political education workshops, fight for low-income housing, serve free lunch to the elderly, and provide free health clinics. In the Spring of 1970, IWK members stood on the corners of Mott and Bayard Streets to pass out a bilingual newspaper called "Getting Together" that discussed issues in Chinatown and what it meant to serve the people. Originally founded by a group of students and young Chinese Americans, I Wor Kuen pooled their savings together to organize a free health clinic in the Spring of 1971 for working residents in Chinatown. For ten concurrent days, doctors, nurses, translators, and medical technicians set up the health clinic on Mott Street so that residents could get tested for tuberculosis, high blood pressure, and other common illnesses. Recognizing the need for a more permanent center that the city refused to invest in, the organizers moved the health clinic to a small garage on Baxter Street which later

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[13] Rocky Chin "New York Chinatown Today: A Community In Crisis" in *Amerasia Journal* 1(1): 14. The statistics mentioned in the article are from the 1968 Chinatown Study Report conducted by Columbia University's Urban Center.
[14] Rocky Chin "New York Chinatown Today: A Community In Crisis" in *Amerasia Journal* 1(1): 9.

turned it into a larger clinic called the Chinatown Health Clinic or now known as the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center.

In the early 1970s, IWK played a critical role in the "We Won't Move" campaign in New York's Chinatown to address housing scarcity and to prevent low-income housing from being demolished by Bell Telephone Company. The "We Won't Move" movement to save the I-Hotel in San Francisco's Manilatown is often epitomized by scholars when it comes to conversations around affordable housing, displacement, and urban renewal. However, a lesser known "We Won't Move" movement was organized around the same time in New York's Chinatown by IWK. In the spring of 1970, Bell Telephone Company announced that the block bordered by Madison, Henry, Market and Catherine Streets would be demolished for a new telephone switching station and that 296 families would be evicted. In a response to these eviction threats, IWK organizers announced the formation of a "We Won't Move" commission in their newspaper called Getting Together, the organizers wrote: "It is often asked what it is like to live in Chinatown. What keeps Chinatown a community? We come to live here because this is where our people are. Among our own kind, we feel strength and peace of mind at the same time. In such a low-income area, the telephone company expects little or no resistance from the Chinese community. For aren't Chinese suppose to be passive, weak, and divided? The Telephone Company's expansion will increase their own profits and at the same time remove hard working people from their homes. This intrusion will prove to be a big mistake and a gross underestimation of the unity of the Chinese community." In the next several months, IWK worked with the Two Bridges Neighborhood Council to organize a demonstration at the downtown office of Bell Telephone Co. where over 70 working mothers, children, and students came out to support their "We Won't Move" campaign. On September 25, 1970, IWK helped to physically move eleven Chinese immigrant families into the abandoned buildings that had been bought by Bell Telephone Co. in order to strengthen tenant forces and maintain community control over land. In another issue of Getting

Together published in October, IWK organizers wrote: "This is an unprecedented event in the history of Chinatown. For the first time, the Chinese people are waging a struggle against a white corporation by throwing off the stigma of the "timid" Chinese and fighting for their homes. Undoubtedly, what this all represents is all attempt to break up the Chinatown community, an attempt to disperse all our people and prevent us from getting together. Our land, which is being robbed from us under our very noses by this land-hungry corporation, is a deliberate attempt to break up our community. Nothing could be clearer than the fact that if we lose this block of Greater Chinatown, we will lose other blocks until nothing remains but restaurants and gift shops on Mott Street." In important ways, the "We Won't Move" fight in the 1970s laid the groundwork for the tactics and conversations that community organizations are now having around neighborhood displacement. Even though the block of housing that was threatened by Bell Telephone Co. still exists today, it continues to be a site of contention as developers are targeting the area for high rise developments to be discussed later in this chapter.

Four years after the "We Won't Move" campaign, in May of 1974 hundreds of Chinatown residents and workers gathered outside of the newly proposed Confucius Plaza construction site on Bowery Street to protest labor discrimination (Jung 2010). The protesters led by Asian Americans for Equal Employment were mobilizing against a private firm called the DeMatteis Corp. for refusing to hire Asian construction workers in violation of New York City's fair housing policies (Gee, Le, Yoo, and Kui 2010). On the day of the action, demonstrators from other communities of color joined in support and over two hundred protesters entered the construction site and forced a work stoppage. Paul Montgomery, a New York Times journalist, captured the protest in an article and wrote: "The meticulously organized protest, similar to those that have been taking place in Black and Puerto Rican areas for 11 years in the city, is something new to Chinatown. While residents have complained of discrimination and short changing on city services, public protest has been rare."[15] The protesters used

[15] Paul Montgomery "Asians Picket Building Site, Charging Bias" in New York Times June 1, 1974.

creative slogans like "The Chinese built the transcontinental railroad, they can build Confucius Plaza" and demanded the contractor provide construction jobs for local residents and hire an Asian American investigator to monitor all hiring practices. For six months, the group continued to organize residents by staging several other rallies at the proposed construction site and organizing large-scale protests that involved a diverse cross-section of the community including students, children, garment and restaurant workers, and residents from other parts of the city (Lin 2006). The contractor eventually agreed to hire twelve Chinatown residents as construction workers for the project and twenty seven Asian trainees. This mobilization and organizing infrastructure led to the creation of Asian Americans for Equal Employment (known as Asian Americans for Equality) in 1974, a non-profit organization that offers education, housing services, community development, financial assistance, and resources to Asian Americans and other immigrant communities.

During the time Confucius Plaza was still being constructed, one of the largest mobilizations in New York's Chinatown history took place in May of 1975. Peter Yew, who was a young Chinese American resident of Chinatown, was stopped by the police for a traffic violation and taken to the Fifth Precinct on Elizabeth Street where he was violently beaten and falsely charged of resisting a police officer (Carmody 1975; Sim 1980). The Chinatown community erupted in outrage when news of this incident broke and protests were organized by Asian Americans for Equal Employment. On May 19, 1975, over 15,000 residents and small business owners took to the streets of Chinatown to demand an end to police brutality (Wong 2017). In a coordinated act of solidarity, hundreds of small businesses in Chinatown closed their stores on the day of the protest and joined the marches to city hall. The protesters demanded that the city not only dismiss the charges against Yew but to end all violence against Chinese Americans and to stop housing, education, and employment discrimination (Ishizuka 2016). The 1970s was considered by many scholars to be a hotbed for grassroots activism and political resistance in New York Chinatown, the actions and conversations that were happening

during this time directly challenged the stereotype of Chinese Americans as passive model minorities (Chin 1971). More immediately, the formation of radical leftist organizations like I Wor Kuen, Asian Americans for Equal Employment, and others was significant because they shifted the power base in Manhattan's Chinatown from the older generation conservative establishment run by the CCBA to a younger generation of Chinese Americans who were radical in their approach to fighting for self-determination and addressing issues around health, housing, employment, and police violence.

The third critical moment in New York's Chinatown history was in the early 1980s to mid-1990s when there was a rise in labor organizing brought on by changes in immigration policy. Until the mid-20th century, New York's Chinatown like the other Chinese immigrant communities was predominantly a bachelor society. The uneven gender ratio began to change after the 1945 War Brides Act and more drastically during World War II after the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act that allowed Chinese women to enter the country. In *Holding Up More Than Half the Sky: Chinese Women Garment Workers in New York* (2006)*,* historian Xiaolan Bao discusses the gendered changes that the new immigration law brought to New York City and how it contributed to the growth of the garment industry. In 1963 there were only 50 garment factories in New York's Chinatown that employed 2,000 workers, however by 1982 there were over 500 garment factories that employed 20,000 workers who were mostly new immigrant women from Fujian and Guangdong (Abeles, Schwartz, Haeckel, and Silverblatt 1983). During the 1990s as area rents nearly doubled and offshore production increased competition, many co-ethnic garment factory owners in Chinatown reduced worker wages and hired nonunion labor to keep labor costs lower (Zhou and Logan 1989; Zhou and Nordquist 1994; Zhou 2010). In response to rapidly deteriorating labor conditions and stalled work contracts, Local 23-25 of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union organized the largest strike in the history of New York's Chinatown in which 20,000 Chinese immigrant women walked out of their jobs in garment factories and flooded the streets to demand fair contracts and better work conditions (Kwong 1996;

Louie 2001; Lin 1998). This strike was critical because it elevated the role of Chinese immigrant women as leaders in the city-wide workers union and effectively shifted gender relations within the Chinatown community which was still very much patriarchal in nature.

While in the 1980s the women in Chinatown labored in garment factories, Chinese men were primarily working in restaurants and construction. At the time Chinese restaurant workers were paid low wages for extremely long hours, the average pay was around three hundred dollars a month for seventy hours of work each week (Liu 2017). In the 1970s, Chinese restaurant workers in Uptown Manhattan began to organize with Local 69 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) for fair wages (Lin 1998). However, feeling as though their interests as immigrant laborers were never fully represented by the white dominated union, several Chinese waiters formed their own organization in 1979 called the Chinese Staff and Workers Association (CSWA). Their first campaign was in 1980 when management at Silver Palace restaurant asked fifteen waiters to hand over their tips after work hours and then fired them after they refused to do so (Moody 2008; Kwong 2004). For weeks CSWA conducted outreach and mobilized restaurant workers for a direct-action campaign in protest of the horrible work conditions in Silver Palace. The waiters were eventually rehired with a contract of forty hours a week, health benefits, and minimum wage with overtime, and Silver Palace became the first unionized restaurant in Chinatown history under Local 318 Independent Restaurant Workers Union (Kwong 2001). A decade later in 1995 in another high-profile labor dispute, workers at Jing Fong restaurant located on Bayard Street went on strike to protest their management for taking tips and forcing them to work seventy hours a week without overtime pay (Lii 1995). In 1995, CSWA formed a Committee for Economic Survival of Chinatown and launched a direct-action campaign against Jing Fong. Hundreds of low-wage restaurant workers protested in front of Jing Fong on Elizabeth Street demanding better work conditions in compliance with minimum wage laws. These efforts culminated in a week long student led hunger strike and a petition which was signed by 5,000

supporters to demand investigations into labor abuses of Chinatown restaurants and garment shops (Tait 2016). After a prolonged investigation led by New York State General Attorney Dennis Vacco, Jing Fong was found guilty of labor law violations and made to pay back 1.13 million dollars in lost wages (Chen 1997). The labor organizing in New York's Chinatown from the early 1980s to the 1990s represented a critical time in which Chinese immigrant workers were developing strategies to address oppressive structures that existed within the community largely from co-ethnic exploitation.

As evident throughout the decades, New York's Chinatown exhibits a rich history of political activism in which I argue has profoundly shaped the political trajectory of the neighborhood and has strengthened its place identity as home for older and younger generation Chinese Americans. These moments provide important context of how Chinatown has historically been a vibrant hub for civic volunteerism and grassroots activism, which challenges the common narrative that portrays Chinese immigrants as disengaged from politics. Given that the vast majority of the scholarship on Manhattan Chinatown has focused on these earlier moments of political activism, this project focuses on a more contemporary period and specifically the post 9/11 period. Recognizing the tremendous changes that have happened in the neighborhood within the last two decades, I argue that one of the most critical moments of political engagement that will determine the future of the neighborhood is reflected in the current fight against gentrification. The gentrification in New York's Chinatown is not a neutral or natural process, it is the direct result of a deliberate set of policies and practices led by the city government, private corporations, developers, financial institutions, and predatory landlords. In New York's Chinatown post-9/11, specific housing and land use policies have accelerated gentrification by allowing for upzoning, predatory landlords to evict vulnerable tenants, and tax exemptions for real estate developers to build without accountability to existing residents. According to a report published by the Asian American Legal Education and Defense Fund (AALDEF) on land use and gentrification in East Coast Chinatowns, the percentage of Asian immigrants in New York's Chinatown has dropped

15 percent within the past ten years while the percentage of white residents has increased by nearly 20 percent.[16] The report indicates that there was a notable decline of multi-generational immigrant family households and increase in the share of non-family households comprised of young professionals, a key marker of gentrification in urban areas. In addition to these residential changes, approximately 12 percent of all businesses in the area were classified as "high-end" including 79 clothing boutiques and 62 restaurants. There have been many more commercial vacancies and galleries that have moved into certain sections of the neighborhood, which are key indicators of real estate speculation and increasing property values. In the following section, I describe in detail how New York's Chinatown changed after 9/11 and provide a description of how public-private partnerships have played a critical role in the gentrification of the neighborhood.

1.2 Gentrification and Major Transformations in Manhattan's Chinatown Post 9/11

New York's Chinatown is the closest residential neighborhood in proximity to ground zero, spatially speaking the neighborhood is less than ten walking blocks away. Jeanne Jackson who is a Chinatown resident and employment agency owner vividly recalled about the event: "It was about 10:30 am where people started coming in and saying there is no more World Trade Center. They were screaming, so we went out to take a look and saw the smoke coming, the black smoke."[17] The social, economic, and health effects of 9/11 were catastrophic for residents in the weeks, months, and years that followed. The police placed checkpoints all around Chinatown, effectively making the entire area a frozen zone where residents had to carry identification in order to move in and out of the neighborhood (Strozier 2011; Foner 2005). The traffic restrictions, electricity outages, subway service disruptions, permanent shutdown of Park Row, and collapse of the garment industry led Chinatown into an unprecedented level of economic depression. According to the Asian American Federation of

[16] Asian American Legal Education and Defense Fund "Chinatown Then and Now: Gentrification in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia" report originally published in October 2013.
[17] Jeanne Jackson. Interview by Teri Chan. Ground One: Voices from Post-9/11 Chinatown Oral History Collection.

New York (AAFNY), in the first two weeks after 9/11, nearly 75 percent of the workforce in New York's Chinatown was unemployed.[18] Even though Chinatown residents made up less than 1 percent of the city's overall population, those in the neighborhood disproportionately suffered 10 percent of the total job losses after 9/11 — approximately 24,500 workers in the area were left temporarily dislocated or unemployed. According to the AAFNY report, total wage losses were estimated to be $114 million. Three months after 9/11, 14,000 workers in Chinatown remained unemployed or had reduced hours, especially those who worked in the retail, restaurant, tourism, and garment industries. In the span of a single year, the garment industry alone lost $490 million in revenue and saw 65 garment factory shutdowns. The restaurant industry experienced an estimated 70 percent decline in revenue, while the retail and jewelry industries experienced a self-reported 50 percentage decline in total sales. Since the vast majority of workers in New York's Chinatown are low-income first-generation immigrants with limited English proficiency and low skill and education levels, these changes have had profound quality of life consequences (Chin 2005). In the years after 9/11 and throughout the recession that lasted from between 2007 to 2009, the city government, real estate developers, financial institutions, and business elite have taken advantage of what geographer Neil Smith terms the "rent gap" and have pushed for long-term revitalization of neighborhoods throughout Manhattan including the Lower East Side and Chinatown.[19]

Immediately after 9/11 Congress made $3.5 billion available to New York City through the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) (Seessel 2003; Boyd and Gonzalez 2008). In November of 2001, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) was founded by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Governor George

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[18] Asian American Federation of New York "Chinatown One Year After September 11th: An Economic Impact Study" published in September 2002.

[19] Neil Smith (1979) explained with the rent gap theory, the more disinvested an urban area becomes the more profitable it is to turn for profit. The larger the difference between current and potential rents, the more attractive a place becomes to capital investment.

Pataki as a subsidiary of the New York State Urban Development Corporation and the Empire State Development Corporation to help distribute the federal grant monies (Hajer 2005; Gotham 2008). The LMDC board comprised of twelve members who were appointed by Governor Pataki and Mayor Giuliani and represented mostly the business elite, real estate developers, private companies, and members of their political administration (Mollenkopf 2005). As a public-private corporation, LMDC was tasked with distributing recovery grants and federal assistance funds to residents and businesses below Houston Street who were impacted by 9/11 including in the Financial District, Tribeca, Chinatown, and some parts of the Lower East Side (Dixon and Stern 2004). LMDC created the Job Creation and Retention Aid Program which distributed $150 million to businesses impacted by 9/11 in downtown Manhattan, with $130 million of the total going towards 34 large companies with 200 or more employees (Graham 2007). The primary goal of the Job Creation and Retention Aid Program was to retain and keep firms from leaving lower Manhattan and to help create 80,000 additional jobs at the assisted businesses.

The assistance program carried out by LMDC failed to meet the needs of Chinatown residents due to language barriers and eligibility issues. For many longtime residents like Jeanne Jackson, the paperwork for 9/11 relief aid proved to be too much: "We tried to, we were going to apply, but then we saw the paperwork was this high, and they really asked an awful a lot of questions, so we didn't apply, because there was too much red tape."[20] For many other Chinatown residents, especially those who were limited English proficient, the fact that the materials were not translated until weeks into the program discouraged individuals from applying. In addition, the vast majority of the funds were distributed to private firms and large corporations in the financial district including American Express and the American Stock Exchange (Seessel 2003). The application eligibility guidelines favored large Wall Street businesses, despite the fact that private companies did not endure the same financial risk

[20] Jeanne Jackson. Interview by Teri Chan. Ground One: Voices from Post-9/11 Chinatown Oral History Collection.

and margin for failure as smaller family owned businesses in Chinatown. A survey conducted by the Asian American Business Development Center found that fewer than 11 percent of businesses in Chinatown received LMDC job retention aid and of those that did, most received an average of $7,000 per business, which was a negligible amount compared to the losses accrued over time (Katz 2003). In another LMDC initiative called the Residential Relocation Incentive Program, federal assistance grants of up to $14,500 were allocated to families living in Battery Park City and Tribeca where the annual median income is $125,000.[21] In Chinatown, families were only allocated $4,750 on average, even though nearly one third of families live below the poverty threshold. Despite appeals for LMDC to provide affordable housing, employment assistance, and health protections to those most impacted by 9/11, LMDC instead prioritized corporations and plans to revitalize lower Manhattan, including Chinatown and the Lower East Side.

It is estimated that LMDC's budget included $2.8 billion of federal funds, some of which was earmarked for upscale real estate development (Foner 2005). Shortly after its formation, the LMDC released a Principles and Preliminary Blueprint of the Future of Lower Manhattan which involved a detailed plan to convert lower Manhattan into a mixed use magnet for the arts, culture, and recreation with residential, retail, and commercial amenities. Five years into its operations, LMDC revealed that $150 million of federal funds had been earmarked for the New York City Economic Development Corporation, a public-private corporation to redevelop the East River Waterfront. The proposed plan would stretch two miles along the East River waterfront from Battery Park down to the East River park spanning through the Lower East Side, Financial District, South Street Seaport, and Chinatown. In a press release to indicate his support for the project, then Mayor Bloomberg expressed that the East River waterfront development would make the surrounding neighborhoods impacted by 9/11 more diverse and sustainable by constructing a scenic esplanade, pavilions, and piers with commercial,

[21] Lower Manhattan Development Corporation "Neighborhood Summary Report" published in January 2004.

cultural, recreational, tourist, and community attractions (Rogers 2005). In the two mile stretch of land along the East River, the proposed waterfront development would include upscale restaurants and cafes, exclusive exercise areas, and boutique shops. Given the lack of public input in the planning and decision making processes for the East River waterfront promenade development, many residents in Chinatown and Two Bridges were skeptical about the project and openly expressed their concerns that it would accelerate the pace of gentrification by attracting wealthier residents and high end developments. In what Marxist geographer David Harvey calls accumulation by dispossession, the waterfront esplanade redevelopment project would lead to the accumulation of high value land by the dispossessing poor residents from their homes and communities.[22] Recognizing the severe impact of such a large-scale revitalization project on the lives of residents in Chinatown and Lower East Side, the newly formed coalition called Organizing and Uniting Residents Waterfront Coalition led a series of community visioning sessions which culminated in the People's Plan of the East River Waterfront to provide alternative options for equitable development.[23]

The revitalization narrative continues to be used as a tool post 9/11 by developers and the city government to turn Chinatown into what the rest of downtown Manhattan looks like, modern with tall residential and commercial buildings (Moskowitz 2017). In addition to the reconstruction of the East River waterfront development, the LMDC has funded projects that focused specifically on the beautification of Chinatown including the Transportation Study of Chatham Square, Columbus Park Reconstruction, Tourism Marketing Campaign, and Rebuild Chinatown Initiative.[24] In 2004, the LMDC allocated $7 million to fund the Rebuild Chinatown Initiative which was spearheaded by Asian

[22] David Harvey's *The New Imperialism Accumulation By Dispossession.*
[23] Organizing and Uniting Residents Waterfront Coalition is comprised of community-based organizations and tenant associations representing residents of the Lower East Side and Chinatown including: CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities, Urban Justice Center's Community Development Project, Good Old Lower East Side, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, Public Housing Residents of the Lower East Side, Hester Street Collaborative, the Lower East Side Ecology Center, Two Bridges Neighborhood Council and University Settlement. The full "A People's Plan for the Waterfront" is available online: https://cdp.urbanjustice.org/sites/default/files/peoples_plan.pdf.
[24] More information about LMDC's projects and programs can be found on their website at renewnyc.com.

Americans for Equality, a social service and community development organization founded by a group of student activists in 1974 under the name Asian Americans for Equal Employment. The Rebuild Chinatown Initiative brought together business leaders, attorneys, non-profit directors, academics, real estate developers, and bank executives to push the publication of a plan aimed at addressing post 9/11 neighborhood needs through eight initiatives.[25] Despite persistent high levels of poverty and historic rates of unemployment experienced by Chinatown residents, the plan instead prioritized East River waterfront development, street beautification, wayfinding and creative placemaking. The plan went as far to recommend incentives for private entertainment venues to move into the neighborhood and the upzoning of certain areas like Canal and Bowery Streets to encourage the construction of taller higher density buildings. From the Rebuild Chinatown Initiative plan, the LMDC committed a total of $7 million towards the creation of the Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corporation, a separate non-profit entity that focuses on revitalizing the physical environment of the neighborhood. The LMDC officials allocated $5.4 of the $7 million to the Chinatown Clean Streets Initiative for the sweeping of sidewalks, gutters, garbage, and graffiti removal, and the remaining $1.6 million for short-term community development initiatives including wayfinding public art projects and promotional efforts led by the Chinatown Partnership.[26] In 2010, Wellington Chen, who was appointed to be the Director of the Chinatown Partnership, with the full support of real estate developers, business interests, and Council member Margaret Chin, pushed to transform Chinatown Partnership into the Chinatown Business Improvement District. Chinatown Partnership's BID like the other 64 BIDs in the city would collect mandatory annual fees of $200 to $2000 from small property owners in the neighborhood to fund street cleaning and garbage removal, maintenance, tourism initiatives and beautification projects (Kwong and Stein 2015). Despite intense opposition from a coalition of local

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[25] Asian Americans for Equality "Rebuild Chinatown Initiative: The Community Speaks" published in November 2002.

[26] The amount breakdown is listed in the record of The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation invoices published by Edgar Moore, regional inspector general for audit issued on July 27, 2012.

residents, community groups, and small business owners in Chinatown and in neighboring SoHo, District 1 City Council Member Margaret Chin, the Community Board 3, and City Council voted to approve Chinatown BID (Troianovski 2011; Ross 2011). Wellington Chen and those who serve on the advisory board of the Chinatown Partnership's BID are mostly wealthy elites, developers, bankers, and part of the "old establishment" many who do not live in the neighborhood anymore.[27] BIDs can accelerate gentrification, this is especially true in Chinatown since the BID voluntarily plays into the revitalization narrative and channels resources away from those who need it the most to fund beautification projects that do not speak to the immediate needs of existing residents. The annual fees that the BID collects from small property owners has also made it harder for small businesses that are already struggling with rent increases to stay in the neighborhood (Shapiro 2012). The Chinatown BID has also invited commercial developers like ABS Properties into the community, who has previously pushed for spot zoning or upzoning of Canal Street to reach the highest possible density to build taller condominiums and hotels.

A significant way in which city governments can alter the physical build of a neighborhood is through selective rezoning practices (Angotti and Morse 2016). In the years after 9/11, then Mayor Bloomberg targeted lower Manhattan including Chinatown, Two Bridges, and the Lower East Side for renewal — not just to rebuild, but to encourage upscale reconstruction and high rise market rate development (Gotham 2008). In 2008, the City Council approved then Mayor Michael Bloomberg administration's rezoning of the East Village, which was considered to be the city's third largest rezoning plan since 1961 (Stein 2016). The plan would preserve the established neighborhood scale and character of the East Village by mandating height limits on new buildings and affordable housing incentives for developers within a 111-block area. The boundaries of East Village under protection

[27] The old establishment meaning board members of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Associations or family and district associations that have yielded control in New York's Chinatown for generations since the 1800s.

included East 13th Street to the North, Avenue D to the East, Grand and Delancey Streets to the South, and Third Avenue to the West, leaving out all of Chinatown, Lower East Side, the Bowery, and NYCHA public housing (Haughney 2008). Many residents and housing advocates from these neighborhoods came together to protest the proposed 2008 rezoning plan, arguing that it was blatantly racist and deliberately drawn to exclude low-income communities living outside of the rezoned wealthier East Village area (Angotti and Ervin 2008). After the 2008 rezoning plan was approved by the City Council, it has already pushed more real estate speculation and luxury high rise developments into Chinatown negatively impacting the existing residents who rely on rent regulated housing to survive.[28] Without rezoning in place to protect Chinatown residents, between 2008 to 2018 dozens of new upscale as-of-right high rise hotels have been built without any public hearings, environmental impact studies, or input from local community members.[29] In response to these changes, in the fall of 2008 sixty organizations came together and over the span of eight years drafted the Chinatown Working Group (CWG), a community-led rezoning plan with the intent to preserve the affordable housing stock and small businesses in the neighborhood. The CWG plan proposed a "Special Chinatown and Lower East Side District" which would provide essential height limits on buildings to preserve neighborhood character, protect tenants in rent controlled and rent stabilized apartments through anti-harassment regulations, and build more affordable housing units for low income families.[30] Carl Weisbrod who is the Director of the Department of City Planning rejected the CWG plan in 2015 for being too "ambitious" and City Council Member Margaret Chin has instead chosen

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[28] For more information refer to CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities and the Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center "Converting Chinatown: A Snapshot of a Neighborhood Becoming Unaffordable and Unlivable" report published in December 2008.
[29] In 2009, the construction of Wyndham Hotel on the corner of Hester and Bowery Streets caused structural destabilization of a tenement building next door at 128 Hester Street, leading to a forceful evacuation and displacement of thirty longtime residents and a small business located on the first floor.
[30] Chinatown Working Group "Preserving Affordability and Authenticity" in collaboration with the Pratt Center for Community Development and Collective for Community, Culture and the Environment published in December 2013.

to support Mayor De Blasio's plan to rezone Chinatown core which would exclude Two Bridges and the large Latino population in the Lower East Side from protection.

The lack of a rezoning plan for Chinatown has led to dozens of out of scale high rise market rate developments in the neighborhood and its surrounding areas. In February of 2013, four months after Hurricane Sandy left lower Manhattan devastated, Extell Corporation purchased a plot of land at 227 Cherry Street for $175 million (Hughes 2017). A year later in 2014, Extell Development Corp. demolished the neighborhood Pathmark that was located on site and revealed plans for a 800 feet or 84 story high rise tower, twice the size of the adjacent 336 foot Manhattan Bridge. As an "as-of-right" development it was not necessary for Extell to hold public hearings or seek approval from the City Planning Commission, the local Community Board, or any other local government entities (Litvak 2018). When Extell filed for a new construction permit with the Department of Buildings, the only requirement was to indicate that the development complies with Floor Area Ratio (FAR) requirements as outlined in the zoning ordinance. Based on zoning and land use regulations, each zoning district in New York City has a predetermined FAR that typically ranges from 1.0 to 10.0 at the highest, FAR is important because it controls the size and height of buildings in any given neighborhood (Fainstein 2001; Zukin, Trujillo, Frase, Jackson, Walker 2009). The 227 Cherry Street lot that Extell purchased was in a R7-2 zoning district which allows medium-density build with lower height level apartment buildings.[31] When Extell acquired the Cherry Street lot, the FAR was under 4.0 but was increased to the maximum of 12.0 from the transferring of air rights and the Inclusionary Housing Program. Through the Inclusionary Housing Program, the city provides a floor area bonus as an incentive to real estate developers who propose new residential construction with affordable housing units. Rather than construct the promised 20 percent of affordable housing units within the proposed 84 story high

[31] The Municipal Art Society of New York has an interactive map that indicates borough by borough, and parcel by parcel where New York's available FAR is located. The zoning for each plot of land in New York City can be calculated through the Department of City Planning with address, street name, and borough.

rise on Cherry Street, a loophole allowed Extell to build a completely separate affordable development for poor residents several blocks down.[32] In addition, since the city defines eligibility for affordable housing as earning up to $83,450, the proposed Extell "affordable" housing units will not be easily accessible to the predominantly senior and low-income residents in the neighborhood whose median household income is much lower.[33] According to the 2017 American Community Survey, one third of residents in Manhattan's Chinatown live below the poverty threshold — the average median income for a family of four in Chinatown is $39,584, much lower than the average median income in New York area which is $77,379.[34] The 84 story Extell development has paved the way for other as-of-right developments to be built in the area, including a 1,008-foot tower by developer JDS, a 700-foot towers by developers L&M and CIM Group and a 724-foot skyscraper by Starrett (Rosenberg 2016). These projects combined add 2,000 of additional market rate apartments to the area, changing the face of Manhattan's Chinatown and Two Bridges forever.

After the garment industry collapsed in Chinatown in the early 2000s, many of the former factory buildings were converted into million-dollar luxury lofts and developers have intentionally purchased buildings with a large number of rent regulated units to convert them into market rate housing for profit (Chin 2005). According to several real estate listing services such as Streeteasy, Zillow, and Naked Apartments, the average market rate monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Chinatown comes out to be around $3,000 and a two bedroom apartment is marketed at $5,000. Being in such close proximity to Tribeca, SoHo, Financial District, and the East River waterfront, Chinatown has been advertised as the final frontier by predatory landlords who have systematically

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[32] In 2015, Extell Corp. was widely criticized for building a separate "poor door" for residents in the affordable housing units in their 50 Riverside Boulevard thirteen story tower in Harlem.

[33] The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines affordable as earning an income limit of $83,450 which amounts to 80 percent of the area median income that includes all of New York City, Westchester, and Rockland counties.

[34] Administered by the United States Census Bureau, more information about the American Community Survey can be found online each year: https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/.

harassed vulnerable rent-regulated tenants out of their homes. According to Housing Preservation and Development data from 2015, 22,000 households were evicted in New York City in less than a year, 200,000 tenants were sued in Housing Court by their landlords for holdover or nonpayment of rent, and 30,000 were sued for eviction for other reasons. The lack of comprehensive tenant protection laws have left many low-income New Yorkers at risk of landlord harassment, forcible evictions, and displacement. Many predatory landlords in Chinatown like Marolda Properties, R.A. Cohan, and Steve Croman have intentionally purchased buildings with a large percentage of Chinese tenants and have taken advantage of the fact that many are new immigrants, limited English proficient, or unfamiliar with political processes as a method to clear out apartment units (CAAAV 2008). These predatory landlords have used a variety of tactics to force rent-regulated tenants out of their apartments from refusing to provide heat, hot water, gas, and basic repairs to using hazardous construction practices as a form of harassment. As a result of these new developments, forced evictions, and systematic landlord harassment, hundreds of low-income residents in Chinatown have been uprooted from their homes and there are now fewer affordable housing units are available. New York's Chinatown has seen its affordable housing stock diminish drastically, the area has lost nearly 20 percent or approximately 15,000 units of affordable housing including 11,000 rent regulated units in the past decade (Gafvert and Weber 2011). These changes bear heavily on the political lives of individuals and have influenced the ways in which residents move through, interact, and make sense of their relationship to their home and their neighborhood as it continues to change over time. While the conventional narrative is that people are being pushed out of their homes without a fight, this is simply not true as many Chinatown residents, seniors, younger generations, small business owners, local artists, and community members are mobilizing to confront dispossession in all its forms. The gentrification happening in Manhattan Chinatown provides a useful lens to understand how Chinese immigrants, youth, and women become active in their own communities around issues that affect their daily lives and in ways that cover new

theoretical ground in American politics. Rather than portray residents in the backdrop with limited agency of their own, in the next chapters I examine Chinatown gentrification in direct relation to the themes of democratic citizenship, intergenerational resistance, and political possibilities. From a younger generation organizing dialogues about displacement in the oldest store in Manhattan's Chinatown to tenants taking predatory landlords to court for unfair evictions to women-led artist collectives using cultural production as resistance to erasure to residents playing street volleyball to combat state-sanctioned development, each chapter captures a snapshot of how those most impacted are mobilizing to stay in their homes.

Chapter 3: (Re)generation Not Gentrification: Shop Talk and Imagined Futures

Image: Wing On Wo & Co. located at 26 Mott Street taken by Alex Wroblewski.

Located on 26 Mott Street, Wing on Wo & Co. (永安和) is the oldest continually run store in Manhattan's Chinatown. The humble red-painted porcelain shop is filled with rows of ceramics and porcelain imported from Hong Kong that artfully decorate the wooden shelves. The first time I stepped into the store was in November of 2015, when I started fieldwork in New York City and was in the process of interviewing small business owners about their thoughts on gentrification in the neighborhood. It wasn't until I returned to the store a few weeks later that I met Mei Lum, who is currently the fifth-generation shopkeeper of 永安和. During our first encounter, Mei had not yet taken over the position and she told me that her family was actually about to sell the building along with the porcelain business that had been in the neighborhood since the late 1800s. The burden of increasing property taxes, maintenance costs, and operating fees made it exceedingly difficult for her family to keep the property afloat and earn a livelihood. My conversations with Mei complicated the way that I understood gentrification because they forced me to think more centrally about the role of

small business owners in the midst of these changes. As neighborhoods experience gentrification, independent small businesses are among the first to bear its effects and are forced to close because of high rents and little protections in place to help them stay in the neighborhood. In Chinatown, a walk down on the once vibrant Canal, Mott, and Elizabeth Streets reveal a streetscape in transition, with stores shuttered in limbo, for lease signs on vacant storefronts, and corridors overshadowed by new condo towers. Longtime small businesses like 永安和 that have been in the neighborhood for generations are now under pressure to downsize, relocate, or shutdown altogether to make way for these changes that are transforming the heart and soul of New York's Chinatown.

If you ask anyone who grew up in New York's Chinatown what the neighborhood was like in the early 1900s, they would tell you that it was no larger than six square blocks, with Mott Street at its geographical heart. In fact, in the very beginning, New York's Chinatown had three main streets: Mott, Pell, and Doyers, and all of these streets were divided by tongs[35]. Due to discrimination and federal restrictions on Chinese immigration, housing, and labor, for much of the twentieth century Chinatown was primarily a bachelor society consisting of transient low-wage working men. After the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882 which halted Chinese immigration and until the 1950s, thousands of Chinese men gained entry into the United States by purchasing false papers identifying them as blood relatives to Chinese Americans who had citizenship, making them sons on paper only or "paper sons."[36] Walter Eng was a paper son who migrated to New York's Chinatown from Taishan in Guangdong, China in the mid 1880s. With assistance from the Eng family association, Walter opened the doors of 永安和 in 1890 on 13 Mott Street as a general store, selling practically everything to new

[35] Tongs were informal organizations found in Chinatowns across the country that provided essential services for early Chinese immigrants including employment, housing opportunities, counseling, Chinese schools. Tongs controlled almost every aspect of life in the early Chinatowns and were affiliated with crime and criminal activity.

[36] From the early 1900s to mid 1950s, thousands of Chinese men gained entry into the United States by purchasing false papers identifying them as blood relatives to Chinese Americans who had citizenship, making them sons on paper only or "paper sons." For an extensive memoir that covers the lives of paper sons in New York City's Chinatown see *Paper Son: One Man's Story* written by Tung Pok Chin.

immigrants such as canned goods, Chinese vegetables, medicinal herbs, and roasted pork. The general store even had wire racks that functioned as a makeshift post office to receive mail from China and sleeping quarters in the basement for those passing through in search for work. The move from 13 Mott Street to diagonally across the street to 26 Mott Street occurred in 1925 when Walter purchased the building from Irish owners for $68,000. The new location allowed him to expand the scope of the general store, even hiring an herbalist to fill traditional Chinese medicine prescriptions for customers. He also built a trap door in the kitchen, which led to the basement oven room used for roasting pigs for 叉燒 or *char siu* on special occasions like Lunar New Year.[37] In New York's Chinatown, 永安和 served as an important anchor for the earliest Chinese immigrants in the city who faced discrimination and limited employment opportunities. The community spaces created by small family owned businesses like 永安和 were crucial because they extended a lifeline to immigrants who were otherwise isolated from the rest of society.

When Walter Eng passed away in 1964, he left 26 Mott Street to his daughter Nancy Eng. Despite having a full-time job elsewhere and no formal training, Nancy decided to keep the store open and taught herself the basics of running a small business. She eliminated the sale of groceries to focus her energies on shaping 永安和 into an exclusive porcelain shop, sourcing porcelain from Japanese companies who sent supplies through Hong Kong, since at the time China had yet to open its doors to the United States. Nancy balanced running the store with her full-time job as secretary to the assistant commissioner at the New York City Department of Health. She worked out a schedule with her younger brother Tungnan Eng where he ran the store for several hours in the afternoon until she was off at six, keeping the store open until eleven at night. In 1972, President Nixon's widely publicized trip to China brought about policies that promoted reform and trade between the two

[37] Char siu is a Cantonese style roasted pork that can be found in most Hong Kong style restaurants.

countries. In 1973 Nancy and her husband Shuck Seid began their biannual business trips to Hong Kong to purchase porcelain for the shop. Nancy would send large wooden crates of curated ceramic teapots, decorative plates, ginger jars, and other selections from *Yue Hua*, a Hong Kong Department Store, to the Port of New York. Throughout the 1980s, cities across the country hosted museum exhibits and trade shows that focused on Chinese culture and arts, which sparked national curiosity and brought more tourists into New York's Chinatown. This sudden interest in China and traditional Chinese culture helped to generate considerable interest in 永安和 collection of porcelain and housewares. In 1986 Nancy left her full-time job at the Health Department and with the help of her sister Betty Eng, decided to focus attention entirely on the shop. The shop continued to serve as a vital space for residents to congregate, build relationships, and participate in neighborhood life.

Nancy managed 永安和 for five decades as she watched her three children raise another generation in the shop. However, things began to change when the business, along with the entire Chinatown community, was impacted by the events of 9/11. New York's Chinatown is one of the closest residential area in proximity to Ground Zero, spatially speaking the neighborhood is less than ten blocks away. The social, economic, and health consequences were catastrophic for Chinatown residents in the months, weeks, and years that followed. In the weeks after 9/11, all transportation was suspended and police placed checkpoints throughout Chinatown, effectively making the area a frozen zone where residents had to carry identification in order to leave or enter the neighborhood. Over sixty Chinatown garment factories shut down and twenty percent of small businesses including restaurants, bakeries, and retail stores did not survive the economic downturn.[38] Though millions of federal dollars in assistance were poured into Lower Manhattan, the Lower Manhattan Development

[38] A report from the Asian American Federation of New York found that garment factories in Chinatown saw their business volume decline by 60 and 100 percent two weeks after 9/11. At the time, Chinatown employed 33,658 people in restaurant and garment industries, of which 24,5000 temporarily lost their jobs including 13,000 garment factory workers who were mostly Chinese immigrant women. Three months after 9/11, nearly 8,000 workers remained unemployed.

Corporation that distributed these funds provided disproportionate support to large corporations on Wall Street over small businesses in neighboring working-class communities like Chinatown and the Lower East Side. Additionally, the pro-development policies put in place after 9/11 accelerated gentrification in these neighborhood as real estate speculators and developers swooped in to raise property values, making it exceedingly difficult for existing residents, small property owners, and businesses to remain. Despite these changes happening in Chinatown, Nancy kept 永安和 open for another fifteen years until the fall of 2015 when she stood at a crossroads on whether or not to keep or sell it along with the six story red brick tenement building that her father had bought in 1925. After a series of back and forth conversations with family members and friends in the neighborhood with whom she confided in, Nancy decided that she was exhausted, and it was time to shut the doors of 26 Mott Street.

This decision would have ended five generations of family ownership of the store. Mei Lum, who is the second youngest of the family's five grandchildren, learned about her grandmother's decision when she received a call from her father while she was working abroad in China. Fearful of the rapid changes happening in Chinatown, Mei immediately considered the risks of a developer or large chain store purchasing 26 Mott Street, which would change the landscape of the entire block. Mei also thought of the many buildings she has seen in Chinatown that have been sold to developers who have either demolished them to construct skinny hotel towers, banks, or left them vacant. By the time their 26 Mott Street building was on the market for an asking price of ten million dollars, Mei had already applied to graduate school in the city and was accepted into a program to study international development. However, not ready to part with such an integral part of her childhood, Mei turned down her acceptance to graduate school to take over the shop from her grandmother as fifth generation shopkeeper. As I sat down with Mei for a one year reflection interview over a meal, she reflected on why she chose to take over the store and stay in the neighborhood: "The situation

that my family was going through was larger than us. If we sold the business, it would affect our block, our neighborhood, our entire community. I started thinking about how I could, as a single person, reinvent the store and put new energy into it. I wanted to turn it into a space where residents could share their stories and creatively strategize around issues like gentrification. The work I did in China set me up for the work I have to do in Chinatown, I realize now that I can't make changes in other parts of the world if there is so much work to be done at home." In the same way that 永安和 created a space for early Chinese immigrants to connect with one another and to build community, Mei envisions the store as continuing in that tradition. She has since transformed the store into a space for intergenerational dialogue and action through The W.O.W. Project, which is a community initiative run from inside of the porcelain store to address neighborhood issues outside.

Drawing from oral history interviews and conversations organized by The W.O.W. Project that were held inside of 永安和 over the span of two years, this chapter investigates how ordinary neighborhood spaces and small businesses can serve as a catalyst for political thought and resistance to gentrification. More specifically, I document in detail how The W.O.W. Project uses what I call "shop talk" to encourage other Chinatown small businesses and residents to be proactive about neighborhood changes and to build across generations. I suggest that by actively listening to shop talk or what residents in the neighborhood discuss on a regular basis offers tremendous insight and perspective on how ideas about gentrification and neighborhood change are formed or negotiated over time in Chinese immigrant communities. In the next sections of this chapter, I contextualize what I mean by "shop talk" by drawing from extant American politics scholarship, then I proceed to draw from two conversations in particular to detail how Mei uses "shop talk" as a method to imagine futures in which Chinatown is not threatened by gentrification. The first set of conversations I draw from were organized by The W.O.W. Project in the spring of 2016 that involved second and third generation younger small business owners with deep roots in New York's Chinatown. The second is

a series of red envelope oral history conversations that were organized by Mei in collaboration with Melissa Liu, who was The W.O.W. Project inaugural Artist In Residence in October 2016. After ninety years in New York's Chinatown, 永安和 continues to be an anchor for Chinese immigrants and their families to build toward a better future, even in the wake of gentrification.

1.1 Shop Talk and Everyday Sites of Politics in New York's Chinatown

For decades researchers have been enamored with the question of *why* an individual becomes active in politics. To answer this question, debates have ensued across social science disciplines and hundreds of books have been written as a result. The political socialization literature captures the processes by which individuals begin to develop political values and ideologies, notably through the influence of parents, teachers, friends, and the media (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Easton and Dennis 1969; Niemi and Hepburn 1995; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996; Sears and Valentino 1997; Wattenberg 2008). The policy feedback literature crucially explores how individuals become active in politics through public policies and the processes by which specific policies have the ability to shape the political lives of those affected by them (Skocpol 1992; Pierson 1993; Mettler 2002; Mettler and Soss 2004; Soss and Schram 2007; Campbell 2011; Michener 2018). The political participation literature tends to emphasize resources like money, time, knowledge, civic membership in shaping political involvement (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1998; Putnam and Feldstein 2009). The neighborhood and contextual effects scholarship has also contributed to our understanding of this question by exploring how local context including demographics, health, violence, noise, services, and other social factors can shape political interest and involvement (Huckfeldt 1979; Cohen and Dawson 1993; Small and McDermott 2006; Michener 2013). This scholarship importantly recognizes that the inquiry of *how* an individual becomes active in politics cannot be separated from the question of *where* politics unfolds, especially since the two are complementary and mutually reinforcing. To date, however, much of the dialogue on *where* politics

unfolds revolves around formal arenas of political involvement including churches, organizations, and charities, leaving the literature on alternative sites of participation relatively scarce in comparison.

Importantly complicating this body of literature are scholars of Black politics, who have for a long time argued that politics extends beyond traditional sites and often occurs in the places that are closest to our daily lives. Drawing from James Scott's "infrapolitics" framework, Robin D.G. Kelley explores the everyday struggles of the Black working-class in the 1930 and 1960s to uncover forms of unorganized, clandestine, and subversive politics. In *Race Rebels,* Kelley illustrates that one of the primary forms of Black political expression was through everyday talk in places that were frequented such as bars, dance halls, blues clubs, barbershops, beauty salons, and neighborhood street corners (Kelley 1994). In order to understand the nuances of Black working-class politics, Kelley argues that it is necessary to see these everyday spaces in the neighborhood as sites of political activation, he writes: "proponents of subaltern studies maintain that, despite appearances of consent, oppressed groups challenge those who have power by constructing a dissident political culture that manifests itself in daily conversations, folklore, jokes, songs, and other cultural practices." For Kelley, everyday talk as with other daily acts of resistance has a cumulative impact on power relations and inform organized political movements. A more intentional focus on everyday talk in familiar neighborhood spaces allows us to broaden our thinking of *where* politics occurs, and to importantly be inclusive of groups that have not always had access to traditional venues of participation. Taking this framework further, Melissa Harris-Lacewell argues that the daily face-to-face conversations that ordinary Black people have with each other are essential to understanding Black politics and political thought. In *Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought,* Harris-Lacewell draws on talk that happens in barbershops, churches, historically black colleges, and Black media outlets to learn about Black political ideologies and opinion on pressing issues of the day (Harris-Lacewell 2006). To uncover the nuances of Black politics that are often overlooked in conventional analyses of voting patterns,

partisan affiliation, and organizational membership, Harris-Lacewell shows through her work that everyday talk reveals a wealth of information about Black political thought including how political attitudes are developed or expressed over time, she writes: "African Americans use everyday talk to jointly develop understandings of their collective interests. By centering spaces of everyday talk, her book returns political agency to ordinary people by privileging the voices of regular black men and women whose discussions contribute to the extraordinary process of ideology building." Her study chronicles everyday talk to reveal how the political ideologies of ordinary Black men and women are shaped by four ideological systems. More recently, political scientists Amy Lerman and Vesla Weaver in their book *Arresting Citizenship* (2014) examines the democratic consequences of daily encounters with the criminal justice system through the perspective of "custodial citizens" or those who come into direct contact with the police, courts, and prisons. Their study creates space for a kind of politics that takes place outside of traditional political spheres and illuminates "glimpses of agency, resistance, voice, and creative means of influence, and a broader repertoire of political practices" that are cumulative in nature. These studies all represent what political scientist Cathy Cohen in *Deviance as Resistance* (2004) calls a paradigmatic shift in how scholars think, write, and talk about the politics of those most vulnerable in Black communities. In broadening the scope of *where* politics unfolds on the ground, we are able see and learn much more about democratic participation and importantly how historically excluded groups are able to participate in politics on a regular basis.

The abovementioned studies lay the theoretical foundation for this chapter and motivate my decision to focus on conversations inside of quotidian neighborhood spaces like 永安和 to better understand the political contours of gentrification. When I use the term "shop talk" I am primarily referring to informal conversations that take place between family members, customers, friends, and neighbors in store spaces. Throughout the past two years of conducting ethnographic research in New York's Chinatown, I have noticed various forms of shop talk conversations that take place inside of

永安和 — sometimes between Mei, her dad, sister, aunt, and grandmother who all work in the shop and other times with neighbors who swing by to share the latest news or announce another change on the block. By listening to these conversations inside of 永安和 I began to more centrally consider the political significance of these spaces as arenas for political involvement and community engagement among residents. Historically in New York's Chinatown and in Chinatowns across the country, medicine and curio shops, laundries, bakeries, tea houses, and general stores have been safe havens for new Chinese immigrants where they could gather together to talk freely about politics, relatives, news, and organize around issues that affect their daily lives. While these conversations were rarely recorded on site the significance of these shop spaces were documented through letters, diaries, autobiographies, oral histories, and even photographs. The largest department store in the neighborhood called Pearl River Mart was the first Maoist inspired "friendship store" in New York City and served as a popular meeting spot for young Chinese American student radicals in the 1970s. The department store basement was frequently crowded with members of the community coming together to share meals, run radical poster workshops, and Marxist study groups. In the 1980s, Pearl River Mart turned into a gathering space for garment workers who were organizing a massive strike against their employers for unfair conditions and low wages. As Chinatown continues to change due to gentrification, these neighborhood shop spaces no longer exist in their previous forms. Michelle Chen, who is the daughter of the co-founders of Pearl River Mart, reflects in an *Open City Mag* piece: "What made the business a fixture in the urban fabric was the way it knitted together kinetic energy and grassroots coziness. When people think of gentrification in neighborhoods, they assume that the fishmonger and pushcart vendor are the commercial analog to displaced working-class tenants, but in truth the entire retail ecosystem is upturned. The reality is that small businesses, including retail shops

and specialty stores and restaurants, buttress the scaffold of a local economy."[39] Although many of these small businesses have shut down due to unaffordable rents and changes in clientele, some Chinatown fixtures like 永安和 continue to exist as potential sites of democratic possibilities and intergenerational community engagement.

In the same way that small businesses in early New York's Chinatown served as gathering spaces for residents to connect with one another and share knowledge about neighborhood issues, Mei envisions 永安和 as continuing in that tradition. Inspired by the conversations that her family had of selling their porcelain store, Mei founded The W.O.W. Project out of the desire to bring her concerns about gentrification into a communal space for community dialogue and grassroots action. As an intergenerational collective of local residents, small business owners, organizers, and artists, The W.O.W. Project centers the exchange of ideas and discussion of neighborhood issues through informal "shop talk" conversations held at the store. For Mei, this strategy does not involve ignoring the challenges and material conditions that working-class immigrants in neighborhood continue to face but it means believing that ordinary residents have the power to change their surroundings. It means fostering neighborhood spaces that never existed before, bringing those who never interacted together, sharing knowledge in ways that is accessible to everyone, and also dreaming out loud to get things done. In the span of two years, The W.O.W. Project has organized a series of conversations in the store, founded an Asian American Artist In Residency program, started an internship program for neighborhood youth, and built relationships with residents in other Chinatowns facing similar changes including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Vancouver. In the rest of this chapter, I draw from a series of shop talk conversations held inside of 永安和 to uncover how small business owners and residents are talking about gentrification and organizing around neighborhood changes. I illustrate

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[39] Michelle Chen "When A Small Business Takes A Great Leap Forward" in Asian American Writers Workshop's *Open City Mag* published on December 15, 2015.

that by listening to shop talk or what Chinatown residents discuss on a regular basis offers tremendous insight on how ideas about gentrification are formed or negotiated over time, it is within these conversations that individuals do the most extraordinary and critical work of political thought development around the issues that affect their daily lives.

1.2 The Role of Younger Generation Business Owners in the Neighborhood

One of the most visible signs of gentrification is the replacement of mom and pop shops for big box chain stores like Starbucks, Duane Reade, or Whole Foods (Cahill 2007; Zukin, Frase and Trujillo 2009). In New York City, another key indicator of gentrification is the number of storefront vacancies on a block (Marcuse 2013). In working-class neighborhoods like Chinatown, commercial vacancies have been used as a tactic to drive real estate speculation and to increase property values. In *Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost Its Soul,* documentarian Jeremiah Moss writes about the demise of hundreds of beloved neighborhood shops across New York City in the past decade, he finds that most of them have shut due to rent increases (Moss 2017). Since there are currently no commercial rent control laws in the city, once a lease comes up for renewal landlords are able to increase the rent to three, four, or five times the existing rent.[40] Instead of leasing the storefront to someone who wants to open a corner bodega or deli, landlords will let the property sit vacant until a business that is able to afford the exorbitant rent eventually moves in (Zukin 2012). The commercial vacancy rate has nearly doubled in Manhattan between 2012 and 2017 from 2 to 4 percent.[41] That percentage increases to 30 percent in some neighborhoods like Soho and Chinatown. According to a recent study commissioned by Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, there were 188 vacant

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[40] New York City had commercial rent control from 1945 until 1963 under Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, it was enacted by the state legislature in response to rampant real estate speculation and small business closures. The commercial rent regulation bill is currently pending in the City Council as the Small Business Jobs Survival Act which would mandate that landlords provide ten year lease renewals upon request.

[41] These numbers are according to NYU Furman Center's State of New York City Housing and Neighborhoods Report which provides data and analysis about housing, land use, demographics, and quality of life indicators. The entire report can be found here: http://furmancenter.org/files/pr/NYUFurmanCenter_SOCin2015_6MAY2016.pdf.

storefronts between a thirteen mile thoroughfare on Broadway from the Financial District through Chinatown, Soho, Greenwich Village, and Midtown.[42] In another study conducted by the Chinatown Working Group, a walking canvas of the neighborhood revealed that there were over thirty vacant storefronts in a ten block radius. As the number of commercial vacancies increase in low-income neighborhoods like New York's Chinatown, there are discernibly fewer amenities and services that are available to those who still live in these communities.

However, in contrast to these vacancies, there has been a resurgence of younger residents in Chinatown who have chosen to revive their family businesses like Mei or open their own stores in the neighborhood. Many of these stores are considered to be non-traditional new businesses and are run by second or third generation Chinese Americans who have recently graduated from college. After Mei met some of these younger generation store owners on her block, she decided to invite a group of them to 永安和 to chat about the changes happening in the neighborhood. In this section I draw from a series of these shop talk conversations that include Sophia Ng, of Po Wing Hong Food Market, Tommy Leong and Cory Wong of Mott Street Cycles, Amy Li, of Amy Li Projects, Richard Tam of 10Below Ice Cream, Michael Tan of Eggloo, and Mei herself. I sat through several of these conversations as an active participant observer, mostly listening to what individuals had to share with each other. For several hours each week, I watched Mei turn the kitchen of the shop into space of talking, storytelling, healing, laughing, activating, and community building. From listening to these shop talk conversations unfold I was able to learn about how a younger generation of small business owners in Chinatown talk about gentrification through their own personal experiences and how they view themselves as being part of the neighborhood changes. The thoughts captured in these

[42] The report was released on May 21, 2017 and lists the total number and location of all of the 188 Broadway storefront vacancies. Council Member Helen Rosenthal canvassed for vacant storefronts on the Upper West Side and East Harlem organization CIVITAS canvassed East Harlem and the Upper East Side to reveal similar numbers. However, to date there is comprehensive data on commercial vacancies.

conversations complicate our understanding of gentrification by revealing how these newer small businesses can be complicit in neighborhood displacement but also at the same time exist at the forefront in the resistance movement against gentrification.

The first conversation held at 永安和 was an intimate one, everyone gathered in the kitchen around a table with tea and Chinese snacks like sour plums, dried logans, and sunflower seeds. Mei began the conversation by introducing herself as the fifth generation shopkeeper of 永安和 and sharing what made her come back to the neighborhood after working abroad for several years: "I recently came back to Chinatown. I spent three years working and living in Asia. I feel like I am coming full circle after being in Beijing, Hong Kong, Thailand, and now coming back here where I am realizing that rootedness in a community is something unique and special. The story behind this store for me revolves around this informal community space that has always been present for my family and our friends. The store has been here since the 1890s. My grandma took it over after my great grandfather passed away in the 1960s. I have so many memories from high school of coming into the back of the store and having a snack or dinner with my family. We have quite a long history here and with that history we have been able to fill this room with community. That's always been my grandparents number one — bringing people together and having as a space for community."[43] Michael Tan, who is a third generation Chinese American born and raised in New York's Chinatown opened a dessert shop on Mulberry Street called Eggloo. The shop sells uniquely flavored egg waffle cones filled with ice cream and unlimited toppings such as pocky, mochi, and condensed milk. Michael explained what inspired him to open up the dessert store: "For me I used to live on 22 Mott Street and that is where my first home was. Basically, at my shop I sell egg waffles with ice cream. When I was a kid I used to go down to Columbus Park with my parents. We used to play and then always ended up at the cart

[43] Mei Lum. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 4, 2016.

on Mosco where the lady used to sell the best egg cakes. I think her name was Cecelia and her stand was called Hong Kong Egg Cake Company. But she made these golden egg cake nuggets that made the streets smell unbelievable. Her stand was so popular the line formed around the corner on Mulberry. Then one day she left and kind of never came back. Those were the memories that stuck with me and it was a big influence for how Eggloo came to fruition." Since Eggloo opened in the spring of 2016, the store has been featured in a wide array of magazines including Zagat, Buzzfeed, Eater, Bon Appétit and has over seven hundred Yelp reviews. Amy Li, who is the founder of an art gallery called Amy Li Projects located on Mott Street was similarly raised in Chinatown as a second generation Chinese American. As the most soft spoken in the group, Amy talked about her roots and what inspired her to open an art gallery in the same space as her father's button shop: "Our store He Zhen Snap Button opened in 1986 and is over thirty years old. When my dad found the space at 166 Mott Street, it was a Kung Fu school but after it closed my dad moved in. When there were garment factories along on Broome Street, the factories would send their garments to us. My dad applied snap buttons to all the clothing. He's still selling buttons. My gallery is in the front corner of my dad's button shop — we share the space. I started showing art three years ago because I wanted to bring friends into the space like my dad. Our store brings people together. Besides from business interactions, my dad and his friends are always in the back. There's a TV in the back so his friends come watch shows and chat for hours every day, especially on the weekends. They chat about their lifestyle like dealing with the government, getting benefits, or talking about retirement."[44] Amy continued to talk about the influx of new galleries in Chinatown and what it meant for her to run operate of the only Chinese American owned art galleries in the neighborhood. Richard Tam, who is one of the co-founders of 10Below is a third generation Chinese American raised in Chinatown. 10Below is a hand rolled ice cream dessert shop located at 10 Mott Street, which similar to Eggloo the

[44] Amy Li. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 4, 2016.

store has attracted famous foodies and two hour long wait lines out the door. Richard draws from his own family history as the source of inspiration for his business: "My parents met in America. They came from Hong Kong and grew up in Chinatown. My mom used to be a seamstress and my dad used to iron clothes. I was raised here by my grandparents because my parents were at work all the time. My grandma lives in the same building that she found when she came over, you know the kind that has a bathtub in the kitchen. I still live here at the Smith Projects on Madison Street. Chinatown is all I know, so it wasn't even an option for me to open the store anywhere else."[45] When Mei asked him how he got the idea and location for 10Below, Richard responded: "Basically we have a 10-month lease, it kind of is like a pipe dream. Me and my best friend from college were sitting around eating ice cream and I was like 'hey, what do you think about opening an ice cream store?' From there we came with the rolled ice cream idea and it sort of blew up from there. Then we started looking for a space by walking around. We went to the beauty salon upstairs and asked for the landlord's number but they said she normally doesn't talk to anybody about renting the place out. The space had been empty for a while so we were persistent. And, you know, she's a Chinese landlord that is an older lady so it was like talking to my grandma. We found a way to make it work."[46] Tommy Leong and Cory Wong, who are co-founders of Mott Street Cycles were raised in the neighborhood as second generation Chinese Americans. Cory talked about why they decided to open a custom bike shop in Chinatown: "Me and Tommy we have the bike shop down the street, we're there 'cause we used to occupy the basement. Like Richard we didn't have a plan to open up a store or a business. It sort of snowballed from us selling bikes on craigslist from the basement. Then when the upstairs hair salon became vacant we rented it for a month. We made enough money for a second month and then a third month. I guess we're now the local bike shop."[47] When Richard asked why they decided to open their shop in

[45] Richard Tam. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 4, 2016.
[46] Richard Tam. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 4, 2016.
[47] Corey Wong. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 4, 2016.

Chinatown, Cory responded: "I mean, why not? Chinatown is our home. Our friends own businesses here. You walk down the streets you see your parents' friends they grew up with. I mean it's a tight-knit community, kind of like a village. When I walk to work from home, I see everyone hustlin' and bustlin', people delivering vegetables, meat markets opening up, people talking to each other, it feels like home."[48] While these younger generation store owners have chosen to open stores that have not previously existed in area, their visceral connections to Chinatown have grounded them to the neighborhood.

The next gathering at 永安和 one week later centered around gentrification and specifically how each individual understood their own role in the process. Even though everyone agreed that neighborhood changes were happening at an unprecedented rate, there was some disagreement on whether or not their own businesses contributed to gentrification. Cory started the discussion by sharing observations he made about gentrification on his block: "Just as everyone says: everything changes. The neighborhood is changing. You have to reinvent yourself to keep up, to stay relevant. A lot of the businesses in Chinatown slowly are getting dated. These non-Asian businesses are coming in and encroaching into the borders. Just our block alone has changed 80 percent in five years. There were lots of vacancies. I think Di Palo's and Gwai Suk's the bakery next door to us are the only originals left. You know, it's been tough to see it all turn into empty spaces, it feels like a time bomb."[49] When asked about whether he views himself as playing a role in the gentrification of Chinatown, Cory responded: "I want to provide something that the community doesn't have. I don't care what you call me, call me a gentrifier. But why should I provide another Dai Wong? There's four of them. I don't need to sell *char siu* 'cause there's already so many options. There's not another Mott Street Cycles. You can't name one. There's not another bike shop until you pass Broadway. The kids have to go a

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[48] Corey Wong. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 4, 2016
[49] Corey Wong. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 11, 2016.

bike shop outside of Chinatown. We're providing a business that's not there. We're not a Chinese supermarket or restaurant but we are Chinese-owned. Do we have to sell *char siu* to not be gentrifiers? We live in the community. We spend money in the community. We help the community. We been part of the community."[50] Tommy who is a co-owner of Mott Street Cycles explained how they were using their storefront to create space for youth and elders in the community: "We have a bench out there. Every single day four old ladies sit there. They'll sit there for maybe three or four hours. We chill with them, we talk to them, we eat with them. It's a community bench! They sit there, take a rest, talk to each other, talk to us. It's the same ladies every single day. You know in the beginning they told me that they felt guilty for sitting there. I'm like, that's what the bench is for! Then in the afternoon after school all these kids from PS-130 hang around the bench until dinnertime. That bench does a lot for the people in this community because where else can you go on this side of Chinatown to chill."[51] Tommy also drew from his personal experiences to describe the significance of creating new neighborhood spaces and opportunities for Chinatown youth: "When I was growing up there was a lot of street violence and I don't want kids to get caught up in that. We have kids from PS-130 who come here to hang out. We have young Chinese teens who come to us because we're also Asian and can relate to them. They look up to us and we want to help them in anyway possible. Most of the Chinese teens we employ — they're not immigrants themselves but their parents are. You know, their parents were immigrants, so we know the struggle. I'm sure everyone here is providing jobs for Chinatown kids, that's the least we can do. You're hiring from within, people who are at least two degrees of separation and you're helping an immigrant family by providing a young adult with a job that can help out at home or at least pay a quarter of the rent."[52] As small business owners, Cory and Tommy reveal that have the ability to cultivate new community spaces and to intentionally hire from

[50] Corey Wong. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 11, 2016.
[51] Tommy Leong. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 11, 2016.
[52] Tommy Leong. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 11, 2016.

within the neighborhood so that families are able to stay put. This strategy of keeping residents in their homes through job creation and retention is significant because it tackles one of the most pronounced effects of gentrification, which is higher rates of local area unemployment.

Returning to the question that kicked off the conversation of how their new businesses were potentially contributing to gentrification, Michael explained that with Eggloo his audience has been mostly non-residents and foodies: "I thought my demographic was going to be Chinatown middle or high schoolers and college kids home for the summer. But I quickly realized that we were getting a lot more tourists and I guess it does add to the problem of gentrification. That's one of the biggest challenges I have with Eggloo, we can't really turn people away at the door just 'cause they don't live here. But at the same time I don't really want to change our block."[53] As food policy scholar Nevian Cohan has found in his research, food and "foodie" culture plays an increasingly significant role in the gentrification of low-income urban neighborhoods (Nevin 2018). Young Asian American food entrepreneurs have been at the forefront of the foodie culture movement including David Chang's Majordomo restaurant in Los Angeles Chinatown, Dale Talde's Asian fusion eatery Rice & Gold in the controversial 50 Bowery Hotel in New York Chinatown, and Brandon Jew's michelin star rated Mr. Jiu's in San Francisco's Chinatown. As Michael acknowledges himself, the presence of dessert shops like Eggloo and 10Below contributes to the development of a hip food scene in New York's Chinatown. The reality is that developers and landlords often use these food establishments as a tool to drive gentrification in Chinatown, as if the fact that the store owners are also Asian mitigates the overall impact. Michael continued to reflect on how he has been trying to navigate being a resident and potential gentrifier at the same time, exploring ways to contribute back to the neighborhood that he knows he is changing: "When gentrification comes in, values don't have to go out the window. I mean we have a lot staffers who grew up in Chinatown, they are friends or friends of friends. We

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[53] Michael Tan. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 11, 2016.

motivate our staff, you know, let's make this a team effort, let's achieve something that betters the community. We make donations to the local Chinese schools and the 9-man tournament that comes over the summer. I don't think that's something Häagen-Dazs would do."[54] Richard echoed what Tommy and Michael said by noting how most of the 10Below employees are from Chinatown: "I think over seventy of our employees are from here. They either grown up here or they're friends with someone who lives a few blocks away or something like that. Most of the employees we hire grew up in Chinatown, I've probably played basketball with half of them at the park before or seen them at Columbus Park before. I see the store as part of a resurgence of newer businesses that are owned by younger people like us concentrated on Bayard and Mott Streets. There's Chinatown Ice Cream Factory, Xian Famous Foods, Bayard 69, all these young people places in Chinatown owned by young people from Chinatown. Now it's extended around the block to where we are and where Eggloo is. I mean, I feel like we need to be part of these changes to have a voice in what happens."[55] Building on the idea of younger generation small businesses as having agency to curtail the effects of gentrification, Mei expressed: "The challenge is making sense of how to maintain our roots in the neighborhood that honors our history but welcome these changes as well. The BID tells everyone that Chinatown is fading because young people leave and never come back. But that isn't true we're still here. The W.O.W. Project is almost like the antithesis of that narrative because it's led by these incredible youth from Chinatown who keep coming back. It's remarkable to think about the role that a shop can play in the neighborhood — as collector and regenerator and repository and site of exchange for people's experiences — and catalyst for change."[56] Mei talked about the upcoming Resist Recycle Regenerate Project that she hoped would create space for neighborhood youth to be more proactive about gentrification ahead of real estate developers and speculators.

[54] Michael Tan. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 11, 2016.
[55] Richard Tam. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 11, 2016.
[56] Mei Lum. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 11, 2016.

The third conversation primarily focused on how old and new small businesses can work together in the face of gentrification. Mei's dad Gary Lum who had wandered in and out of the first several conversations asked the group what they could do to bridge the generation gap, he shared: "Last time, someone talked about staying relevant and not being outdated. That is so important. As innovators you bring new energy to Chinatown, with that comes new ideas, new opportunities, and new responsibilities. As someone who is of an older generation, I want to ask how can you bridge the generational gap to help older establishments like ours put a spin on their businesses to survive. I'm sure you can use your knowledge and tools to help some of these establishments that are close to folding over like Fong Inn Too the down the block."[57] In response to Gary, Richard mentioned that he has been in conversation with older generation business owners and wants to support them but doesn't want to impose his views: "There are plenty of things that can help older businesses like Dai Wong. Like, I want *char siu* delivered, there is no way that you're going to find a restaurant here that delivers *char siu*. I don't know why. It would greatly improve their numbers but for some reason that doesn't happen. The older generation don't want to fix what's not broken."[58] Richard continued to express why he felt hesitant to impose new ideas on older businesses: "We want to help the older generation. I would hate to see Dai Wong go. I would hate to see Bo Ky go.[59] You know, obviously, I want to help but it is also a matter of what they want. If they feel like what they're doing, you know selling a hundred items is the right way to do business, then who are we to say that they're doing the wrong thing. I don't think any business owner wants a younger person to come and tell them that for the last fifty years they been running their restaurant incorrectly."[60] Cory also added that some strategies might not work well for older businesses in the neighborhood: "Like, when it comes to

[57] Gary Lum. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 18, 2016.
[58] Richard Tam. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 18, 2016.
[59] Dai Wong also known as Big Wong located at 67 Mott Street is a Cantonese mainstay in Chinatown. Bo Ky is a Chinese Vietnamese restaurant located at 80 Bayard Street that is popular among local residents. Both of these restaurants have been in the neighborhood since the 1980s.
[60] Richard Tam. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 18, 2016.

social media, for places like 69 Bayard, Noodletown, Jing Fong, and Wo Hop it can work. They're already getting business and people like Andrew Zimmerman even know about them But places like Duc Cheung or Hong Kong Supermarket, what is social media going to do for them? The people who shop there everyday like my grandma are not using Instagram. She goes there ten times a week without needing an Instagram page. But as gentrification continues I think the question to ask is do these businesses even want to stay and if so how can we support without changing them too much."[61] This dialogue speaks to generational nuances and differences that exist within New York's Chinatown, especially around the questions of preservation and whether or not it is possible to preserve aspects of the neighborhood while still leaving room for growth. It also importantly reveals how breakthroughs for one generation often become a burden for the next.

Others present for the conversation were more sympathetic to bridging the generational gap between younger and older generation small businesses. Amy remarked that it was important to talk about gentrification induced neighborhood changes with elders before it becomes too late: "I think there should be communication and an understanding across generations. Of course, we were taught to respect our elders. But that doesn't mean they can't learn from us, that shouldn't be seen as rude. The talking can help a lot. We should be talking about the future and make plans for the future. We should be talking about real estate and what will happen if we can no longer afford commercial rent. We need to talk about affordability and what it means to stay in Chinatown. I don't think that can be avoided. The older generations are being pushed out. There was an 82-year-old Italian woman who owned the Grand Street market. Her landlord refused to extend the lease. Now it's an empty space. My dad doesn't know why these streets look like a ghost town. I explained to him that it's because landlords want top dollar and would rather leave storefronts empty than rent to people like us." Mei

[61] Cory Wong. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 18, 2016.

echoed Amy on the importance of knowledge exchange and intergenerational dialogue: "I think we can learn a lot from the older businesses. It's not that we're going to go help them update, we can also learn a lot from them. Earlier we were talking about intergenerational dialogue and small tweaks, it might be something even like updating their menu or their credit card machine. It could be something super small. But all that starts with conversations to make sure that we're on the same page and that we can communicate across languages and across generations."[62] Mei shared what she has been doing to better communicate with her 89 year old grandma: "I'm fifth generation, my dad who works in the space too is fourth generation, and my grandmother and great aunt are of the same generation. We're all in a 92-year-old business together trying to push towards this goal, to regenerate and welcome new energy into the space. There have been challenging moments that have emerged from me changing the ways in which things have been done in the past. The question that pops into my grandmother's mind is "Why change when it's been working for so long?" I try to help her understand by finding commonality — we have the experience of taking over the business in common. Here I am in the same position fifty years later. We have that relating point as a start to learn about the commonalities between our experiences and that is where the generation gap closes. There's so much that I can learn from my grandma about this neighborhood — whether it be about business, cultural, or historical, younger generations need to inquire and learn about what happened before us. The base building starts with patience, open mindedness, willingness and curiosity to learn from the other person."[63] Michael nodded throughout this part of the conversation and chimed in to share information about neighborhood services that could support older businesses: "There is a small business acceleration office on Mulberry Street. They have classes for things that would be kind of common knowledge to us but useful for our parents. They have free classes on social media, finance practices, inventory

[62] Mei Lum. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 18, 2016.
[63] Mei Lum. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 18, 2016.

management, that kind of stuff. I think building awareness and getting the older generation to accept that 'hey, I can go here and learn about business practices' would help a lot."[64] Michael later brought up a business that recently closed that could have used this type of assistance: "You remember Prosperity Dumpling on Eldridge Street? They had that scandal with them cooking in the alley, I mean, if you grew up in the community you know what's happening. The kitchen is hot so you cook outside, it's whatever. But I guess they were reported by newcomers and were shut down by the health inspectors. I feel like we could have done something to prevent that from happening. That's why I like what Mei said about sharing knowledge and best business practices across generations."[65] Although everyone who took part in the conversation that evening had perceptively different ideas about how younger and older generation businesses could support each other to withstand the effects of gentrification, there was agreement that open communication and skillshares across generations is vital to keeping Chinatown a vibrant working-class immigrant community. The self-reflective topics that were covered in these shop talk conversations importantly reveal how a younger generation of businesses owners are interrogating their own culpability in gentrification and developing strategies to remain accountable to each other and to take ownership of these changes in their everyday lives.

The final conversation was the most interesting to me because it not only demonstrates how shop talk enables political thought development around the issue of gentrification but also how it provides a chance for individuals to engage in visionary organizing for the future. The conversation began when Mei asked what they wanted Chinatown to look like in five years. Mei started out by sharing what she hoped her store and The W.O.W. Project would turn into: "I guess that calls into the question what type of role we each of us will play in shaping what our neighborhood looks like down the line. My goal is to combine the business with this community initiative, and have it feed into

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[64] Michael Tan. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 18, 2016.
[65] Michael Tan. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 18, 2016.

the overarching vision that brings community together. I'm hoping to transform, not really transform, but update the business a little bit and allow people to build like we are today. For businesses in Chinatown I hope that we can continue to come together, collaborate, share strategies, successes, and failures that in the end will bring our community and neighborhood much closer."[66] Mei also expressed interest to get more involved in neighborhood affairs: "This goes back to what we were saying earlier about youth understanding Chinatown history and realizing their own agency in the community. Growing up I didn't feel that I was aware of me as an individual and how much impact I could have. I would like to start conversations with residents and community members to learn about their views for the future of Chinatown. There's the belief that everyone here has opposing views and are extreme in them but I think we do agree on certain issues. Like, we can all agree that we love Columbus Park. If we can agree on that then I think we can agree on other larger issues as well."[67] At this point Gary chimed in to talk about how he wants to continue to be a bridge between Mei and their elders and the outside world: "So many people are feeling the radical changes in Chinatown and in New York City. Change is inevitable, that is a Buddhist tenet. The term gentrification is coined as a negative but to me it means change. And change can be good and bad. What is more important is how people are coping with change, are they engaged in that change in a constructive positive manner? The W.O.W. Project. inspires and awakens the strength in each of us. Now more than ever I feel like I am thrust out into the world. I'm not ready to retire my mind or my body. I hope to still be in the store thirty years from now talking to visitors and customers who walk through the door about our ninety three years and the living memory of being in one place, surviving, and running a business for five generations. From these conversations I build connection with people from all over the world. I tell them to have another talk like this with someone else and to encourage that person to have the same kind of talk. It's like

[66] Mei Lum. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 25, 2016.
[67] Mei Lum. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 25, 2016.

farming, planting seeds." Tommy expressed that he didn't want to see Chinatown change much at all in the future: "I want it to stay the same forever. I don't want it to change. That's why we're here! We are a hardcore community. I think Chinatown here is much more of a community than other Chinatowns. When you go to the one in Washington D.C. it's just a mall, you know? People work here, live here, go to school here. PS-124 is a Chinese school. PS-130 is a Chinese school. It's a real community, we lift each other up no matter what."[68] Richard echoed those sentiments and shared some things from his childhood that he hopes will never change about the neighborhood: "I don't know what Chinatown will look like in terms of what will be around. But there are so many things I remember doing in Chinatown. Participating in the block party on Mott Street. The vast tar pit in Columbus Park. The community organizations that shaped my childhood and young adult life. I want those programs to continue to exist and flourish because that's where I met my now business partners. That's where the idea even came from. For me particularly, I loved playing basketball and I kind of grew up playing basketball and that's what drew me to being part of this community in the first place. That's where I met most of childhood friends. When I'm fifty years old I hope to tell twenty year old Chinese kids about how I used to play basketball in the park too and how I was better than them when I was their age."[69] Michael laughed in response and expressed a desire to connect with his own parents and challenge negative perceptions about what it means to stay in one place: "For me, I would like to reach out to my parent and their generation. A lot of them used to live in Chinatown but now they don't. My parents moved to Bensonhurst in Brooklyn. They have a bad perception of what Chinatown is from their experiences and from what wealthier Chinese people think about it. They laugh at why we want to open a store in the slums. To them it's dirty, smelly, crowded, all sorts of negative ideas. I want to reach out to their generation and tell them that the neighborhood is more

[68] Tommy Leong. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 25, 2016.
[69] Richard Tam. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 25, 2016.

than those thoughts."[70] Last to share an answer with the group was Amy, who remarked that she wasn't sure if she would be in the neighborhood in five years: "Right now our rent goes up every year bit by bit. We're not scared, we're just continuing with our lives as best as possible. But I hope the future is lively and is as similar to now as possible. Chinatown like any neighborhood changes with time and I only hope I can still be part of those changes."[71] Although discussions about neighborhood change are difficult, these shop talk conversations strengthen community relationships and allow residents to reflect and imagine a different future for Chinatown, one that can flourish without the threat of gentrification.

1.3 Building Across Generations Through Red Envelope Oral History Workshops

In addition to generating conversations between small business owners 永安和 has created space for neighborhood residents to come together to share stories of Chinatown past and present. In the spirit of Chinatown's most festive season, Mei launched the Lunar New Year 店面 Window Display Artist Residency Program in November 2016.[72] Each year, Lunar New Year is a time when community members come together to bid farewell to the old and welcome new fortune, happiness, and relationships. For two weeks of the year, the street scene in New York's Chinatown is vibrant with storefronts hanging red banners, rainbow confetti covering the streets, and crowds gathering to watch lion dancers perform in front of stores. As Chinatown continues to change and residents are displaced due to increasing rents, it is important for Mei that neighborhood histories that are at risk of being displaced along with the people are well preserved for future generations. In tradition of the earlier shop talk conversations Mei held at the store, the general purpose of the new Artist Residency Program was to creatively document Chinatown past and present history to inform a cognitive map

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70 Michael Tan. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 25, 2016.
71 Amy Li. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. February 25, 2016.
72 店面 or *dian men* is translated to storefront in English.

of the future. For the inaugural 店面 Window Display Artist Residency Program, Mei put out a call for local artists from any disciplinary background to apply, her goal was to find someone who has creative vision to create a window display for the store that can also serve as a meeting point for younger and older generation residents. After receiving thirty applications within the span of one month, the residency committee selected Melissa Liu who is a cultural worker, oral historian, and first generation Chinese American. As the inaugural Artist-in-Residence, Melissa created a window display installation with Lunar New Year oral histories through handmade red envelopes (紅包 or *lai see* in Cantonese, *hong bao* in Mandarin). In addition to curating a window display for the store, Melissa facilitated a series of oral history workshops in the basement, silk screened handmade red envelopes, and held three artist talks.

When I asked Mei what inspired her to create the 店面 Window Display Artist Residency Program, she reiterated her commitment to fostering intergenerational dialogue and explained that her current ideas falls into a much longer history of Chinatown activism: "The kind of work I do at The W.O.W. Project doesn't exist in a vacuum, I think it is important to recognize that it falls into a lineage of activist collectives beginning from the Basement Workshop. People in the community always talk about that time with excitement and fervor because back then people were meeting in basements to address the same issues we're dealing with today around displacement. I was really inspired by those stories, so I decided to create the Artist In Residence Program in our basement."[73] Before launching the program, Mei spent weeks with her dad in the basement breaking apart dozens of wooden shipment crates used to ship porcelain from over forty years ago and clearing up the space to turn it into an artist studio. When I asked Gary Lum how he felt about the basement being turned into a workshop space he chuckled and expressed: "It's both exciting and challenging to have raised

[73] Mei Lum. Informal Conversation at 26 Mott Street. September 18, 2016.

a daughter whose initiating something like this. The weeks we spent down here made me realize how much we like to hold onto our past. Like all these shipping crates from Hong Kong for what? I'm glad we reorganized the space because now we can invite people into our basement to participate in all these generative programs held at the store. I think I'll repurpose these wooden crates to make them into tables or shelves for inventory." A couple months later Gary used some of the wooden crates to create a 永安和 on wheels, a mobile resource and community engagement cart for residents and members of the local Chinatown community.

In the weeks leading up to Lunar New Year, Melissa began recruiting residents to participate in the red envelope oral history workshops held in the basement of 永安和. Melissa recruited elders from Columbus Park and the senior citizens center on Mulberry Street and youth from community organizations like Chinatown Youth Initiative and Project Reach. In an effort to collect oral histories for the window display, Melissa invited all of the participants she recruited to attend basement workshops in which individuals received training on how to conduct oral history interviews and had the opportunity to share theirs. Melissa told me that the project focus was to have everyone make and create their own red envelopes, in which younger participants would place a question to share with a family member from an older generation. This approach reverses the Chinese tradition of red envelope giving since it has always been elders who give red envelopes with money to younger generations. Melissa hoped that the exchange of questions through red envelopes between the younger and older generations would initiate deeper conversations about neighborhood change and opportunities for intergenerational growth. Melissa explained why she chose red envelopes as a vessel to have these conversations: "As I approach the age when I have to give and not receive red envelopes, I've begun to understand the cultural significance of this tradition. Red envelopes are a vessel for the exchange of goodwill across generations. In conceptualizing my residency project which I named "Chinatown Diaspora and Red Envelope Oral Histories," I wanted to explore what being "Chinese American"

means in the current political moment. Although red envelopes with money are given from those of married age to younger generations, I encouraged participants to reverse this exchange by giving their red envelopes to someone from an older generation. Rather than give money, a red envelope will be exchanged with a written question, opening up an opportunity for a conversation to happen. With political events in the past year that have polarized many within our communities, I wonder how we might be able to hold space for learning and non-confrontational exchange of ideas. I am using my artist residency as an opportunity to empower each other to have meaningful dialogue with our parents and older community members in the hope of bridging this generational gap, while also giving ourselves agency to tell our own stories about Chinatown."[74] Melissa then used materials from the oral history interviews that participants collected through their red envelopes to curate a window display, uplifting narratives of Chinatown that are often erased or overlooked by mainstream media.

What gentrification and displacement leads to is the systematic erasure of what used to exist. Through her red envelope oral history workshops in the basement of 永安和 Melissa was able to contest this erasure by foregrounding the stories of people in the neighborhood who have been or who are being displaced. At the very beginning of the first workshop, Melissa asked participants to share their family histories and to redefine their relationship to Chinatown. There were fourteen participants from across generations, and the conversations centered around community change, family histories, and the new presidency. Wilson Loo, who is a thirty-year-old resident of Chinatown shared his experience of growing up in the neighborhood and how being part of the Youth Lion Dance Club changed his life course. There are dozens of Lion Clubs in Chinatowns across the country, some that are run by traditional family associations and others that are more community oriented. For Loo being part of the Youth Lion Dance Club was a critical way for him to learn from older

[74] Melissa Liu. First Residency Workshop at 26 Mott Street. October 18, 2016.

generations and to avoid gang violence that plagued the neighborhood in the 1980's: "I'm a second generation Chinese American. My personal history with Chinatown is that it has shaped a lot of my bravado — identity. I grew up in NYCHA. Growing up in the projects, I hung around other poor Chinese people, I hung around a lot of African American, Latinos as well. I grew up spending most of my time cutting high school and hanging out in the handball courts and experienced a lot of violence. It was easy for me to fall into a couple local Chinese gangs but eventually I was adopted by a mentor who happened to be a key person in Chinatown and ran a lion dance troupe."[75] Loo explained that his lion club provided essential services and vital identity development opportunities for Chinatown youth, many who later became mentors in the community themselves. While talking about changes in the neighborhood, Loo expressed dismay because his troupe had been displaced from their original location and is at risk of disappearing altogether: "I was involved to join lion dancing at a young age and that shaped my political identity and understanding of Chinese culture. We learned from the Black Panthers, the Young Lords, and adopted a lot of the same fundamentals on how to organize the Lion Dancing Youth Club in Chinatown. We ran a daycare system and a feeding program. Due to gentrification and people moving out our lion dance club has been esoteric for some time and membership is in decline. It is difficult for us to preserve our history. I hope that this opportunity allows me to tell this part of Chinatown's history that has been hidden for so long. I want people to know that African Americans have the Black Panther Party, Latinos have the Young Lords and Brown Beret, Chinese Americans for a long time had the Lion Dance Troupe, which protected the community and people who live in it."[76] Loo continued to talk about his current work with the Henry Street Settlement and felt hopeful spaces like 永安和 could uplift this history and inspire future generations who have lived in the neighborhood to have influence in how it evolves.

[75] Wilson. First Residency Workshop at 26 Mott Street. October 18, 2016.
[76] Wilson. First Residency Workshop at 26 Mott Street. October 18, 2016.

In the same workshop session with Melissa, another participant Liz Chu talked about how gentrification has affected her emotionally given that her connection to Chinatown is beyond simply material. As a lifelong resident on Canal Street Chu explained how she sometimes gets triggered walking around the streets of the neighborhood due to the increasingly visible number of new luxury developments. For Chu the new art galleries, restaurants, and hotels in the neighborhood contribute to feelings of erasure and reminds her that what used to be there is now gone This is in line with what clinical psychiatrist Mindy Thompson Fullilove calls "root shock" where displacement through development induced destruction of neighborhoods causes emotional pain and trauma for longtime residents.[77] Chu decided to participate in the oral history workshops in efforts to contextualize the rapid changes happening in the neighborhood: "I took Chinatown for granted in thinking that what is here will always be here. You know, growing up and seeing all the signs of gentrification and small businesses closing down, it makes me think that Chinatown won't last. When you look around so much of Chinatown is disappearing and that makes me really anxious. That makes me sad and it forces me to think about change in all its forms. I am connected to the mission of this oral history project because I hope to figure out ways to connect with the community at a deeper level, preserve memories, and converse with elders." Chu also talked about how she thought the red envelope oral histories could help her more openly talk about these changes and other political contentious issues with her immigrant parents: "Like all of you, I lost my Chinese language skills, which I feel like is the connection to my parents. There have been conversations that I have wanted to have with them but I haven't found a way to talk to them. I feel a sense of urgency since both of my parents are very conservative, very religious, and so I have struggled to have open conversations about issues like Black Lives Matter

[77] Mindy Thompson Fullilove's *Root Shock: How Tearing Up Neighborhoods Hurt America and What We Can Do About It* provides a critical insight into the mental and health effects of the destruction of urban space and the consequences of when an individual's emotional ecosystem is destroyed or changed over time.

or the recent election. I hope to learn how oral history can be a role in facilitating these dialogues."[78] There were several participants who echoed what Chu shared about using the red envelope oral histories as a method to build deeper relationships with older generations and to strengthen personal relationships as gentrification continues to tear apart communities.

Jan Lee who is a fourth generation small property owner and founder of the neighborhood block association came out to the second oral history workshop and spoke about how he wanted to challenge misconceptions about Chinatown through his family histories: "My grandfather operated a business called Tuck High Dried Goods on 21 Mott. My grandfather could read and write, which was fairly unusual when he came. He was actually literate. He jumped ship three times and was sent back to China twice because he was here illegally. He came once as an actor in an actor troupe and they caught him. It was a few thousand Chinese people here maybe. When they caught him they sent him all the way back and it was a month to go back on a steamer ship but he tried again. The third time he came working part time as a bookkeeper for a company at 21 Mott called Tuck High. My grandfather bought the building sort of on accident which took my father his entire adult life to pay it back." Lee continued to talk about what he has been doing as a resident and small property owner to preserve his family legacy through The Chinatown Core block association: "It's sentimental, the building has a significance to me. The changes on this block around the building make me feel like I won't be able to hold out longer. I formed the block association in response to the proliferation of bars and nightlife venues. I organize with residents, business owners, other small property owners who want to cap the number of liquor licenses allocated in our vicinity to preserve quality of life for new immigrants — people who come like my grandfather. Now any restaurant and bar that opens and wants a liquor license has to appeal to the core before they present at the SLA committee in the community board." Although much of the scholarship on gentrification has placed small property owners like Lee in the

[78] Liz. Second Residency Workshop at 26 Mott Street. October 18, 2016.

backdrop, his perspective is important because it complicates the narrative that paints all landlords as single dimensional. Lee continued to share that part of his work with the block association is also about challenging dominant ideas that fuel gentrification: "This notion that Chinatown is a dying place — it's completely fabricated. And the reason people fabricate stories of Chinatown dying is because they want to be the white knight that comes in and saves Chinatown. So, if you keep the narrative up that Chinatown is a dying place, there becomes a reason to have bars, to have liquor, to have a nightlife, you need all of this to save your dying Chinatown. It's a complete farce. This narrative is motivated by people who see Chinatown as an ethnic ghetto. They don't understand that Chinatown is diverse, vibrant, and complicated." Lee's narrative goes to illustrate how gentrification differentially impacts small property owners in New York's Chinatown, and how the overgeneralized phrase "all landlords are bad landlords" does not capture the reality of the neighborhood where there are many multi-generational property owners who are active in resistance and committed to sense of place. Ultimately, what makes Chinatown Chinatown is not the buildings but the people who live in them.

From these oral history workshop conversations and from the red envelope oral histories that participants collected with their family members, Melissa created a multimedia window display that uplifted resident stories of the neighborhood. The window display installation included a large monitor with scrolling text and handmade red envelopes with questions that participants presented to elders in their families. As the oldest continually run store in New York's Chinatown, 永安和 continues to nurture creative capacity in ordinary people and strengthens community relationships even in the face of displacement. In this chapter I focus on how Mei through The W.O.W. Project uses community dialogue or "shop talk" to encourage Chinatown residents and other small business owners to openly discuss neighborhood issues and imagine alternative futures in which Chinatown is not threatened by gentrification. By listening to these conversations unfold inside of 永安和 I was able to observe how residents and a younger generation of small business owners in New York's Chinatown collectively

develop an understanding of gentrification and how they view themselves as being a part of neighborhood changes. These shop talk conversations broaden the scope of how we think about the politics of gentrification, and more generally where political participation unfolds on the ground beyond traditional sites and in the places that are closest to people's lives. The series of conversations above illustrate that political possibilities are most deeply rooted in the circumstances of everyday life and the environments in which people are born, grow, work, live, age and dream. The intergenerational work that Mei and The W.O.W. Project has done for New York's Chinatown has remarkably caught wind in other Chinatown communities across the country, inspiring similar conversations around gentrification across cities.

Chapter 3: The Eviction Machine, Tenant Mobilization, and Growing the Grassroots

Image: 90 Elizabeth Street Tenant Association protesting outside of their apartment building.

On a rainy March afternoon, I sat down with David Tang and his mother Maria Tang in a Chinese bakery on 39th Avenue in Flushing, Queens. It felt strange meeting them there since most of our interactions have been in Manhattan Chinatown or at the courthouse on Centre Street. I met David when I first started to volunteer with CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities and their Chinatown Tenants Union, the pan-Asian grassroots group that was helping David, his mother, and three other tenants in the building to mobilize against their predatory landlord named James Fong. David was the lead organizer of the tenant association he started in his building and I got to know him through months of tenant meetings, poster making sessions, marches to city hall, press conferences, and court hearings. This was our first sit down interview, and I had asked him to bring his mother with him to join the conversation. It was there that he shared with me their family's migration story to Chinatown and why he was fighting so desperately to keep his mother in their

apartment on 90 Elizabeth Street. Their building is located on what is colloquially known as *鱼街 (Yu Jie* in Chinese translates to fish street), where most of the fresh food markets have historically been located in New York's Chinatown. There are still several fruit vendors and seafood markets on the block but there has been an influx of new boutiques, cafes and restaurants that have spread from adjacent areas. David and his mother were witnesses to some of the most visible changes led by gentrification in the neighborhood and it seemed as though every aspect of their lives were in the process of being transformed as well.

David's ninety-year-old mother, Maria Tang, left her home in Hong Kong after the 1949 revolution in China and settled in New York's Chinatown because she knew relatives who had also moved there. By the time she arrived in the city she had already experienced multiple instances of displacement. For Maria losing her home in Guangzhou China marked the beginning of her ongoing relationship with movement and dislocation. When she first arrived in New York's Chinatown in the early 1960s Maria lived with her grandfather on Mulberry Street for a year before she moved to a series of single room occupancies on East Broadway before settling into 90 Elizabeth Street. Even though Maria never viewed herself as an agent of political change, everything about her life that she shared through our conversation suggested otherwise — from her efforts to navigate the city as a non-English speaker, attempts to become a naturalized citizen, and frequent interactions with the housing court. Perhaps Maria was not consciously engaging in politics in the traditional sense but there were numerous moments in our interactions where she indicated that her citizenship conditioned by her refugee status, gendered labor conditions in Chinatown, and precarious housing conditions brought her in contact with politics whether she liked it or not. Whenever Maria talked about her most recent interaction with displacement it was never mentioned in the context of a single episode, she viewed it as a continuation of her migration experience and the numerous times she has had to move around the city in search for a home. The way that Maria and David talked about their encounters with

displacement was similar to that of many other Chinatown tenants who saw displacement as a continuous theme woven into their daily lives.

The first time I saw David and Maria's apartment was in the fall of 2014 when I was working as a volunteer with CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities on their building campaigns. CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union develops the leadership of low-income Chinatown residents to organize in their individual buildings against predatory landlords and forced evictions. It was during this time that David, Maria, and three other tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street with the help of CAAAV filed a joint HP (Housing Part) action lawsuit in Manhattan Housing Court against their landlord who had made their lives intolerable. When I visited the building I noticed that most units lacked working smoke detectors, electrical wiring was exposed in the hallways, and blue plastic sheets covered most of the apartment doors as if no one lived inside anymore. The stairs were in horrible condition even for a pre war walk up tenement building. Their front door immediately led us into the kitchen which David told me had not been fixed since his mother moved into the apartment in the 1970s. Like many other apartments in Chinatown, the bathtub was in the middle of the kitchen right across from the stove and the bathroom was so small that you could barely squeeze your legs inside to close the door. David showed me his sleeping room which was in the back of their shared apartment. He complained how dust and plaster from the ceiling kept falling onto his bed due to the construction upstairs. His mother told me about how one morning a basketball size piece of the ceiling fell onto her pillow but she had thankfully already woken up otherwise she would not have lived through it. David nervously laughed as he told me it was useless to even try cleaning the apartment because at the end of the day everything would always be covered in layers of dust. The debris that came from the plaster on the walls had already been tested positive for lead and other toxic materials making it extremely hazardous to the health of seniors and young children in the building. Maria said that pieces of their ceiling had been falling for months but that it got much worse after construction started on the apartment unit above them on

the seventh floor. James Fong had successfully evicted the elderly immigrant Chinese couple in the one-bedroom apartment upstairs and was in the process of renovating the unit so that it could be rented out at market rate. I later found out from speaking to other tenants in the building that more than half of the rent regulated tenants had moved out or were evicted from their homes within the last three years.

I visited David and his mother at their apartment many times after that encounter and I saw them through the entire housing court process that lasted approximately two years. It was through these conversations with tenants like David, Maria, and many others in New York's Chinatown that I came to realize the prominent role that gentrification induced eviction has on the political lives of working-class Chinese immigrants, many of whom are on the brink of homelessness. I also came to understand the critical role that grassroots organizations have when it comes to organizing against displacement and developing the leadership of working-class immigrants in the neighborhood. This chapter documents the housing justice work of CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union and the story of how five tenants successfully took their predatory landlord to housing court. I illustrate how Chinatown tenants like David and his mother come to understand their relationship to American politics and contextualize their political existence in the larger political system through their work with CAAAV. Through the 90 Elizabeth Street tenants case, I suggest that grassroots organizations are essential for democratic politics and participation because they create opportunities for those most impacted to develop civic knowledge, strengthen connections across neighborhood issues, and become active in political processes. In the next section I discuss the extant literature on grassroots organizations and why they matter for immigrant political participation and democratic citizenship. I draw from three years of ethnographic research and interviews that I conducted with CAAAV staff, volunteers, and tenants to demonstrate how the organizing efforts of these grassroots organizations are able to enact social change, often in ways that are deeper than immediate policy changes.

1.1 Grassroots Organizational Involvement and Citizen Participation

The question of who, when, and how people participate in politics has been a central one across disciplinary fields but an especially long standing one for political scientists (Downs 1957; Olson 1965; Tocqueville 2002; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Since democratic citizenship is at the heart of American politics, understanding what motivates someone to become active in politics is key to addressing disparities in political participation (Teixeria 1987; Campbell, Angus, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen 2002; Wong 2006). Much of the extant scholarship has emphasized the role of civic organizations as a stepping stone toward more formal types of political participation (Putnam 1995; Skocpol, Marshall, Munson, Camp, Swers, and Oser 1999; Skocpol, Munson, and Ganz 2000; Han 2014). The scholarship on this subject is abundant, social scientists have theoretically and empirically shown how organizational involvement can help individuals across the spectrum develop civic skills, foster efficacy, build political knowledge, and grow interpersonal relationships (Almond and Verba 1963; Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Leighley 1996; McFarland and Thomas 2006; Terriquez 2017). Some researchers have found that organizational membership affiliation and the extent to which an individual is active in organizational activities matters in determining subsequent participation in politics (Brady, Verba, and Scholzman 1995; Quintelier 2008; Sobieraj and White 2004; Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson 2000; Somma 2010). Others have found that factors like citizenship, gender, age, and socioeconomic class can also shape the extent to which organizational involvement matters for political life (Leal 2002; DeSipio 2006; Milkman 2006; Portney, Eichenberg, and Niemi 2009). The overwhelming consensus is that civil society is a major factor for deepening democracy in America.

A number of researchers suggest that there has been a decline in organizational involvement, which has severe implications for democratic citizenship and political health (Putnam 2000; Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Skocpol 2003; Stolle and Hooghe 2005). According to political scientist Robert

Putnam, membership records of organizations like the PTA, Elks Club, League of Women Voters, Red Cross, labor unions, and bowling leagues, show that involvement in these voluntary associations has declined by 25 to 50 percent over the last three decades (Putnam 2002). This steep decline in organizational life is in large part due to societal transformations of postindustrial economies and technological shifts that leave Americans isolated from their families, neighbors, and communities. Putnam and others have also attributed this decline to changing gender dynamics and increased diversity in the United States, the decline in social structures having coincided with the increasing number of first- and second-generation immigrants from Latin American and Asian countries (Costa and Kahn 2002; Putnam 2003). This observation is seemingly supported by studies that find new immigrants from those countries tend to have significantly lower rates of participation due to apathy, cultural barriers, lack of assimilation, and preoccupation with homeland politics (Skerry 1993; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Pachon 1998; Citrin and Higton 2002; Lien 2004; Ong and Nakanishi 1996; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Barreto, Nuno, and Sanchez 2009). However, others have argued that linking decline in civic participation to immigration is misleading due to inaccurate measures of participation that fail to take into account the lived experiences of immigrants (Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2006). Rather than participate in traditional membership organizations and associations, new immigrants from Latin America or Asia might choose to participate in politics differently and hold different conceptions of what civic participation involves in their own communities.

Historically, new immigrants to the United States have had a long and rich history of civic involvement from labor organizing on farmlands and in garment factories to supporting the anti-war movement. In fact immigrants from Latin America and Asia have consistently been at the forefront of ethnic advocacy organizations, worker centers, labor unions, and religious institutions, challenging the narrative that they do not contribute to the growth of civic society (Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Pulido 2005; Wong 2006; Lee, Ramakrishnan, and Ramirez 2006; Narro, Milkman, and Bloom 2010;

Milkman 2014; Das Gupta 2007; Liu, Geron, and Lai 2008; Terriquez 2017). Given that traditional institutions like political parties have failed to actively incorporate immigrants into mainstream political processes, many have chosen to become involved in community organizations that address the issues closest to their daily lives such as housing, employment, health, social services, education, and immigration (Jones-Correa 1998; Rogers 2000; Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001; Ramirez 2005; Lee, Ramakrishnan, and Ramirez 2006; Lien, Wong, and Conway 2006). Many of these community organizations center grassroots development which provides opportunities for immigrants to engage in the public arena while at the same time cultivate important transferable skills like public speaking, collective decision making, organizing group meetings, and using social media (Jones-Correa 1998; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008; Han 2014). In *How Organizations Develop Activists,* Hahrie Han distinguishes between membership associations and grassroots organizations to suggest that the latter takes on the "transformational work of building democratic citizenship" by cultivating political interests, growing relationships, and developing leadership skills. In addition to acquiring civic skills, knowledge, and interests, involvement in grassroots organizations can lead to heightened levels of linked fate or group consciousness, political efficacy, social capital, and interpersonal trust, which are important determinants of participation in formal politics down the line (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Masuoka 2006; Habal 2007; Liu, Geron, and Lai 2008; DeSipio 2011; Chin 2015). For example in their research, political scientist Janelle Wong and sociologist Monisha Das Gupta find that Mexican, Chinese, and South Asian immigrant grassroots organizations are able to create innovative spaces for collective political learning and deliberative decision making around issues like immigration, housing, and gender violence (Wong 2006; Das Gupta 2006; Das Gupta 2014). My experiences of working with low-income tenants in New York's Chinatown support these findings and reveal the continued influence of grassroots organizations on the political lives of immigrants.

Chinatowns in the United States have historically been a vibrant hub for civic volunteerism and grassroots activism. As Michael Liu, Kim Geron, and Tracy Lai document in *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power,* there is a long history of progressive grassroots political organizing in Chinatowns across the country including the Red Guard Party, Kalayaan, and Kearny Street Workshop in San Francisco, New Youth Center in Chicago, East Wind Collective in Los Angeles, and Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance, Basement Workshop, Godzilla, and I Wor Kuen in New York City. These organizations were created not only for Chinese Americans but for Asian Americans more generally to define their political existence in the United States. In the late 1970s, a diverse group of New York City students, activists, workers, and residents inspired by the Black Panther Party Survival Programs formed I Wor Kuen (IWK), a leftist organization in New York's Chinatown that protested poor housing conditions, provided free child care programs, conducted door-to-door tuberculosis testing, and held free political education classes. In addition to improving material conditions for neighborhood residents, IWK organized the Asian American community in New York City around global issues of western imperialism, capitalism, racism, and police brutality (Hsiao 2998; Chin 1971). In the Bay Area around the same time, the Red Guard Party formed in San Francisco's Chinatown to fight for better housing conditions and against the displacement of residents from urban renewal. Their membership consisted of radical Chinese American youth who saw their own plight as intimately connected to the deteriorating social conditions in the city that involved crime and police violence (Maeda 2005; Maeda 2012). The Red Guard Party fought to raise the political consciousness of Chinatown residents through weekly study groups, revolutionary film screenings, and grassroots campaigns to prevent urban displacement including efforts to save the I-Hotel from demolition (Habal 2004; Yamashita 2014). Their slogan "Serve the People" which was inspired by a 1944 Mao Zedong speech on political organizing from the ground up set the stage for other grassroots organizations that emerged in Chinatowns across the country in the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1986, the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence or CAAAV was founded by Monona Yin and Mini Liu in New York's Chinatown in direct response to the anti-Asian violence that was happening across the country, including the murder of Vincent Chin in 1982.[79] CAAAV is a pan Asian organization that works to build the grassroots power of low-income Asian immigrants and refugees in the city (Kelley 2001; Tang 2015). The group later changed its formal name to CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities to broaden the scope of their political organizing work to focus on a wide range of systemic issues including racial justice, police violence, poverty, worker exploitation, language access, gentrification, and deportation.[80] CAAAV's organizing model centers on five pillars: base building, leadership development, direct action campaigns, alliance building, and organizational development. Throughout the decades, CAAAV has incubated projects that later became their own organizations including Domestic Workers United, New York City Taxi Workers Alliance, Street Vendor Project, and Mekong. In the early 1990s, CAAAV was the first and only organization in the city to advocate for the rights of street vendors who were targeted during former Mayor Rudy Giuliani's Quality of Life administration. In the mid 1990s, CAAAV lead a Justice for Yong Xin Huang campaign for police accountability, Huang was a sixteen-year-old Chinese teenager who was shot and killed by Officer Steven Mizrahi in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. In the late 1990s, CAAAV's Youth Leadership Project organized the large Southeast Asian refugee community in the Northeast Bronx around the failed Welfare to Workfare programs. Over the decades, CAAAV has organized hundreds of low-wage workers including Filipina domestic workers and Asian women who worked in garment

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[79] Vincent Chin was a Chinese American man who was severely beaten to death in Detroit, Michigan in June 1982 by two white autoworkers Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz. Ebens and Nitz blamed Chin for the growing troubles that the U.S. auto industry faced due to the presence of Japanese auto manufacturers. Chin's death brought Asian Americans together from across the country to organize for justice. Helen Zia's *Asian American Dreams* provides a detailed account.

[80] *The Voice,* which was CAAAV's public newsletter published between 1989 to 2008 chronicled the specific campaigns and organizing efforts that addressed local, national, and international struggles against racism and state violence. The newsletters have been digitized and are accessible on their website.

factories or nail salon.[81] CAAAV's most recent work includes organizing tenants against gentrification induced displacement, taking part in citywide coalitions to make language accessible to Asian immigrants in public housing, and pushing for a community-led rezoning plan of Chinatown. The organization has a membership base of over 300 individuals and a support base of over 3,000 people in New York City alone.

I was already familiar with CAAAV's work when I began this project because growing up in the New York City I had friends who were involved with their Youth Leadership Program. I had also worked with CAAAV on their Justice for Akai Gurley police accountability campaign when I was the social media organizer for 18 Million Rising.[82] On November 20, 2014, a Black man named Akai Gurley was shot and killed by Chinese American Officer Peter Liang in Brooklyn Pink Houses. The case divided the Chinatown community between those who wanted the police officer to be held accountable and those who felt that the officer was treated as a scapegoat. CAAAV was the only organization in New York's Chinatown who pressured the city for police accountability and for broader racial justice in support of the family of Akai Gurley. In the months that followed I worked closely with CAAAV to discuss matters of police accountability with their tenant base and also organized a panel dialogue titled "Mutual Accountability, Mutual Liberation: A Conversation on Asians4BlackLives." It was during this time that I began to volunteer with CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union (CTU) on their housing justice campaigns and worked closely with their lead tenant organizers Wai Yee Poon, Carol Li, and Ms. Zheng. As a volunteer I conducted door-to-door tenant outreach every Monday and Thursday in tenement buildings around Chinatown to see if Chinese

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[81] Much of this organizational information was collected from visits to CAAAV's archives located in their office on 55 Hester Street.

[82] 18 Million Rising is a digital grassroots organization that addresses Asian American issues through online media campaigns. As a social media organizer, I coordinated local and nationwide campaigns related to civic engagement, media representation, workers rights, detention and deportation, and Islamophobia, in collaboration with core partners like Black Youth Project 100, Center for Media Justice, Desis Rising Up and Moving, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, Color of Change, Presente, Mijente, and CAAAV.

tenants had heat, water, gas, and basic repairs. I helped to meticulously document which tenants and in what buildings were experiencing a lack of repairs, landlord harassment, or eviction threats. I also acted as a language interpreter for the monthly CTU tenant meetings and the legal clinics afterwards. The legal clinics were free and usually lasted two hours, tenants would wait in the CAAAV office to speak to one of three attorneys about their housing concerns. Most of the time the tenants would bring with them stacks of eviction notices, personal documents, and landlord letters collected from over the years. As a volunteer interpreter I would sit through the legal clinics helping to translate the documents if needed and act as a communication bridge between the tenant and the attorney. On occasion I accompanied tenants to Manhattan Housing Court to help interpret for those who were facing eviction but did not speak English. Through my work with CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union over the span of three years, I was able to build relationships with tenants like David and his mother who had reached out to the organization for support when the constructive harassment in their building became unbearable.

1.2 Predatory Equity, Landlord Harassment, and 90 Elizabeth Street Tenants

On September 10, 2015, four tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street filed a joint lawsuit in New York City Housing Court against their landlord. That morning in collaboration with CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union, Asian Americans for Equality, University Settlement, Cooper Square Committee, and MFY Legal Services, David along with other tenants held a press conference at the entrance of their building. Their landlord James Fong owns multiple buildings in Chinatown, he purchased 90 Elizabeth Street for $6.5 million in 2015 from Marolda Properties which purchased it in 2013 from the Wenzhou Association which had owned the building since 1987. Marolda Properties improperly deregulated six rent regulated units before selling the building a year later to James Fong for three million dollars over its purchase price. This practice is known as predatory equity, where banks make speculative loans to landlords who buy buildings in poor neighborhoods but do not maintain them. Predatory equity leads

to tenant harassment because there is an incentive for landlords to evict and convert rent regulated units into market rate units for profit. After James Fong took over the 90 Elizabeth Street building, living conditions became much worse for existing residents. He used dangerous demolition tactics and construction work that compromised the structural integrity of the entire building and caused toxic dust to enter homes, resulting in serious health complications and breathing issues for residents. The Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force[83] confirmed unlivable conditions after they conducted a surprise building-wide sweep in July of 2015, which resulted in a Stop Work Order[84] and multiple Department of Housing Preservation and Development[85] (HPD) violations. The 22 unit tenement building had 69 open housing violations including 51 that were classified by the Department of Buildings (DOB) as "hazardous" or "immediately hazardous."[86] According to HPD complaint records, within a single year the tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street had made over two hundred 311 calls to the department ranging from the landlord doing hazardous construction work without a permit to having no heat, hot water, or basic repairs. In more than three dozen of these complaints, tenants accused James Fong of deliberately obstructing hallways, stairwells, and fire escapes, and refusing to make necessary repairs on collapsing ceilings.

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83 The Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force is a city government program created under Mayor de Blasio to provide legal assistance for low-income tenants who are being harassed by their landlords, many who are taking advantage of zoning changes and using various other tactics to get rid of tenants.

84 The New York City Department of Building enforces building codes and zoning regulations, issues building permits, licenses, inspects new and old buildings, responds to structural emergencies, and has the authority to vacate entire buildings. The department issues Stop Work Orders when building inspectors determine that the work is in violation of the construction codes, zoning resolution, or considered to be unsafe. Once a Stop Work Order is issued no work may continue at the side until the Department of Buildings issues an order to rescind.

85 The New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development is responsible for developing, maintaining, and preserving the affordable housing stock in the city. Housing Preservation and Development issues violations, conducts emergency repair work if a property owner fails to do so, and collects 311 complaints from tenants who call in with housing issues.

86 The New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development's Enforcement of the Housing Maintenance Code identifies three classes of housing code violations. Class "A" is non-hazardous and involves no peephole in the entrance, no street number on the front of the building, and other minor violations. Class "B" is hazardous and involves inadequate lighting in public halls or stairwells, and no approved smoke detector. Class "C" is immediately hazardous and involves inadequate heat and hot water, rodents, peeling lead paint in units where children live, broken or defective plumbing, and defective plaster.

After having their heat turned off over Thanksgiving weekend, the tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street held a second press conference in December of 2015 to demand James Fong provide basic building services and to stop unsafe construction work. In order to paint a visual illustration of how horrible their living conditions were, allies from other tenant organizations wore Hazmat gear to the demonstration in solidarity. For Betty Eng, a 44 year old lifelong resident of 90 Elizabeth Street, her living condition had deteriorated to the point of no return, she expressed in her statement to the crowd of media: "In my apartment there is a toilet in my living room because James tore it out of my bathroom. There is a hole under the kitchen sink with pipes exposed and the main drain pipe is disconnected. In order to have water to cook with, it has to be carried over from the bathroom sink where there is a drainage problem and a huge crack in the ceiling which looks like it will fall down at any moment. The toilet has been in my living room since July. The workmen said they would finish repairs all the while trying to get me to accept a lowball buyout offer. No one should live with a torn-up kitchen, toilet in the living room, and collapsing ceilings in every room. My life counts, not just the lives of these rich landlords whose only goal is to evict the rent-regulated tenants so that we can be replaced by market priced units."[87] Tomasa Davila, a 72 year old Puerto Rico native and longtime resident of the building, shared similar accounts in her statement through a language interpreter: "We live as if we were animals. The owner fixes the empty units, while the apartment units of those like me and low-income neighbors are not fixed as the law mandates. The heat was shut off on Thanksgiving. My apartment felt like a refrigerator."[88] David Tang spoke briefly on behalf of his mother about their experiences: "For more than ten years, my bathroom did not have enough water pressure for us to take showers, we would take sponge baths instead. The apartment was so cold sometimes that we had to sleep in our outside coats and jackets."[89] As tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street

[87] Betty Eng. 90 Elizabeth Street Press Conference. December 10, 2015.
[88] Tomasa Davila. 90 Elizabeth Street Press Conference. December 10, 2015.
[89] David Tang. 90 Elizabeth Street Press Conference. December 10, 2015.

spoke out against their landlord in public testimonies, CAAAV staff members, housing advocacy groups, and tenants from all over the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Harlem came out in support of the demonstration.

David Tang stood closest to the entrance of their front door holding a sign that he made the night before that read in bold letters: “All we want for Christmas is garbage clean up, repairs, no toxic dust, and a safety plan.” Of the many problems in the building, two immediate concerns for David and Maria were the structural integrity of the entire building, David told me in a separate conversation: “The Wenzhou Association and Marolda Properties before James Fong never replaced the ceiling beams, all they did was cover it up. The ceiling beams are all corroded. Would you walk on a bridge with no middle span? That is what our floor looks like now. This paint is more than a hundred years old. Twenty layers of paint. The paint is so thick, it looks like a giant piece of cookie when it falls off.”[90] Recognizing the high profile nature of this case, there were several elected officials who came out to support the 90 Elizabeth Street tenants at the second press conference, including District 1 City Council Member Margaret Chin who asserted: “Mr. Fong has repeatedly broken the law, putting the health and safety of his tenants at risk, and engaging in deplorable acts of tenant harassment. Through the guise of construction, this landlord has attempted to drive rent stabilized and rent controlled tenants from their homes. I will continue to work to empower city officials to hold landlords like Mr. Fong accountable for their actions, and to protect residents from all forms of harassment.”[91] Other public officials who came out in support of the tenants were Manhattan Borough President Gail Brewer, State Senator Daniel Squadron, and Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez. Directly after the press conference, the tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street joined by CAAAV and the Stabilizing New York City coalition, comprised of community groups and city-wide affordable housing advocates, led a

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[90] David Tang. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. November 4, 2015

[91] Margaret Chin 90 Elizabeth Street Press Conference. December 10, 2015

march to City Hall to publicize their support for a package of twelve bills that would come before the City Council later that week. The proposed bills would bring comprehensive change to tenant protection laws and provide the Department of Buildings with tools to better address predatory equity and to prevent landlords from further taking advantage of rent regulated tenants.

What David, Maria, Betty, Tomasa, and the other tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street experienced over the course of five years is reflective of what many low-income and rent regulated tenants in the city live through on a regular basis. The waning garment industry in New York's Chinatown which once employed thousands of immigrants and the rising cost of real estate has meant that poorer residents can no longer afford to stay and must move out to the satellite neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, or outside of the city altogether. Many of the garment factories have since been converted into million-dollar apartments or luxury hotels[92] and predatory equity landlords like James Fong have purchased tenement buildings with a large number of rent regulated units to clear out those who are most vulnerable for profit. David has seen landlords target specific buildings in Chinatown based on this knowledge: "Landlords are buying entire buildings on Forsyth, Ludlow, Eldridge, and Allen Streets because they know more than half of the residents who live there are seniors or not yet citizens. Predatory landlords make money off the fact that residents in Chinatown are vulnerable and can be easily pushed out to make way for wealthier renters."[93] The practices of predatory equity landlords disproportionately impact New York City's most vulnerable residents — 80 percent of impacted residents are people of color, 60 percent are women, and 46 percent have an annual household income of less than $25,000 (Urban Justice League 2017). In Chinatown, women, children, and the elderly population are most at risk when it comes to landlord harassment because of language

[92] According to the Hotel Trades Council (HTC), the Lower East Side and Chinatown is the hardest hit by hotel development than any other neighborhoods in New York City. The group that represents hotel and motel workers in the city has argued that these new developments kill both union jobs and affordable housing.
[93] David Tang. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. November 4, 2015.

barriers and increasingly high levels of poverty. Nearly 40 percent of children live in poverty while 71 percent of elderly residents in Chinatown speak a language other than English and 39 percent of the elderly population live in poverty (Asian American Federation of New York 2018). To contextualize these numbers, there were a total of eviction cases filed in the 90 Elizabeth Street building between January 2013 and June 2015, all of the tenants who eventually left were 65 years of age or older.

In addition to taking advantage of vulnerable residents, predatory landlords like James Fong, Marolda Properties, and Steve Croman are using a wide variety of tactics to force out rent regulated tenants. From conducting weekly door-to-door tenant outreach with CAAAV's CTU, I learned that hazardous construction was one of the primary harassment tactics used by landlords. According to a survey conducted by Stand for Tenant Safety of residents in buildings with construction work being done, 52 percent of those surveyed considered leaving their apartments because of construction and 71 percent reported that construction was a threat to their personal safety (Stand for Tenant Safety Coalition 2015). Anita Wu, an attorney with MFY Legal Services and who worked with 90 Elizabeth Street tenants, identifies landlord harassment to be systematic and pervasive: "Things like turning off the hot water, taking away heat in the winter, or turning off the sole elevator service without any notice. It is really the landlords trying to bring a baseless case, hoping that the tenant who doesn't speak English or who may not be able to afford an attorney will fold over and say "Okay I'll just move."[94] There have been instances of frustrated landlords who have used verbal and physical intimidation or have hired relocation agents to scare tenants out of their apartments. Some landlords give misinformation on succession rights or stop accepting rent payments to purposefully take tenants to court for nonpayment and rent delinquency. As a result of these harassment tactics coupled with city government policies and loopholes, thousands of families have been uprooted from their homes and fewer rent controlled units are now available in New York City. In the 1970s there were 1 million

[94] Anita Wu. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 6, 2016

rent controlled apartments in the city but by 2014 that number has shrunk to 27,000 units or less than 1 percent of the total housing stock.[95] [96] Twenty years ago all of the units in 90 Elizabeth Street were rent controlled, there are only two units in the building that are still under rent control.[97]

Predatory equity and landlord harassment as consequences of gentrification have taken a toll on the time, resources, energy, and physical health of residents. Most landlords have the resources to take multiple tenants to court for weeks, months, or even years, but for tenants who are poor and limited English proficient, the idea of going through an unfamiliar political process is frightening and many would rather leave their homes to avoid it altogether. Beginning with their previous landlord Marolda Properties, Betty remembered how she was taken to court every couple of weeks for minor reasons: "Each court session lasts a couple hours. I have several ongoing cases right now, but I have been in court for one case close to three years now. It is a drain on you mentally, physically — and timewise, it is exhausting. Every time I go to court, I have to take time off work. I had to leave one job because of that. I couldn't do both. You cannot work twelve hour days without a break and be in court at the same time."[98] Betty also recounted the exorbitant number of hours it took for her to gather all of the paperwork in preparation for court: "You lose track of the hours. You lose track of the hours within the first month and it's been for years for me. Is it hard to go to court? Yes. Do I want to go to court? No. But do I need to go to court? Yes. I had to gather a lot of original paperwork. There is no privacy for the person who is being sued. The court wanted to see my birth certificate, my

[95] In 2016 the New York State Tenant Protection Unit (TPU) found 50,000 units across the city had been illegally deregulated and were subsequently returned to its former stabilized rate. The TPU was created in 2011 and monitors landlord misconduct. One of TPU's projects is the Rent Registration Initiative which tracks when apartments previously registered as stabilized disappear from the New York Homes and Community Renewal's registry of regulated units.
[96] This information is collected from the New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey (NYCHVS), which is sponsored by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, is conducted every 3 years to comply with New York state and New York City's rent regulation laws.
[97] Buildings that are rent regulated can have both rent controlled and rent stabilized apartment units. Rent controlled units are only found in buildings that were built before 1947 and have been occupied or passed down by the same family since 1971. Rent stabilized units are found in buildings of six or more units constructed before 1974. The rent guidelines board keeps a thorough list of rent stabilized buildings in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx, and Staten Island on their website.
[98] Betty Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 3, 2016.

passport, my voter registration records, my bank statements, my elementary school, my hospital bills, my tax returns, my junior high school, my high school, and my college transcripts, my everything. The court took over my life."[99] In addition to the time Betty took off from work to appear in court and to gather court documents, she suffered from health complications due to the improper removal of lead and asbestos in her apartment. In one of our conversations, Betty told me about her deteriorating health after Marolda Properties took over: "I had insomnia for most of my life but it was never this bad. When I was taken to court, all of the sudden I developed a cough and tick in one of my shoulders. For six months I was constantly in pain, my shoulder would twitch uncontrollably, and I became tense from anxiety. Even when I was in pain I still had to go to housing court."[100] These health problems are compounded by the fact that Chinatown residents already have one of the highest asthma rates in the city due to congestion and toxic debris from the World Trade Center collapse in 2001.

Other tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street discussed the financial burdens to have to deal with a string of predatory landlords one after the other. Ms. Song, who is originally from Wenzhou but has lived in Chinatown since the mid-1980s, told me that when Marolda Properties took over the building they changed all the locks without notice: "Instead of the regular metal keys, they changed it to electronic keys. They asked each of us to pay $100 for a pair of those electric keys. That is a lot of money for me but I had to agree and buy them, if I don't how would I get home? After I bought the keys, they told us that they were raising the rent to $1,000. The landlord has been raising our rent for renovations that do not benefit our lives. For us the building is becoming worse and worse, he never takes care of things we need like clogging, leaking, and heat."[101] Predatory equity landlords like James Fong often force tenants out of their homes by adding non-rent fees to monthly rent bills. In New York City, when a landlord make improvements to a building they are able increase the rent for all

[99] Betty Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 3, 2016.
[100] Betty Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 3, 2016.
[101] Ms.Song. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. December 20, 2015.

units based on the verified costs of the renovations if they qualify for Major Capital Improvement (MCI) abatement.[102] Many predatory landlords have used MCI to permanently increase the rents of rent regulated units, with the intent to raise the rent over the rent vacancy deregulation threshold of $2,700 so that the unit can be listed as market rate once it becomes vacant.[103] Nearly 23 percent of rent stabilized residents report being charged for MCI, 57 percent have had their rent increase in the past two years despite a citywide rent freeze, 38 percent report being charged arbitrary late fees, and 17 percent of residents report being charged for air conditioning fees (Urban Justice Center 2017). David told me that he spent a large amount of his own savings on transportation to and from the courthouse for his mother: "See my mom, has she to be in a wheelchair. On the first day we went to court, it was raining. Oh it was horrible. I had to get my mom door to door. I had to call a car to pick us up and drop her back home every time we went to court. I remember the fourth time we went to court, it was raining again. How come rain always comes on our court date? Each way costs me $20 so imagine how many times we had to go to court. I spent $200 on transportation alone."[104] In addition, David used his own money to prepare materials for press interviews: "I had to print out dozens of photos, create photo albums, buy poster backing, and other things. The total came out to $1,400. I went to Staples with Betty, she saw how much everything cost. $200 this time, $1,200 last time, $1,400 out into the air."[105] David's experience is not unique in that the majority of poor renting households spend more than half of their monthly income on housing costs and fighting eviction. Given the centrality of time, resources, money, and knowledge on shaping political participation, the current scholarship would lead us to believe that tenants like David and Betty are among the least

[102] MCIs are permanent rent increases that a landlord can add to the rent when they spend money on building wide improvements such as new windows, roofs, boilers, intercom. Most tenants are unaware of their rights regarding MCI increases and what the rent add on limit is.
[103] In New York City, a rent stabilized apartment is able to undergo high rent deregulation if it reaches the threshold. The rent threshold for high rent vacancy deregulation is currently at $2,700 and is adjusted annually based on the one year renewal lease guidelines determined by the Rent Guidelines Board.
[104] David Tang. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 14, 2016.
[105] David Tang. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 14, 2016.

active in American politics and also least likely to shape public policies (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 1995). However, a closer look reveals that these tenants with the support of grassroots groups like CAAAV are on the front lines in the battle against predatory equity, landlord harassment, and unfair housing policies that place working-class residents at risk. I illustrate how the tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street are active in politics by taking their landlord to court, forming a tenant's association, and pursuing direct action campaigns.

1.3 Taking HP Action and Navigating the Manhattan Housing Court

In September of 2015, five tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street filed a joint HP case against their landlord in Manhattan Housing Court. New York City Housing Court was established in 1973 and is the largest court system in the nation, with courthouses in all five boroughs and community courts in Harlem and Red Hook. The fifty judges who are appointed to the bench each for 5 year terms have presided an average of 350,000 filings a year for the past twenty years. According to the Office of Civil Justice, all cases in New York City Housing Court usually fall into one of three categories: non-payment, holdover, and housing part (HP) proceedings. Non-payment petitions are initiated by the landlord when the tenant owes rent. Holdover petitions are also initiated by the landlord when the tenant is alleged to be in violation of the lease for reasons other than non-payment of rent or is alleged to occupy space even after the expiration of a lease. Both non-payment and holdover proceedings account for over 96 percent of housing court cases and can eventually lead to a warrant of eviction issued by the court. By contrast, HP proceedings are initiated by a tenant or a group of tenants to obtain repairs or other corrections to building violations. The New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) can also file HP cases against landlords. The vast majority of housing cases are initiated by landlords and few are HP actions initiated by tenants. For example, in 2015, 22,000 households were evicted in the city across five boroughs — 232,000 tenants were sued in court by their landlords for holdover or nonpayment of rent and 30,000 tenants were sued for

eviction for other reasons. That same year there were only 6,802 tenant-initiated HP actions — 5,951 HP cases were initiated by HPD against landlords for outstanding repairs and 860 HP cases for harassment. In New York City the odds of tenants taking their landlord to court in an HP case and winning is less than 2 percent. There have been only 45 tenant HP actions filed in housing court since 2014 that resulted in a finding of harassment against a landlord.[106] In a city when one out of ten renters are taken to housing court by their landlords, the court system has become oversaturated with eviction cases and overburdened with eviction bureaucracy.

A critical part of CAAAV's anti-displacement work in New York's Chinatown is centered around alliance building and the leadership development of individual tenants that so they have the resources and knowledge to take predatory landlords to court through HP cases. CAAAV is a core member of the Stabilizing NYC (SNYC) coalition which includes sixteen grassroots organizations, a citywide legal service provider, and a citywide housing advocacy group. The SNYC coalition is unique in that it combines legal, advocacy, and organizing resources into a citywide network to combat systematic tenant harassment and predatory equity. Their coalition members come from the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, and include longtime grassroots organizations like Banana Kelley, Mothers on the Move, Community Action for Safe Apartments, Flatbush Tenant Coalition, Good Old Lower East Side, Cooper Square Committee, Chhaya CDC, Fifth Avenue Committee, Woodside on the Move, and the Urban Justice Center. CAAAV has worked closely with the SNYC network to organize and educate Chinatown tenants to collectively bring HP and harassment cases against some of the worst landlords in the city.[107] For the tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street, the process of filing an HP

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[106] In May of 2014, Mayor Bill de Blasio launched Housing New York, a comprehensive plan to build and preserve 200,000 affordable housing in the span of ten years. As part of this plan, the city has begun to collect data on the number of evictions in order to measure progress. Each year the HPD tracks the number and type of housing cases there are in the city. More data: http://ww2.nycourts.gov/sites/default/files/document/files/2018-06/housingreport2018_0.pdf.

[107] Stabilizing NYC has a list of target landlords who have bought buildings in multiple neighborhoods citywide and have systematically tried to harass and evict low-income tenants from their homes. The list can be found on their website.

case against their landlord was an uphill battle and lasted two years from start to finish. The process began with began when Wai Yee Poon, who was the lead tenant organizer with CAAAV's CTU, reached out to the tenants individually in October 2014. It took five consistent months of tenant outreach sessions for Wai Yee to get tenants in the building to come together to discuss their collective housing conditions. Since most of the tenants in the building spoke different languages and work long hours often through the weekends, it took another several months of political education trainings and one-on-one meetings with to determine whether or not an HP case would be possible.

Before the 90 Elizabeth Street tenants officially filed their HP case in September 2015, an attorney from MFY Legal Services was brought into a series of meetings to discuss the logistics of legal action and to figure out what each tenant wanted to get from the process. Since CAAAV does not have staff attorneys, the organization works closely with MFY Legal Services, which offers free legal assistance to low-income New Yorkers in the city to help preserve affordable housing. Most of the meetings were held in the evenings at CAAAV's office on Hester Street and each began with building updates. In the first meeting with the attorney, David, Maria, and Betty came together to draft a joint letter to James Fong that included a list of their immediate demands: 1) to reduce the construction noise, debris, and duration 2) to ensure that there is hot water and gas in all units and 3) to stop tenant harassment. When James Fong failed to respond to their letter in the timespan he was given, another meeting was called to discuss how the collective felt about taking legal action in the form of a HP case. When everyone agreed to proceed with legal action, Wai Yee reminded all the tenants to continue calling 311 in order to have their complaints on record in preparation for the HP case. Wai Yee then asked Betty and David to speak about their experiences with 311 since Tomasa expressed ambivalence towards 311 and how calling them won't do anything to help tenants, Betty explained: "So 311 allows us to contact the city about things that affect our lives. You can call 311 for everything from traffic signals to street conditions to school closures but I only call to record my

apartment situation. When James Fong moved each of our mailboxes to the post office because of construction I complained to 311 because it was inconvenient for me to walk twenty minutes just to get mail — and it was even harder for seniors in the building. I also called 311 about the temperature changes. Every day I keep a log of the temperature inside my apartment. It was different every day, one day it was an icebox and the next day it was a sauna. Wai Yee told me to record the temperature every day and call 311 to keep it on record. When James Fong took me to court three months ago, I used these records to support my case. David has been calling 311 about the construction. We have to call 311 to record what happens in our building because otherwise it's like it never happened." Although some scholars caution interpreting 311 as a measure of political participation since it does not directly influence voter turnout or political donations (White and Trump 2017), it is evident that for working-class immigrants in Chinatown the act of calling 311 is of itself an important exercise of democratic citizenship since the information remains on city record for later use. Wai Yee handed a sample script of what to expect when 311 is called and explained to Tomasa when during the automated message to say "Spanish please" for a translator. The tenants decided at their end of the meeting to establish a tenant's association in their building in efforts to recruit more tenants to be part of their HP case. The group unanimously voted for David to be the leader of the tenant association since he was already most active in CAAAV. After these conversations, the following meetings that followed were aimed at developing a comprehensive plan to expand the tenant association, prepare for press conferences, and build alliances with tenants in other parts of the city through the Stabilizing New York City network. These late-night meetings continued until the end of the year when the court proceedings began in October of 2015.

The time it took for CAAAV to organize the tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street was much longer than the actual case itself. After three court dates in which two resulted in adjournment, a settlement was reached between the tenants and James Fong on December 18, 2015. The settlement came after

two days of intense back and forth hallway negotiations. The housing court hallways are crowded by noon and filled with mothers with their children and tenants who are either arguing loudly or sitting on the benches sifting through dozens of documents. In Manhattan Housing Court, over 95 percent of lawsuits are settled in what is known as the "halls of justice" or what David more accurately calls "halls of doom" instead of actual courtrooms. During the two days of hallway negotiations, tenants with the support of CAAAV language interpreters met with James Fong and his attorney to go over a list of demands and agreements. Betty remembers how challenging these conversations were even when language interpreters were present: "The fact that you have to mobilize everyone across the language spectrum takes time and it creates a big headache. Trying to communicate was a process because there were always four translations going on at the same time for Cantonese, Mandarin, Spanish, and English. We had to make sure that we were on the same page as a group but also that James Fong understood our demands."[108] Although New York City Housing Court requires language interpreters be available for non-English speaking litigants, there are sometimes inconsistencies with compliance of language access requirements across courthouses and not enough interpreters for the cases that are settled in the hallways outside the courtroom.[109] The tenants reached a settlement with their landlord to repair all open building violations and to stop harassment in all its forms. The five tenants who filed the HP case also won structural renovations to their individual apartment units as part of their negotiations. This outcome largely resulted from the time and effort that the tenants put into the process and from the work that Wai Yee put into ensuring adequate language and legal resources. In the New York City Housing Court system, it is extraordinarily difficult for tenants to take on landlords alone without organizational support. This is especially true for low-income and

[108] Betty Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 3, 2016.
[109] For a comprehensive report on the prevailing standards and challenges to language access for Asian American communities in court see the 2 "Interpreting Justice Report: Progress and Challenges on Language Access" published in 2017 by the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association.

non-English speaking tenants who do not have attorneys to advocate for their needs in the hallway negotiation processes. In 2014, the Chief Judge's Task Force to Expand Access to Civil Legal Services compiled statements from housing court judges across five boroughs on barriers that tenants face when it comes to legal assistance and representation. The task force found that from a total of 273,216 housing cases in one year, less than 1 percent of tenants had lawyers as compared to 95 percent of landlords who had legal representation (Lippman 2015). In another study conducted by the Office of Civil Justice, Office of Evaluation and Research, and Department of Social Services, housing court clerks across five boroughs reported that out of 593 cases in which tenants appeared in court in a single year, 70 percent of them involved tenants who were self-represented and had not received any advice from a lawyer prior to court (Human Resources Administration 2016). In New York's Chinatown, grassroots organizations like CAAAV play a critical role in leveling this systemic imbalance and bureaucratic chaos by helping tenants navigate court process and by developing the leadership capacity of tenants to manage their own building campaigns through tenant associations.

1.4 The Formation and Role of Tenant Associations in New York's Chinatown

When I saw David several weeks after the court settlement at one of the monthly CAAAV CTU meetings, he handed me a green badge that he made with letters that read "advocate" under my photo. I asked him what the badge was for and he explained that he wanted to make sure that everyone knew about the team of people who were part of the HP action. I thanked him and asked who else received a badge and he then told me about the other categories: "There are five categories, each is a different color. Yours is green. You are the advocate. Then we have lawyer. Then we have organizer. Then we have coordinators, which is us the building tenants and tenant association members. We are the middleman, the broker. Then we have the media. We need every category to make it work and to make it happen. I made these badges to let others know that we are doing something larger than

ourselves and to remind us that this battle not over."[110] This wasn't the first time I saw David create something for other tenants in his building or for CAAAV staff and volunteers like me, in the past he had taken on the task to put together photo albums, share tenant protection knowledge, design a banner for marches, and make posters for actions. One of the most significant roles of community organizations like CAAAV is to grow the leadership capacity of tenants who have limited resources and access to formal political institutions. Wai Yee Poon, who is the lead tenant organizer with CAAAV's CTU, explained that part of her role is to identify the skills that tenants like David already have and to develop those interests even further through one-on-one trainings or encouraging them to speak at workshops, skillshares, and conferences around the city. Wai Yee expressed how inspiring it was for her as the lead tenant organizer to see David take on the leadership role of forming the 90 Elizabeth Street Tenants Association: "I learned to never assume anything about anyone you meet, our tenants have skills and knowledge but they are too humble to tell us. 90 Elizabeth Street was a strong group of tenants. David is tech-savvy and Betty is a powerful public speaker. Ms. Song was a teacher in China so she writes really well. They helped me realize that organizing work should not come from a place of scarcity, and that it should come from a place of mutual learning and trust."[111] Wai Yee continued to explain that one way that CAAAV develops the leadership capacity and skills of individual tenants is through the formation of tenant associations.

The 90 Elizabeth Street Tenant Association was formally created in the spring of 2014 after months of door to door outreach and mobilization with the support of CAAAV volunteers like me. New York is a city of renters, this is especially true for New York's Chinatown where 94 percent of all residents rent their homes (Asian American Federation of New York 2013). Tenant associations play a critical role in solving immediate problems in buildings but also in improving the long-term

[110] David Tang. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview at CAAAV office. December 27, 2015.
[111] Wai Yee Poon Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. July 28, 2016.

living conditions for renters. The continued influence of tenant associations in the city can be traced back to a long history of tenant advocates and organizers who have relentlessly fought for better housing conditions. In the 1930s, tenant advocates in New York City shifted away from city-wide tenant associations to neighborhood-based tenant associations. That trend changed in the 1970s as building associations became more prevalent and a more effective means for individual tenants who were facing immediate problems with their landlords. Today tenant associations continue to bring together residents who live in the same building to resolve complaints, stop landlord harassment, upgrade services, and demand repairs. In working-class immigrant neighborhoods like New York's Chinatown, tenant associations build community, foster collective efficacy, and develop leadership abilities, which are all important determinants of participation in politics. Since the formation of the Chinatown Tenants Union in 2005, CAAAV has helped to establish over twenty tenant associations and many of them remain active in organizational base building activities including street outreach, door knocking, and new member recruitment. In the monthly CTU meetings, tenant leaders from the various tenants associations come together to share building updates, participate in skill shares, and strategize around ongoing direct action campaigns.

David told me that he had taken his housing situation to several community organizations in the neighborhood, but none were able to support his case. In one of our conversations Wai Yee explained what sets CAAAV apart from other Chinatown organizations: "We are unique because we have a left and radical analysis. To be a left organization in the Chinese community is not easy. We were the only group that would take on their case, that would do this kind of deep organizing work. When it comes to landlord harassment, telling tenants to call 311 is not enough. They need to learn the tools to protect themselves, that is where organizing comes in. My role as an organizer is to work on issues that immediately affect the people who live here and to expand people's political analyses so

they can advocate for themselves, their building, their community, and their city."[112] The majority of organizations in New York's Chinatown are social service organizations that help non-English speaking and elderly populations navigate the citizenship process or access government benefits, employment, healthcare, and other resources. The work that grassroots groups like CAAAV does is rooted in deep organizing which brings people together for the long term and fosters democratic participation. David recalled his very first encounter with CAAAV: "They knocked on my door and I said, "who the heck is knocking my door at 7 o'clock at night." I opened the door and I saw Wai Yee standing there with a clipboard. She asked me what was going with in the building and listened to what I had to say. She told me that I have rights as a tenant. That I have these options. I looked at her and said "Dammit, how come it took you so long to find me? You know how long I been waiting for someone to tell me where to go? I went somewhere else for help and all I got were pamphlets. What am I supposed to do with pamphlets?"[113] Shortly after David spoke to Wai Yee about his building conditions, he began to attend the monthly CTU meetings where he learned from other Chinatown tenants that his situation was not so different from theirs and the importance of tenant associations.

Although Betty was more politically active than David, her actions rarely extended beyond the ballot box. In one of our conversations she revealed that the reason she joined David in forming a tenants association was because of her family experiences with displacement: "My parents used to tell me about our old home in China but they said we can't ever go back. My father, after he got displaced from China was displaced again from Cuba. He was displaced some more when he got to New York until he settled in this building. It's been understood all my life that I can't go back home to China. I mean that's what you have to remember about immigrants. Many of us have nothing to go back to. We are fighting for something that is no longer there but we still fight on. What are they going to do

112 Wai Yee Poon Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. July 28, 2016.
113 David Tang. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 14, 2016.

to me? I have nothing to lose. But if I don't fight, then I have everything to lose."[114] The 90 Elizabeth Street Tenants Association currently has five active tenants but when it first started in December 2014 it was only David, Maria, and Betty. CAAAV assisted with recruitment but David recalled the difficulties he endured while conducting door-to-door outreach in the initial months: "At the beginning, it was only me and Betty. When I went around flyering and door knocking in the building the other tenants always said to me "I don't have time" or "I have to cook for my children" or "I have work." But I told them "You have a problem with your apartment and with our landlord right? If in the future you lose your apartment where will you live? Your home is most important, so you need to do what you can now to stay here later."[115] David recalled how he eventually came up with a tactic to creatively recruit others in the building to join the association: "I came up with a trick. I knew that everyone came home at about 7 o'clock at night and they have to pass through the first floor to go upstairs. So me and Wai Yee planned a series of "hallway meetings" during that time so every time someone walks in, they have no choice but to stop and listen. First time, we stopped half of them. They sat, listened, asked questions, but still didn't want to get involved. The second time we sat in the hallway on the staircase. We told them that there is a new tenants association. That it is supported by CAAAV and entrusted to a legal team. That they are going to represent us on our behalf no charge. That we have these kinds of rights as tenants. That we will be stronger if we come together."[116] In the months that followed, David and Betty were able to recruit several others in the building to eventually join the tenants association including Tomasa Davila and Ms. Song. Both had been living in the building for over two decades and endured similar forms of harassment from James Fong and their previous landlord Marolda Properties. To mark the official formation of the 90 Elizabeth Street

[114] Betty Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 3, 2016.
[115] David Tang. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 14, 2016.
[116] David Tang. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 14, 2016.

Tenants Association, the group of five worked with CAAAV staff to draft a letter to James Fong notifying him that one had been established and to expect legal action.

Over the course of eight months the tenants association worked with attorneys from MFY Legal Services to determine common issues and draft an agreeable HP case for an order to repair. It was challenging to recruit other tenants from the building to join the association for several reasons, but the most apparent one was an extreme distrust of authorities. Betty told me that her cousin who lives in the same building as she does refused to be part of the tenants association because of her fear of going to court: "My cousin called me a criminal for going to court. She thinks that only criminals go to court. I explained to her that the courts are different here than in China. I told her that tenants have a right to take their landlord to court, especially if they make our lives miserable. I asked David to talk to her. I even brought her to the monthly tenant meetings at CAAAV's office. I don't talk to her about that anymore. What is the use if she refuses to listen? I did what I could do to convince her."[117] Sam Lui, a housing attorney at MFY Legal Services who has worked with Chinese tenants in Los Angeles and New York expressed similar thoughts: "Chinese immigrants are paranoid about the authorities from the police to judges. They don't trust the authorities. I understand the paranoia. It comes from their experiences of living under a communist regime. If you start anything that involves the authority, people will get paranoid and think "Oh everybody will know that I was in trouble." They may import what they know from China to here and think "Oh if I go to housing court, I am going to get punished by the judge." They don't seem to understand, that is not how the government works. We engage in what I call community lawyering, I have to advocate and explain these things to Chinese tenants until they understand."[118] Some landlords have fueled this mistrust by telling tenants misinformation, Tomasa told me about one time where James Fong tried to prevent the association

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[117] Betty Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 3, 2016.
[118] Sam Lui. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. February 9, 2016..

from meeting: “We were having a meeting on the fourth floor outside my apartment door and he sent the super to interfere by telling us that we couldn’t meet in the building. The super told us that he would install hallway cameras to make sure we don’t break the law again. I told him that we have the right to organize and speak to each other. I said that if he gives us anymore trouble we would organize against him and report him until he no longer works here.”[119] In a conversation I had with Ms. Song over dinner, she shared with me one time when James Fong tried to intimidate her into taking a buyout offer: “When I came home from work he told me that I can’t go to court because I am not a citizen. He said that I should be careful because if I go to court I could lose my pubic assistance and end up on the tenant blacklist.[120] He said that I shouldn’t go through the trouble and tried to get me to sign off on a buyout offer. I got scared so I went into the office to ask Wai Yee, she told me that those were all lies he made up to scare me. I know he uses the same trick on other Chinese immigrants like me in the building so I already knocked on their doors and told them what they need to know. They say that people of same ethnic background should take care of each other. That is not true. James Fong is Chinese like me but I see him as the enemy now.” [121]Much of the organizing work that CAAAV does with their CTU tenant membership and tenant associations is to remove these misconceptions through “Know Your Rights” and political education trainings. The political education trainings that CAAAV provides for tenants like Ms. Song integrates a social justice framework which contextualizes gentrification as an intersectional issue that cannot be removed from conversations of class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and citizenship.

Even though there were hurdles along the way, the formal presence of a tenants association pressured James Fong to be more responsive. David saw changes right after they wrote him a letter

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[119] Tomasa Davila. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 10, 2016

[120] The tenant blacklist does in fact exist individual tenants can be blacklisted as a renter through tenancy databases in which landlords and agents report bad tenants. For instance, if a tenant withholds rent to compel their landlords to make repairs, the landlord can put that tenants name in the tenant blacklist system.

[121] Ms.Song. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. December 20, 2015.

about the tenants association: "You know ever since these meetings he treats us differently. He even gave us his cell phone number and told us to call him when we need anything. What does he think I will call him for? Hell no, I would rather be on the phone with 311 all day. Ever since we started this tenants association and became active with CAAAV, James Fong knows that he could end up on the worst landlord list."[122] Each year grassroots groups like CAAAV and Stabilizing NYC works with the city to compile the Public Advocate's Worst Landlord Watch List which includes more than a dozen of landlords in Chinatown who have collected hundreds of health and safety violations.[123] Having a tenants association also fostered a sense of collective efficacy and connectedness between tenants. Betty recalled how terrifying it was for her as an English speaker to navigate court for the first time alone, and how much harder it must be for tenants who can't speak or understand English: "I was scared to death of going to court and I know English. But you have people that are scared to death and are scared of their language barrier. I have no language barrier that gives me an advantage. Because I can actually go to court. They question my citizenship, they question my language abilities, they question whether I am my mother's child, they question everything. I can stand there and say "Yes I can provide my birth certificate" and "Yes I will submit myself to a DNA test."[124] The fact that I can say those things and know what they are saying to me is different than if I didn't speak English. Being in a tenant association helps tenants like Ms. Song who can't do it alone." When I asked Betty why she felt a sense of responsibility for others in her building, she expressed sentiments of what scholar Michael Dawson terms linked fate: "You saw that during the press conference and our march to City Hall right? You have people in Harlem, you have people in the Bronx, you have people in Queens who all face the same problem. I think sitting there all alone in the courtroom, scared out of my mind,

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122 David Tang. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 14, 2016.
123 You can find the Public Advocate's Worst Landlord Watch List on their government website. The list includes buildings owned by New York City's 100 worst landlords and are ranked according to the number of open violations issued to their properties by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development.
124 Betty Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. December 15, 2015.

gave me a lot of strength, and made me more determined that nobody else should go through what I had to. That's something I want the people in my building to know. You shouldn't have to go through that alone. If that ever happens to you, I'll be there. You don't have to go through this alone."[125] In a separate conversation David reiterated feeling collective efficacy and social connectedness as a primary reason for his continued participation in the tenants association: "You want to organize something for Chinatown? It has to be a group process. We need you, and you need us. As long as we get together to fight for a common cause, we will get farther than where we first started. Maybe the outcome won't be exactly what we want but if we keep at it together it will get better. If we don't then it is guaranteed that we will get nothing. We have to start from somewhere."[126] The 90 Elizabeth Street Tenants Association tenants have since continued to support CAAAV in their other building campaigns to fight predatory landlords and have taken an active role in shaping the direction of their direct action campaigns.

1.5 Direct Action Campaigns for Tenant Protections, Rent Freeze, and Rezoning

When I spoke to Cathy Dang, who is the Executive Director of CAAAV, she reiterated the importance of having the campaigns tenant driven: "It's working-class immigrants who lead the fight against gentrification here in Chinatown. We believe that their voices need to be at the forefront. What are the changes that they want to see? What are the solutions that they see as viable? We as organizers have to believe in the power of their leadership and that their experiences on what they propose as a solution are just as legitimate as what a city council member might propose." As seen with the 90 Elizabeth Street press conference when the tenants marched to city hall afterwards to advocate for a package of twelve bills that would protect renters from landlord harassment, many of CAAAV's building campaigns have been tied to larger citywide policy campaigns as determined by tenants

[125] Betty Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. December 15, 2015.
[126] David Tang. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 14, 2016.

themselves. The specific bills that the 90 Elizabeth Street Tenants Association advocated for includes Intro 794-A, which would establish a Department of Buildings housing task force to assess safety risks at construction sites, Intro 0949 and Intro 0939, which would raise landlord fines for open building violations and penalties, and Intro 214-B, which would provide all low-income tenants facing eviction with legal counsel in housing court. In August of 2017, Mayor De Blasio signed Intro 214-B to law which made New York City the first city in the nation to ensure that any renter facing an eviction case can access free of charge legal representation. In a press statement, De Blasio stated: "New Yorkers should not lose their homes because they cannot afford a lawyer, stopping wrongful evictions from happening makes both ethical and economic sense." Speaker of the City Council Melissa Mark-Viverito who brought the legislation to vote in the council expressed in a statement: "Access to counsel is about leveling the playing field and providing all tenants facing eviction with access to legal advice. No tenant should fear losing their housing simply they could not afford a lawyer. This landmark legislation will greatly impact the lives of residents of this city." The passing of the bill was groundbreaking for New York renters, and was the result of four years of advocating, rallying, and marching led by tenants. District 1 City Council Member Margaret Chin said in support: "This is not just a housing issue, it's a human rights issue. For far too long, tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street have suffered unbearable harassment at the hands not only of their current landlord but the previous owner who refused to make necessary repairs. These residents have a right to live in peace in their homes without the constant fear of harassment and eviction. My office continues to fight harassment by helping to provide free and low-cost legal services, organizing tenants, and pushing legislation to get the city to protect residents." The high-profile nature of 90 Elizabeth Street case and the press conferences that tenants organized to raise public awareness around predatory equity and landlord harassment put direct pressure on legislators to take action.

Another citywide campaign that the organization participates in every year is for a rent roll back and rent freeze. On June 29 2015, the Rent Guidelines Board (RGB), a government oversight board that regulates rent for more than one million rent stabilized apartments, voted for a historic rent freeze on one year leases. The 7 to 2 vote was unprecedented, for the first time in forty years it signals an acknowledgement of the precarious conditions faced by tenants whose incomes have not kept pace with increasing housing costs. Historically, the RGB has been favorable to landlords in their rent adjustments, especially under twelve years of the Bloomberg administration when rent increases were notoriously high. On the day of the RGB vote, a crowd of a hundred enants gathered at the Great Hall at Cooper Union, including CAAAV's CTU tenant leaders and city-wide housing advocacy groups like Stabilizing New York City, Rent Justice Coalition, Right to the City Coalition, Equality for Flatbush, Fifth Avenue Committee, Picture the Homeless, and Families United for Racial and Economic Equality. When the chair of the RGB announced to green-light a rent freeze for the 2 million residents living in rent stabilized homes in the city, the entire auditorium burst in applause. This vote resulted from years of citywide coalition building and the mobilization of tenants, legal service providers, and advocates from across the city. Throughout the rent rollback and rent freeze campaign, CTU tenant leaders like David conducted hours of phone banking to inform other Chinatown tenants about the RGB vote and to encourage them to share their stories at the public hearings. Many Chinatown tenants including Tomasa and Ms. Song attended the RGB hearings weeks before the vote to share personal testimonies about the increasing unaffordability of their apartments and the negative changes happening in Chinatown. At one of the public hearings, Ms. Song on behalf of the 90 Elizabeth Street Tenant Association shared her testimony in front of the RGB panel, her voice reverberated through the auditorium as Wai Yee helped to translate her words: "My name is Song Mei Hong, I am a member of CTU and I live at 90 Elizabeth Street. I am an immigrant, I don't know much English. I don't make a lot of money. I make only $600 a month but my rent is $1,000.

On top of that, this new landlord keeps harassing us, trying to evict us. The landlord has brought many buildings in Chinatown. We have twenty two apartments in our building, he has already forced out six apartments. He has been trying to increase our rent through means like Major Capital Improvements. It has been really hard for us. He stopped our heat at one point in the winter. This landlord is not taking care of us, but we really need to keep our homes. We are asking for a rent freeze otherwise there is no way for me to survive in the city."[127] David, Betty, and dozens of CAAAV's CTU staff, volunteers, and tenants from other building associations joined in solidarity to put pressure on the board and to show in sheer numbers how many immigrants need affordable housing. Through these continued citywide organizing efforts that happen each year, tenants won rent freezes two years in a row to keep rent stabilized apartments affordable.

A third campaign that CAAAV tenant leaders have mobilized around is the community-led rezoning plan. In New York City, rezoning controls land use and affects a wide range of things such as quality of life and neighborhood character. It determines what can be built in a certain area, how high it can be built, who can has access to what is built, and for what purpose. In the last decade, the city government has given developers incentives to demolish entire buildings and to build in place luxury condos and hotels in New York's Chinatown. These changes are related to rezoning, which as David described to me is a tool used by city planners and elected officials to either control, preserve, or promote development in specific neighborhoods. The current zoning of New York's Chinatown encourages real estate speculation and high-rise luxury development which harms the working-class immigrant families who live there. Recently the city approved a tax break for Extell development to build an 84 story tower at 227 Cherry Street along the Two Bridges waterfront which is only two walking blocks from Chinatown. Following the Extell development, there have been other proposed developments of luxury skyscrapers in the neighborhood, including a 1,008-ft tower by developer JDS,

[127] Ms.Song. Rent Guidelines Board Public Hearing. April 23, 2016.

a 700-ft towers by developers L&M and CIM Group and a 724-ft skyscraper by Starrett. These projects would introduce over 2,000 market rate apartments in the neighborhood and accelerate the privatization of public housing and change the landscape of Chinatown forever.

To stop these massive development projects that would force thousands of working-class immigrant families from their homes, CAAAV tenant leaders have advocated for the Chinatown Working Group (CWG) community-led rezoning plan. In 2008, more than sixty organizations came together to draft the CWG plan. The recommendations as outlined in the CWG plan would create a "Special Chinatown and Lower East Side District" which would protect tenants in rent regulated apartments through anti-harassment regulations, provide height limits and restrictions on the size of buildings to preserve neighborhood character, build more affordable housing units for low-income families, and protect small businesses by restricting the development of chain stores. CAAAV along with the rest of the CWG coalition presented their plan to the Department of City Planning (DCP) in March 2015, the agency responsible for reviewing the process of any zoning in any neighborhood. Carl Weisbrod, who is the director of the agency responded by saying that the plan was too ambitious and advocated for Mayor De Blasio's plan to rezone "targeted areas of opportunity" or in other words to only rezone the Chinatown core. CAAAV tenant leaders have continued to push for the entirety of the CWG rezoning plan since protecting only the Chinatown core is not enough to stop predatory equity landlords and developments like Extell from coming into other parts of the neighborhood. Cathy Dang, who is the Executive Director of CAAAV, supported this sentiment in a piece written for City Limits: "Our communities will not settle for just the rezoning of the core. DCP claims our neighborhood plan is too expansive. But the CWG plan covers 103 blocks, which isn't that much bigger from other current plans like East Harlem, which is 95 blocks, and is smaller than some. In a time when our communities are feeling the repression of mass deportations and the loss of social security nets, the local administration can take a stand by implementing community-led rezoning plans

that protect homes and livelihoods" (Dang and Wang 2017) The fate of rezoning Chinatown is still uncertain but CAAAV and their Chinatown Tenants Union continues to push for the community-led rezoning plan and have put pressure on elected officials like their City Council Member Margaret Chin to take action.

In the summer of 2016, CAAAV held a Rezoning Town Hall in Chinatown at Project Reach to create a space for residents to dialogue about rezoning and the specifics of the CWG plan. During the Town Hall, David spoke about the specifics of the CWG rezoning plan and why it was critical to support the entire CWG plan so all residents in the neighborhood are protected: "I am a member of CAAAV's CTU and I lived at 90 Elizabeth Street for 36 years and in the United States for 53 years. I have been through four different landlords and different housing issues. The last landlord used construction to harass us. The new landlord is worse. These landlords are trying to evict tenants and one way they do it is to use construction as an excuse. Last year we united to bring him to housing court. Many landlords are buying buildings to make Chinatown into a more profitable community. Now the city is trying to rezone Chinatown to bring even in more developers to build luxury towers. The current rezoning plan allow developers to easily regulate the income or change the coding of buildings. If we don't work together to fight for the future of our community, then our homes will be gone forever and we will be displaced. We need to take it back, to have fate be controlled in our own hands."[128] It is evident that in order to fight the proposed massive luxury developments and to guarantee long-term protections for all of Chinatown residents, a comprehensive rezoning plan is required. In efforts to place pressure on Council Member Margaret Chin, Community Board 3, and Borough President Gale Brewer to support the CWG rezoning plan, Kenny Mai a CAAAV CTU tenant leader from the 22 Spring Street Tenant Association spoke in about his own experiences of

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[128] David Tang. CAAAV Rezoning Town Hall Forum. July 17 2016.

fighting predatory landlord Samy Mahfar: "We voted them into office so we should have a say in rezoning or we vote them out. Why don't we as a community of residents decide what we want for Chinatown. Not the city. Not the developer. Not the landlord. If everyone in this room spreads the word and reaches out to Council Member Margaret Chin and others, we can get somewhere. We can win. When we are united in numbers, we have strength. How many of you have benefited from construction? How many of you are losing your neighbors, friends and local businesses? Of course, the city wants us to think that progress is good. But what is progress to you? I don't see any. Who benefits from the construction of the waterfront towers? If you don't benefit now you won't benefit later. I don't want you to be a casualty like me. I am never getting back my home. There's constant construction. I have a place to live but no home."[129] The CAAAV Rezoning Town Hall concluded with tenants breaking into small groups to strategize how they would take the knowledge gained that afternoon back to their buildings and communities. The rezoning campaign is ongoing, Mayor de Blasio and his administration has tabled his call for rezoning the Chinatown core and have agreed to reopen negotiations into the rezoning area.

1.6 Tired of Giving In, When Home Is a Constant Struggle

Most of the tenants I interviewed as part of the 90 Elizabeth Street building campaign were not involved in formal politics but as evident were nonetheless leaders in their own communities. In fact, almost all of the tenants I built relationships with expressed uncertainty when it came to participating in electoral politics, David explained that many Chinatown residents have what he calls "political phobia" which he describes as: "When you are scared to get involved in politics because of your past experiences. Even myself, I had political phobia. I never voted in my life. Ever since Obama ran for president, that was the first time I thought about voting. But still I haven't gone. Maybe after this incident with our building, if we can have the landlord fix everything like he promised in court, I

[129] Kenny Mai. CAAAV Rezoning Town Hall Forum. July 17 2016.

might go vote for the first time in my life. I want to get more involved with other groups as long as it makes a difference." After this conversation, I saw that David did become more active in politics through CAAAV's direct action campaigns and the tenants association in his building. He became a tenant leader and part of CTU's Organizing Committee. He has continued to call 311 on James Fong when there are building violations and takes daily photos of the renovations in his apartment to ensure safety standards are met. He has even showcased some of his photos in an exhibit curated by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center. I have also seen David attend countless monthly CTU meetings to share with other tenants his mobilizing experiences in hopes of encouraging them to take action. David has continued to send me updates via e-mail about his political whereabouts including photos of him and Maria at the first ever New York City Women's March in November of 2017.

Recently I went to visit David and Maria at their 90 Elizabeth Street apartment after noticing their absence at the monthly tenant meetings. When I knocked on their door, David invited me to see the new apartment renovations as part of the settlement they made with James Fong. Although David had sent dozens of in progress photos through email, this was the first time I was seeing the refurbished apartment in person and it looked so different from when I saw it two years ago. David told me that Maria was sick with a respiratory illness and could no longer leave their home, which is why he had to put his political activism on pause. David told me that before the renovations were finished Maria had to be hospitalized, and that he wrote a speech but never found a chance to share it with anyone. I asked him if he could share it with me so he read it from a page of his notebook: "My mother's only wish in her lifetime is one day to return home to her apartment and to live there for the remaining years of her life. My wish is that one day I could see my mom set foot in the apartment once more and to not worry in her sleep that the ceiling will fall down or that the landlord will evict us. She has moved from place to place all her life, what would feel like to just settle in once place? I strive for the rights of mine, yours, ours, so that we can live with dignity in our own homes

at last. It was here we stood, here we voiced, and here we let it be known. We will fight until the end, we are tired of giving in."[130] After David read his speech, he asked me if I could share it with Wai Yee and the other tenants at the next monthly CTU meeting since it would be a while before he could make it out to one again. As I stepped outside into the hallway, David said that he has a feeling that James Fong will sell their building to another developer soon. A few weeks ago, he saw James Fong showing the property to what it seemed like was a potential buyer. I felt bitter and disheartened that the 90 Elizabeth Street tenants would have to relive everything all over again, I asked David what he thought would happen and said: "Who knows, but we still won't move."

[130] David Tang. Quoted Speech from Informal Conversation. December 20 2017.

Chapter 4: Artwashing, Cultural Production, and the Politics of Placekeeping

Image: Chinatown Art Brigade Here To Stay Projections on M.S. 131 Middle School on Hester Street.

When I volunteered with CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union for tenant outreach, I would take the dollar van from where I lived in Flushing in Queens to Chinatown and asked to be dropped off at the intersection of Allen and Grand Streets. From there I walked down the block to Ludlow Street and turned once I got to the staple corner candy store on Hester Street toward Steward Park.[131] I made that walk more than a hundred times in the span of three years and have noticed many of the changes in progress in the area. On most days I rushed to meet Wai Yee and the other volunteers, but on days where I had extra time, I would walk around to document changes. I learned from Wai Yee that CAAAV's former office was located at 46 Hester Street, and that after their lease expired in 2013, the landlord raised their rent from $3,000 to $4,000. Unable to pay the increase, CAAAV and their

[131] The store "The Sweet Life" on 65 Hester Street no longer exists, while writing this chapter it shut down due to high rents after three decades in the neighborhood.

entire staff had to move across the street to 55 Hester Street. Their previous office was taken over by Meow Parlor, a cat cafe where patrons can drink coffee in a room full of cats. There have been countless other changes in that area in recent years, it seems as though every week something that was once there no longer exists anymore. There are dozens of upscale restaurants, streetwear boutiques, lounges, and independent theatres like the Metrograph that line the streets of Chinatown. Many of these newer stores have displaced immigrant family owned businesses that have been in the neighborhood for decades like specialty Chinese restaurants, laundromats, bakeries, and print shops. The family owned store that stayed open the longest on the block was a Cantonese food place called 38 Yummy Kitchen located on the corner of Allen and Hester Streets. I used to go there after tenant outreach with other volunteers to eat a steaming bowl of roasted duck noodle soup, but the owners announced early in 2018 that they would be closing soon too. The thing about gentrification is that the places you grow to love can disappear almost overnight, revealing the evolving temporality of cities as entire neighborhoods turn into what geographer Edward Relph termed placeless places.

Last year in September, I walked past the corner of Eldridge and Grand Streets and noticed a store I had never seen before. It had a bright yellow awning with Chinese characters in red that read "服裝藝術美術館"（translated to English as Chinese Garment Art Museum). The storefront was strange, I remembered that four years ago the four story tenement building was bought by famous art dealer Gavin Brown's Enterprise who had opened up galleries in other neighborhoods like Harlem. I also knew that the ground floor of the building had been rented out to a well-known contemporary art gallery chain named James Cohan. It was constantly featured in art magazines and was one of the most popular art galleries in New York's Chinatown. When I walked by the sleek glass windows I saw that James Cohan frequently showcased new art installations. I wondered if the gallery had shut down or moved to a different part of the city. I had to check Google Maps to be certain that I was standing at the correct intersection but then I saw under the yellow awning a door that confirmed the address

of the building. The exterior of the store looked weathered as if it had been on the block for decades; it reminded me of one of those intercity bus companies on Canal Street where crowds of passengers gathered on the curb. The store no longer had a sleek glass exterior and was instead covered in concrete plaster with graffiti tags at the bottom. On the right side of the entry door there were plastic crates stacked on top of each other with large planks of construction wood precariously sticking out from underneath. I also noticed a blue bag filled with trash and white buckets that might have contained plaster at one point but had since been converted into makeshift smoker stations. I assumed that the gallery had moved elsewhere and that the space was haphazardly being turned into a bus station or garment museum as advertised.

I was curious to learn what happened to the James Cohan Gallery so I went inside to ask but no one was behind the counter. I immediately saw a three tiered glass case with cell phone covers priced at $24.99 and other random trinkets for sale. The interior of the store resembled a bus waiting room with several mismatched metal chairs lined up neatly against the walls. There were two ATM machines but both were out of order. As I waited for someone to return to the counter, I noticed several things hanging on the wall including a free calendar from Hong Kong supermarket common in Chinatown and a New York lottery information sheet. To the left on the wall was a sign that read "no refund, no exchange" and in small print below "ten minimum for credit card transactions." There were barely any other decorations besides from three red lanterns that hung from the ceiling, an oversized Chinese money plant, and a pair of good fortune cats. In the middle of the room there was a fridge that contained water, coke, sprite, Arizona ice tea, and chrysanthemum drink. Everything in the room seemed to indicate that the space was a bus station waiting room, but I found it strange that there were no passengers in the space with me. The only thing I saw in the room that resembled as if it belonged to someone was a metal cart, the kind that Chinese aunties and seniors push around the streets for support while grocery shopping. I was about to leave when I noticed that all of the metal

chairs in the room were facing a flat screen television on the opposite wall with something that was playing on loop without sound. I walked towards the screen to see what it was only to realize where I was standing. This was the newest art installation at the James Cohan Gallery by artist Omer Fast, the space had been intentionally transformed to look like an ordinary store in Chinatown. This was one of several yellowface galleries in which the exterior facade is kept to maintain a Chinatown aesthetic, masking the reality that the space inside has already been occupied by white artists.

The changes in Chinatown have accelerated within the past five years most visibly due to the influx of new galleries. For a long time, scholars have interrogated the relationship between art and gentrification, artists are often the first to gentrify a neighborhood by opening galleries that increase property values, rents, and general costs of living (Deutsche and Ryan 1984; Cameron and Coaffee 2005; Molotch and Treskon 2009; Deutsche 2012). In New York City, there has been a 442 percent increase in the number of galleries since 1965, from 272 to 1,475 in 2017 (D'Amato 2015). As of 2015 over 40 percent of all the new galleries in the city have opened in Chinatown, outpacing Chelsea, Dumbo, Bushwick, Upper East Side, and other areas known to have a vibrant new art scene.[132] While many these new art galleries that have opened in Chinatown are run by artists who have been priced out of Chelsea due to exorbitant rents, others have moved in for the artistic freedom to experiment with content and form outside of the traditional fine art scene (Moy 2016). A lionshare of these galleries have opened up in clusters along Delancey, Orchard, Eldridge, Grand, Rivington, and Chrystie Streets. There are now over 125 galleries in Chinatown which include artist-run spaces, white box galleries, galleries run out of apartments, and non-profits like Chinatown Soup (Moy 2017).[133]

[132] For details about the number of galleries in New York from past to present, Earl Bateman who is a real estate broker for the arts has data compiled online: http://www.galleriesofnewyork.com/. In the data compilation, the Lower East Side is combined with Chinatown.
[133] Besides from traditional artist-run spaces and private white box galleries, there are increasingly more DIY art spaces including galleries run by collectors out of loft apartments or abandoned warehouses. In New York City there are a number of non-profit art spaces that show art and hold artist residencies including Artists Space, Eyebeam, Flux Factory, No Longer Empty, among many others.

There are also groups like the New Art Dealers Alliance, which is a non-profit arts organization located on Chrystie Street that actively recruits new galleries into the neighborhood. As the number of galleries in Chinatown has grown, so has the audience and the number of art collectors, curators, and visitors. These galleries have undoubtedly contributed to increasing rents in Chinatown while at the same time have failed to address the immediate concerns of longtime residents who are predominately low-income Chinese immigrant families and seniors who live in severe poverty. The majority or 94 percent of families in Chinatown rent their apartments, making them dependent on the limited affordable housing stock in the neighborhood (Asian American Federation of New York 2013). The most affordable housing available to tenants are single room occupancies (SROs) which is usually a rooming house with small closet sized rooms and shared kitchen and bathroom spaces. In New York City specifically, most SRO buildings are rent-stabilized, those who live in SROs are the most vulnerable to homelessness. While SROs once housed 200,000 tenants in the 1960s, there are now estimated to be only 30,000 SRO units or fewer left in the city, with a large number concentrated in Chinatown (Sullivan and Burke 2013). Real Estate developers and predatory landlords in New York's Chinatown and other poor neighborhoods across the city have demolished and illegally converted SROs into market rate units to attract artists and other creatives.

The art scene in Chinatown has largely been facilitated by the media and developers playing into the narrative that the neighborhood is in need of cultural revitalization, ignoring the existing culture that Chinese immigrants have built across generations. The media, developers, and artists have continually tried to paint Chinatown as the newest gallery scene outside of Chelsea. In a recent *Paper Mag* article, writer Kate Messinger describes the scene in New York's Chinatown as hip and stereotypically backwards: "A revamped dumpling shop. An old walk-up tenement building. Next door to a fish market. These are spaces that make Chinatown a uniquely New York neighborhood and have recently become home to a handful of independent art galleries, adding a whole new

neighborhood to art lovers' itineraries" (Messinger 2016). In a *Vice-iD* article, journalist Paige Silveria writes about Chinatown from a similar perspective that simultaneously exoticizes and romanticizes the immigrant neighborhood: "Chinatown somehow resists the prevalent gentrification of the rest of New York. In this remaining vestige of bohemian downtown, one can still find old signage, garbage laden streets, and manageable rent. While it is nothing new for artists and galleries to inch toward Chinatown from neighboring Soho and the Lower East Side, a fresh wave of galleries is redefining the art scene in the area" (Silveria 2016). The article goes on to feature art collector Angelo Lanza who recently opened a gallery in the basement of Broadway Mall called Jeffrey Stark: "People have been trying to gentrify Chinatown for years, with a bit of success, but it still stays pretty damn Chinese. Not sure what it will look like in ten years but I have a feeling it will smell like dead fish and people will still be spitting on the floor" (Silveria 2016). In an *Artsy* piece writer Casey Lesser speaks to some of the new gallery owners. Describing the scene as a tight-knit community, Lesser quotes Ellie Rines who owns 56 Henry: "The Lower East Side has shifted so much in the past two years. Look at something like Eleven Rivington. That space is so pristine and beautiful, it's like a Chelsea gallery. A lot of it is because of the success of James Fuentes, Eleven Rivington, and Rachel Uffner — they want to stay where they are, and they're able to open up these beautiful spaces. Anything goes now. Chinatown doesn't have to be ghetto and dingy anymore" (Lesser 2016). This synthesis of stereotypes is troubling because it reinforces the notion that Chinatown is immune to gentrification, obscuring the reality that the neighborhood has already gone through many transformations and is a now site of mass displacement.

However, recognizing the dangers of artwashing to low-income residents and their families, there have been several groups in Chinatown that have been creatively mobilizing against this trend. In this chapter I focus on the political organizing work of the Chinatown Art Brigade, a women-run artist collective that has led a series of community interventions to actively protect residents in New

York's Chinatown. I draw from two years of ethnographic field research, archival materials, and oral history interviews with CAB members and volunteers. In the following section, I discuss the extant literature that has been written about cultural production and Asian American politics, weaving together disparate literature in ethnic studies, cultural studies, and political science. I contextualize the legacy of CAB's work in a much longer lineage and history of cultural production in New York's Chinatown through Asian American artist collectives like the Basement Workshop, Asian American Arts Centre, Epoxy Art Group, and Godzilla. I then shift to discuss how CAB was formed and what their collaboration with other community members in the neighborhood looks like, especially in relation to CAAAV's CTU tenant membership base. This chapter sheds light on the ways CAB uses artistic interventions and cultural production campaigns to expose practices that fuel gentrification in New York's Chinatown namely creative placemaking and art washing. I place particular emphasis on CAB's Here to Stay campaign which was held in the summer of 2016 and on a neighborhood town hall titled "Chinatown: NYC's Newest Gallery Scene?" that CAB organized in collaboration with The W.O.W. Project in the fall of 2016. Through my analyses I suggest that gentrification is not simply about physical displacement but that it is also about cultural erasure and appropriation across entire neighborhoods, and in turn how these dynamics have political dimensions.

1.1 The Political Significance of Cultural Production

Cultural studies scholars have for a long time noted the importance of cultural production in shaping politics in immigrant neighborhoods like Chinatowns (Ong, Dominguez, Friedman, Schiller, Wu, and Ying 1996; Maira 2000; Maeda 2011; Rowe and Tuck 2016; Estefan, Kuoni, and Raicovich 2017). In her book *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, English literature scholar Lisa Lowe argues that through decades of exclusionary laws and citizenship restrictions in the United States context, Asian immigrants have been excluded from the national political sphere while simultaneously included as non-citizen labor in the economic sphere (Lowe 1996). Lowe crucially identifies the role

of culture in constructing and negotiating the boundaries of citizenship, she remarks: "Citizens inhabit the political space of the nation, a space that is, at once, juridically legislated, territorially situated, and culturally embodied. Although the law is perhaps the discourse that literally governs citizenship, national culture — the collectively forged images, histories and narratives that place, displace, and replace individuals in relation to the national polity — powerfully shapes who the citizenry is, where they dwell, what they remember, what they forget. It is though the terrain of national culture that the individual subject is politically formed as the American citizen."[134] From a racial formation perspective, Lowe shows how citizenship for Asian immigrants was articulated in the American national culture through patterns of colonial expansion, militarism, orientalism, and globalization. However, for Lowe citizens are not simply regulated by the national culture but immigrants themselves also actively participate in making meaning of citizenship through their own culture. In other words, citizenship boundaries for Asian immigrants are shaped by a series of state sanctioned acts that reinforce their imposed statuses as racialized others, but also by the actions of immigrants that contest these dominant narratives.

Lowe theorizes that Asian immigrants and their children through various cultural, aesthetic, and material modes of production have challenged the contradictions inherent within the institutions of democratic citizenship and national identity. She argues that culture should not be conceptualized in the language of "identity, equivalence, pluralism, but out of contradiction, as a site for alternative histories and memories that provide the grounds to imagine subject, community, and practice in new ways."[135] In her own writings, Lowe draws from a wide range literary texts and perspectives including Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* (1946), Monica Stone's *Nisei Daughter* (1953), Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* (1982), Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990), and Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* (1993) to

[134] From Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* page 2.
[135] From Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* page 96.

show how Asian Americans have used literature to contest the dominant boundaries of belonging in the United States. However, beyond literary production, Lowe suggests that Asian Americans have also used art, design, music, theatre, performance, and other forms of creative expressions to shape political possibilities. Her observations continue to influence scholars from across disciplines, notable recent works include Adam McKeown's *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (2008)*,* Glen Mimura's *Ghostlife of Third Cinema: Asian American Film and Video* (2009)*,* and Charlotte Brook's *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing, and Transformation of Urban California* (2010). These studies delve deeper into the intimate and mutually influencing relationship between cultural production and democratic citizenship especially around issues that affect the daily lives of Asian immigrants. Lowe's work serves as a fundamental reminder that while politics shapes culture, culture often precedes politics — it is through how frontline communities creatively express themselves, give voice to new ideas, pursue artistic practices, and inhabit spaces of resistance that we are able to learn how democratic politics takes place in localities like Chinatown.

Despite the influence of Lowe's scholarly work on Asian American cultural production and politics, there has not been much engagement with it by political scientists. This may be because most of the studies related to Asian immigrant politics overwhelmingly privileges electoral politics over other forms of political activities (Junn, Lee, Ramakrishnan, and Wong 2009; Aoki and Takeda 2008; Hajnal and Lee 2010). Since most of what we currently know about Asian American politics is within the electoral arena, we are left with far more accounts of why Asian immigrants do not participate in politics as opposed to the myriad of creative ways in which they manage to do so despite barriers. As Don T. Nakanishi reminds us in his article "Beyond Electoral Politics: Renewing a Search for a Paradigm of Asian American Politics" written nearly two decades ago: "An expanded conceptual framework is necessary to highlight the fact that electoral politics is only one of several major competing forms of political activity that diverse ethnic groups have pursued and likely will continue

to pursue in the years to come. A broader view that recognizes their extensive historical record, as well as their present wide-ranging participation in nondomestic and nonelectoral political activities should guard scholars against making unwarranted and generalizations about the overall political participation of the Asian American population based solely on its seemingly low levels of electoral participation. This inclusive perspective should steer researchers toward analyzing points of intersection among different forms of political activity in order to more fully and accurately capture the dynamic growth, dilemmas, and diversity of Asian American politics."[136] Although Nakanishi does not explicitly mention the role of cultural production in shaping politics, his research agenda implies that to understand the complexities, nuances, ambiguities, and contradictions of Asian American and immigrant political life necessitates a look at past and contemporary forms of creative expression.

In this particular moment in time when one in seven Asian immigrants are undocumented and unable to participate in formal political processes, it is even more critical for scholars to develop a multifaceted conceptualization of democratic citizenship to make room for a kind of politics that is not as easily discernible from large scale survey data (see Ramakrishnan and Shah 2017). Taking into account the persistence of cultural production and other nonelectoral activities in Asian immigrant communities, I maintain that we urgently need a conceptual framework that broadens the scope of what citizenship involves on the ground in new democratic arenas. In the following section, I trace the historical development of cultural collectives in New York's Chinatown and document from the 1970s onwards how their work has opened up new possibilities for democratic participation and social change. New York's Chinatown has been home to several locally based grassroots cultural collectives and continues to be a locus for political activism, dissent, resistance, and engagement. I show through the work of four cultural collectives including Basement Workshop, Asian American Arts Centre,

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[136] From Gordon H. Chang's edited volume Asian Americans and Politics: Perspectives, Experiences, and Prospects, quote from Don T. Nakanishi article "Beyond Electoral Politics: Renewing a Search for a Paradigm of Asian American Politics" page 123.

Godzilla, and Chinatown Art Brigade, how three generations of artists in New York's Chinatown have used cultural, aesthetic, and material modes of production to improve the everyday conditions of Asian immigrants and refugees in the city. From demanding affordable housing, fair employment, and social services to combating orientalist stereotypes, these cultural collectives have found innovative methods to tackle issues that impact the lives and livelihoods of Asian immigrant communities. Drawing from this historical context I suggest that a focus on cultural production will allow political scientists in particular to reconfigure and reimagine what democratic citizenship, agency, identity, and empowerment looks like for Chinatown residents in the face of displacement. This shift will also permit us to think more fluidly and expansively about how individuals are shaping new areas of political investigation in their own communities and making sense of their relationship to the larger political system.

1.2 From the Basement to Godzilla: Cultural Art Collectives in Manhattan's Chinatown

New York's Chinatown has been a hub for cultural production through artist collectives and movements whose work expands political possibilities for Asian immigrants. In 1969, a group of students, writers, artists, and neighborhood activists came together in the basement of a tenement building on Catherine Street to form what became known as the Basement Workshop.[137] The Basement Workshop was a space for creatives to exchange ideas about Asian Americanness and to produce place specific work that spoke to the needs and conditions of a changing Chinatown (Chin 1971; Chiang 1988). Largely influenced by national conversations around Black Power, Third World Liberation, Vietnam War, post-1965 immigration, and local socio-cultural transformations in the city, early members of the Basement Workshop came together as poets, curators, designers, musicians, choreographers, and poets to challenge existing structures and institutions. The Basement Workshop

[137] The headquarters was located in the basement of 54 Elizabeth Street but as the Basement Workshop grew there were many other locations as well including 22 Catherine, 32 East Broadway, 1 East Broadway, 7 Eldridge, and 199 Lafayette.

functioned as a community arts space, it sponsored the Amerasia Creative Arts Program which organized cultural programs, literary events, performances, exhibitions, film screenings, and offered art workshops like silk screening, photography, film, and choreography (Wei 2010; Maeda 2012). It created a space for young Asian Americans in the city to connect their individual artistic practices to broader neighborhood issues like health care, housing, police violence, poverty, western imperialism, and unemployment (Chiang 1988; Ishizuka 2016). Basement Workshop also organized the Chinatown Study Group which produced the Chinatown Report of 1969, the first ever resident led research project of New York Chinatown (Chinatown Study Group 1970). Fay Chiang, who was the director of Basement Workshop for several years, wrote a reflection piece titled "Looking Back" about how the collective set up a health clinic staffed by volunteer health professionals to address the lack of healthcare in Chinatown: "During the fair musicians Charlie Chin, Nobuko Miyamoto, and Chris Ijima performed songs about Asian American identity, politics, and history. After the health fair, those involved decided to put the music into print, illustrate it, and add more poetry and prose. Many of the people involved were like myself: second generation Chinese Americans who had lived most our lives in the boroughs, whose parents worked in laundries, sweatshops, shirt-press factories, or restaurants."[138] Basement Workshop ran youth programs for at-risk Chinese Americans, trained local residents for acts of civil disobedience, and campaigned for special education programs for new immigrants and their children in Chinatown. Their work also included self-published zines to promote representation and expression in efforts to challenge dominant narratives that portrayed Asian Americans as model minorities, a term coined by sociologist William Petersen in 1966 (Saval 2018). In 1976, Basement Workshop published the nationally circulated *Bridge* magazine, which was a critical Asian American movement quarterly publication aimed at building a pan-Asian American political identity (Wong 2017). Basement Workshop also later published local bilingual newspapers like *Workers*

[138] From Fay Chiang's "Looking Back" published in *Journal of Arts Management and Law*, 18(2): page 64.

Viewpoint and feminist graphic anthology *Yellow Pearl* (Liu, Geron, Lai 2008). In an article written by Michelle Chen whose parents were active in the student movement in Chinatown in the 1970s, she reflected: "The Basement Workshop had artistic renderings of Asians in America that complimented their activism in the neighborhood, as activists they organized demonstrations and street fairs. The graphics that artists used to represent the movement were reappropriated Orientalist tropes, like Chinese characters or dragon images, glossed with modern designs. In their feminist publications, Asian women were depicted with depth, whether as factory workers or guerrilla fighters — a rebuke to the two-dimensional exoticized caricatures of Asian femininity."[139] Basement Workshop was seen as an umbrella organization that inspired the formation of other activist and cultural collectives like the Chinatown Health Fair (now known as the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center), Asian American Resource Center, Asian American Art Center, Asian CineVision, and Museum of Chinese in America. Many of the artists, writers, residents, and cultural practitioners involved with Basement Workshop later became community leaders in Chinatown and went on to found their own cultural organizations and neighborhood-based institutions.

New York's Chinatown was also a site for the mural movement that swept across the United States in the 1960s and 1970s in low-income communities of color (Wong 1999; Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 1998). In the spring of 1967, a mural titled the Wall of Respect was painted on a semi abandoned building in the Southside of Chicago which galvanized a People's Arts Movement that spread to cities across the country (Donaldson 1998; Alkalimat, Zorach, and Crawford 2017). This movement came to New York's Chinatown in the mid-1970s when progressive artists who were sponsored by The Cityarts Workshop collaborated with neighborhood youth to create a series of murals (Wong 2017). There were three murals sponsored by the Cityarts Workshop in Chinatown

[139] From Michelle Chen's piece titled "Culturestr/ke: Taking Back Chinatown" published in the Interference Archive blog on December 20, 2013.

which were directed by Arlan Huang, Alan Okada, and Tomie Arai, all Asian American artists active in the neighborhood through their work with Basement Workshop (Braun-Reinitz and Weissman 2009). Their first mural titled "History of Chinese Immigration to the United States" was painted over the summer of 1972 in Chatham Square on the side of a old tenement building. The mural illustrated faces of a contemporary Chinese family alongside historical scenes of immigrant miners, railroad workers, and sweatshop laborers. The following summer Alan Okada and Arlan Huang worked with two dozen neighborhood youth to paint a mural titled "Chinatown Today" which drew attention to the rampant issues of gambling, sex work, and tourism in Chinatown and the Lower East Side. A third mural titled "Wall of Respect for the Working People of Chinatown" was directed by Tomie Arai in the summer of 1978 and done in partnership with a group of local middle school students from Dr. Sun Yat Sen M.S. 131 in Chinatown. The mural was located on a side wall of Music Palace at the corner of Bowery and Hester Streets and illustrated a larger than life golden dragon swerving through a series of vignettes that portrayed the daily lives of Chinatown residents including restaurant cooks, garment workers, calligraphers, street musicians, and card players. These murals provided an opportunity for artists to work closely with neighborhood street youth in efforts to combat gang violence that came from a lack of employment, social services, affordable housing, and after school programs. However, due to large-scale redevelopment projects in Chinatown, all three of these murals have since been demolished to make way for new buildings and luxury hotels like the Wyndham Garden that replaced Music Palace which Arai's mural was painted on. As Arai and other muralists acknowledged early on in their careers as cultural producers and practitioners, as the neighborhood changed eventually so would the art.

The Basement Workshop inspired a number of other activist cultural spaces to emerge in New York's Chinatown, the Asian American Arts Centre was founded in 1974 by resident and artist Robert Lee to showcase Asian American cultural workers, exhibitions, and performances. Originally founded

as the Asian American Dance Theatre, the Arts Centre was located on 20 Bowery Street directly across from Confucius Plaza (Wong 2017). The Arts Centre invited local Chinatown artists to share their work that dealt with themes of geography, family, community, tradition, identity, and resistance (Cheung 1997). One of the first public events held in the space was a panel discussion that centered neighborhood issues and the future of Asian American art.[140] The panel was accompanied by a slideshow featuring the work of over twenty Asian American artists including David Diao, Margo Machida, Kit Yin Snyder, John Woo, Lucy Lippard, John Yau, and Lydia Okumura. The Arts Centre also curated exhibits that dealt with immediate issues in the neighborhood through annual Open Studio shows that showcased the work of local Chinatown artists like Arlan Huang, Amy Cheng, Emily Cheng, and invited select outside participants like Ai Wei Wei, Martin Wong, and Kwok Mang Ho. In 1988, Lee curated a solo exhibit titled "From Cambodia to the Bronx" which included a series of photographs that documented the Cambodian refugee community who were resettled to the Bronx but continued to face displacement. The exhibit connected the displacement experienced by Cambodian refugees in the Bronx to the urban displacement of Chinese immigrants in Chinatown. There were also exhibits that connected local concerns in Chinatown to what was happening at the global scale, challenging Asian Americans to build deeper connections across all working-class communities around issues of war violence and western imperialism. One of the most remembered shows at The Arts Centre was titled "China: June 4, 1989" which exhibited the artwork of artists who dealt with the themes of revolution, citizenship, and suppression after the Tiananmen Square protests. The Arts Centre closed its doors in the mid-2000s due to post-9/11 changes in the neighborhood, but Lee still maintains a physical archive at Norfolk Street close to the Williamsburg Bridge. The archive houses over six decades of Asian American cultural production including 1,600 entries of artist

[140] Most of this information was gathered from several visits to the Asian American Art Centre archives, which is run by Bob Lee and located in New York's Chinatown on Norfolk Street. I also ventured into the Robert Lee and Eleanor Yung Papers at NYU's Asian/Pacific/American Institute archives.

materials, publications, work samples, artist statements, reviews, exhibition materials, catalogs, interviews, and photographs.

Building on the momentum put in place by the Basement Workshop, less than a decade later in 1989 a group of Asian American curators, artists, and writers including Arlan Huang, Bing Lee, Ken Chu, Tomie Arai, Eugene Tsai, and Ik-Joong Kang, and Margo Machida came together over several lunch conversations in Chinatown to found a new cultural collective called Godzilla: Asian American Arts Network. Named after the fictional monster that first appeared in Japanese director Ishiro Honda's films, the vision of Godzilla was to promote intergenerational and interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration between Asian American visual artists in New York City (Chang 2009). Many of the artists involved with Godzilla had been involved in the Basement Workshop, Asian American Arts Centre, or both, and had experience with organizing forums, exhibitions, lectures, and symposia that drew connections between socially engaged art and collective action (Wong 2017). In the spring of 1991, Godzilla penned an open letter to David Ross, the newly appointed director of the Whitney Museum, criticizing the institution for a lack of diversity at the biennial exhibitions and failure to include Asian American artists. Ross responded by inviting the members of Godzilla to the museum to talk about Asian American contemporary art and promised to hire more artists of color to the curatorial staff.[141] Godzilla also mounted their own exhibits in alternative art spaces like Artists Space, New Museum, and Art in General using experimental styles, genres, materials, and mediums that uplifted narratives of Asian American identity, labor, immigration, displacement, war trauma, and assimilation. In a *Hyperallergic* piece written by curator Ryan Wong, these exhibits were always connected to issues that impact the local Chinese community: "*The New World Order III: The Curio Shop* at Artists Space in 1993 used the Chinatown store as a visual reference. For the 1998 *Urban Encounters*

[141] More details about their work as a collective can be found in the archives of NYU's Asian/Pacific/American Institute where there is a Godzilla archive that includes interviews with members, including co-founder Margo Machida.

at the New Museum, they created the installation "From Basement to Godzilla" reflecting on their own genesis. Many of the artists spoke directly on political issues. Godzilla members created a window installation in 1992 on the murdered Chinese American auto worker Vincent Chin, and collaborated with CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities on a mural in Union Square."[142] Godzilla self published a newsletter which was run by a rotating committee and included listings of exhibitions, open calls for artist opportunities, and commentary on Asian American art. Godzilla eventually disbanded in 2001 when many of its core members felt as though the collective had accomplished its mission, and was succeeded by several offshoot groups including Godzilla West and a younger transnational group of artists called Godzookie.

New York's Chinatown has been a critical site for cultural production and artistic expression that has opened new political possibilities for political consciousness development and democratic participation across generations. This historical context of cultural production in Chinatown is vital because it expands our understanding of where political change happens on the ground in Asian immigrant communities in places beyond formal political institutions. In what sociologist Monisha Das Gupta (2006) terms space-making politics, these cultural collectives created a space for artists and residents to come together outside of formal political institutions to talk about neighborhood issues and to creatively find collaborative solutions through dialogue and grassroots action. Since the 1970s, there have been four generations of Asian American cultural workers and artistic collectives that have found their beginnings in Chinatown, all of them in their own ways have been committed to improving the material conditions of residents through artistic productions and performances on the streets and at temples, churches, colleges, senior centers, coffeehouses, rallies, prisons, and parks in the neighborhood and across the city. The cultural collectives have also informed organized movements for better housing conditions, healthcare, employment, educational services, and displacement.

[142] Ryan Wong's "A Brief History of the Art Collectives of NYC's Chinatown" in Hyperallergic in February 7, 2017.

Nobuko Miyamoto, who was active in Basement Workshop and a member of Asian American folk group called A Grain of Sand, reflected on importance of these cultural collectives in building community in the 1970s while also serving the people: "This feeling of not belonging in the society, racism, and displacement was visceral. Everyday there was organizing going on at many different levels. We were crossing borderlines, and the music helped us to do that. We sang songs that were the collective expression of our Asian brothers and sisters to stop the killing of people who looked like us. As musicians we became like griots moving from community to community — we'd say 'This is what is going on in New York and we have this Chinatown health program going on' and we would carry this news to Sacramento and Los Angeles and Stockton and San Francisco. Then we'd gather news from there and carry it back to New York."[143] The type of socially engaged artistic production that cultural collectives in Chinatown have produced through exhibitions, panel discussions, performances, workshops, and publications have over the decades left a long legacy of resistance which challenges the dominant idea of Asian communities as model minorities disengaged from politics. This legacy of socially engaged cultural production work continues to be carried out by new formations like the Chinatown Art Brigade (CAB). In the next section I focus on the creation and significance of CAB's work as a contemporary cultural collective. I specifically focus on their work to combat artwashing galleries and their Here To Stay placekeeping campaign which was done in collaboration with CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union tenant base. I demonstrate from these examples that cultural production has been a powerful tool used to combat displacement and to redefine what democratic citizenship can look like in New York's Chinatown.

1.3 Getting Together: The Founding of the Chinatown Art Brigade

In the fall of 2015, artists Tomie Arai, ManSee Kong, and Betty Yu came together to form the Chinatown Art Brigade (CAB) an activist cultural collective driven by the fundamental belief that art

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[143] Interview with Noboku Miyamoto conducted by Nic Paget-Clarke for Inmotion Magazine October 31, 2000.

has the power to advance social change (Yu 2017). As Asian American visual artists who have deep roots in movement work in Chinatown, the collective grew out of a series of informal conversations and from their individual relationships with CAAAV over the span of two decades. In the summer of 2015, Betty had organized an anti-gentrification event for her artist residency with the U.S. Department of Art and Culture that Tomie and three hundred others attended from across the city. The event was titled "Imagining Creative Strategies to Fight Gentrification in New York" and was held at the St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Midtown. Under Mayor Bloomberg's twelve year administration, 120 rezoning plans were passed that has displaced thousands of low-income families, immigrants, and residents of color from their homes. To address the reality of these effects, Betty expressed her motivation for the event: "Everyday New Yorkers are struggling and getting pushed out of the city with declining wages and increases in costs of living and rent prices. Gentrification breeds and exacerbates racial and class tensions, communities of color are experiencing an increase in police violence and surveillance in their neighborhoods. Yet, hard-hit communities are organizing to resist mass displacement."[144] The event brought together community members, organizers, elected officials, and cultural workers who participated in a collaborative imagining process to creative map the gentrification happening in their own neighborhoods and ideas to combat displacement. The other participating organizations included New Sanctuary Movement, Equality for Flatbush, Picture the Homeless, Queens Neighborhoods United, Right to the City Alliance, Mayday Space, Gowanus Art Collective, Interference Archive, Families United for Racial and Economic Equality, Right to Remain Network, and many others. After the event a member of CAAAV named Huiying B. Chan approached Yu and Arai to discuss the possibility of working together on a joint cultural production, however ideas for what that collaboration could be did not grow into fruition until a year later. Over a series of

[144] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 2, 2016.

meetings, Yu, Arai, and Kong met with Cathy Dang, who is the Executive Director of CAAAV to discuss the logistics of forming an artist collective and how their art could support organizational movement work around gentrification and tenants' rights in Chinatown.

Yu, Arai, and Kong, who are the three co-founders of CAB, have all been active for decades in New York's Chinatown. After getting to know each co-founder individually over the span of two years as a general member and steering member of CAB, I learned that each of them had their own reasons for doing cultural work in Chinatown. The most senior member of CAB is Arai, who spent most of her twenties and thirties in Chinatown as a visual artist active in the Basement Workshop, Yellow Pearl, and Godzilla. She also worked with the City Arts Workshop and directed a number of mural projects in Chinatown in the 1970s including the "Wall of Respect for Working People of Chinatown" which was located on Bowery and Hester Streets before it was demolished in 2000. As a public visual artist and printmaker, Arai has designed permanent public art works for community organizations and city government agencies, and her work can be found in collections of the Library of Congress, Bronx Museum of the Arts, Japanese American National Museum, Whitney Museum, and Museum of Modern Art. In 2017 she was working on a public commission for an architectural glass mural for the new Central Subway Station in San Francisco's Chinatown. As a third-generation Japanese American woman whose family had lived through the internment during World War II and multiple instances of displacement afterwards, her art explores the wounded intimacies of Asian American cultural identity, forced movement, and lived experience. She recalls her family journey to the city after World War II: "We wound up in Harlem, one of the few communities that allowed Japanese Americans to rent apartments and settle. I went to a high school in New York called Music and Art, which was a public high school for young people who wanted to be artists and musicians which later became LaGuardia High School. I remember going to high school and taking the train through Harlem. It was the middle of the Harlem Riots and I remember when Malcolm X was

assassinated and how we were also in the middle of the war in Vietnam. The school itself was kind of a hotbed for political activism. I was interested and involved in the community arts movement, which was a place where artists, mostly artists of color, who felt marginalized from the art world, could find ways to think about how their art reflected their own experiences."[145] When I asked Arai how she became a socially engaged artist, she explained to me in her midtown studio: "I always refer to that time in the 70s as the time when I learned how to be an artist. I learned as I went along, as I was making the work. We worked on these projects that had to be done collectively and that were in places outside of the traditional art world. Mostly on the street or in community centers or in places where people don't normally see art. I saw that as sort of a classroom where I learned to think about art very differently and how to really think about why do you make art and who do you make art for."[146] It was during this time that Arai became involved with the Asian American movement in New York City and the activist art scene in New York's Chinatown. In the mid 1970s, Arai became active in the Basement Workshop and shared her first encounter with the collective: "It was very natural for me to go to Chinatown since I didn't have that kind of sense of geographic community where I was living. I remember at that time I was a single parent, trying to make a living and somebody told me there was a group of artists and students, people my age who were trying to publish an anthology about Asian Americans through art and poetry. It was in a basement in Chinatown. I went down and I met all these folks from a group from Yellow Pearl and they were all very young artists, poets, and writers who were trying to work collectively to create what was actually the first edition anthology of Asian poetry and art to be published on the east coast. In those days there was very little in the way of any kind of Asian American cultural production, but we soon became aware of different groups like Gidra in Los Angeles and Kearny Street Workshop in San Francisco, but at that time it was new. I remember

145 Tomie Arai. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 6, 2016.
146 Tomie Arai. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 6, 2016.

going to Chinatown physically every day or every other day. I wanted to believe that this was a community that I could live and work in eventually."[147] Although Arai never left Harlem, her work with Chinatown continued on for decades. Less than ten years later in 1989, Arai became the first artist-in-residence of the Chinatown History Museum on 70 Mulberry Street, now known as Museum of Chinese in America. During her residency, she pursued an oral history project titled the Mother Daughter, which lead her to become more sensible to some of the changes happening in the neighborhood: "We had an Exhibition we called Mother Daughter Wall of all these oral histories, we had one hundred submissions of stories and photographs from Chinatown women. For me it was really the beginning of a whole way of working where I would rely on conversations and exchanges with individuals who lived in various communities as a way of preserving history. It was only natural that after a while I began to see that Chinatown was changing, not always for the good. I started to see how places that had meaning for people were disappearing. I began to see the negative impact of gentrification and how the way of life that existed for so long in Chinatown is now being threatened. That was one reason why I became aware of gentrification. It's important for artists to address the systemic reasons for displacement, if you think about what New York City would be like without Chinatown, without Harlem, without Inwood, we're looking at a city that has no heart, no culture, no soul."[148] It was from her decades of experience as a cultural worker in Chinatown that Arai felt a sense of urgency to continue to serve the neighborhood that she saw was rapidly changing before her eyes, Arai saw CAB as an opportunity to interrogate the complicity of art and artists in the process of gentrification and also to explore how artists can be an ally in the struggle against displacement.

ManSee Kong is a documentarian born and raised in New York City. Her films are inspired by stories of ordinary people in Chinatown and narratives grounded in social justice movements. As

[147] Tomie Arai. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 6, 2016.
[148] Tomie Arai. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 6, 2016.

a second generation Chinese American with immigrant parents from Taishan in mainland China, Kong moved often with her parents between Queens and Brooklyn. She had been with CAAAV for more than ten years before she helped to co-found CAB, when I asked Kong how she first became she became involved in Chinatown community work she mentioned that it was during her time as an undergraduate in college at Hunter: "My first encounter with anybody from CAAAV was when I was at this student conference. It no longer exists but was called CAIC, or the Chinese American Intercollegiate Conference. When I came back, I got an email to join the Friends of Chinatown Street Vendors committee or something like that. It was an initiative that was organized by CAAAV, or more specifically their Chinatown Justice Project, and I was curious. That is how I got involved with organizing, I was heavily involved in helping to co-facilitate and interpret during the meetings because most of the street vendors spoke Cantonese."[149] Kong went on to work as a part-time youth coordinator and later become involved with CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union (CTU) when it was established in 2005: "We were trying to build up CTU at the time, so leading up to that, we would do a lot of door knocking. We were organizing for really basic things that we have now. One of the first actions I went to was for the Hear This campaign, where tenants were just learning about 311 and we were demanding that 311 have language interpretation services. We tabled outside on East Broadway and stopped people on the street passing by to show them how to dial 311. These were the earliest "know your housing" and tenant rights campaigns."[150] For Kong, her work as a film documentarian has always been done in close collaboration with CAAAV and stems from the deep relationships that she has built with members in the group over the course of ten years: "CAAAV is my political home in New York. I mean, friendship-wise, some of my closest friends are folks that I have met through CAAAV and I have really good relationships with tenants. They are like family. Ms. Zhang is like

[149] ManSee Kong. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. March 4, 2016.
[150] ManSee Kong. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. March 4, 2016.

family. Mr. Wong is like family. You know, I'll check up on them whenever I can."[151] After receiving support from the Asian Women Giving Circle, Kong worked with CAAAV's CTU on a "Chinatown Tenants Stories" documentary short video series about gentrification through the voices of tenants. In one of her documentary shorts, Kong chronicles the eviction story of Mr. Wong, a ninety-year-old tenant who lives in one of the last remaining single room occupancy (SRO) buildings on Bowery Street. Recently in collaboration with CAAAV's core staff and CTU tenant leaders, Kong led a women's photography exhibit and organized photography workshops over the course of three months to teach tenants who are women how to visually document their encounters with gentrification in intimate spaces like their individual buildings and homes. Given how much of her work has been rooted in New York's Chinatown, she sees her current collaboration with CAB as a natural progression of her previous work. CAB presents an opportunity for artists to challenge traditional notions of art, how art should be produced, where it can be accessed, and who an artist should be, Kong expressed: "I identify as someone who has experience working in the community and I recognize the power of art, media, and culture as a way to promote social change. The artist label is something I don't like because it is always so centered on the artist. More broadly, I think that organizing can happen in different ways, and there are a lot of different tools that you can use to transform a community and show new ways of thinking or understanding the world."[152] While there are a multiplicity of practical tactics that can be used towards community organizing, what Kong's work importantly reveals is how socially engaged artists can contribute their skills to strengthening the frontline communities most impacted by displacement through creative methods that deepen participation within organizations. ManSee's rootedness in Chinatown and her deep relationship with

151 ManSee Kong. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. March 4, 2016.
152 ManSee Kong. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. March 4, 2016.

CAAAV's CTU tenant members like Mr. Wong inspired CAB's first placekeeping project in Chinatown which was titled Here To Stay.

The third co-founder Betty Yu is a multimedia artist, filmmaker, educator, and activist who was born and raised in Sunset Park, Brooklyn by immigrant parents. Even though Yu grew up in Brooklyn, she would split her time between Brooklyn and Manhattan Chinatowns. Her father was a button operator and mother was a seamstress working in Chinatown factories in Manhattan. Both of them were impacted by 9/11 and post 9/11 policies when thousands of jobs in the neighborhood were lost and factories moved overseas or to the outer boroughs. As a multimedia artist, her work explores the interconnectedness between labor, immigrant justice, gender and militarism through her own stories, family narratives, and community histories. Her earliest documentary titled "Resilience" was about her mother who was a garment factories and fought sweatshop conditions in Chinatown, the film was screened at national and international film festivals including the Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival. As a first-generation Chinese American woman, Chinatown has always provided a sense of home and familiarity, Yu explained to me: "In Chinatown there is such a fusion of people and cultures that you can exist and not feel apologetic or uncomfortable. My cultural memories as a child and even now as an adult are very much connected to Chinatown. I have a visceral connection that is beyond material."[153] Throughout high school Yu was active in labor and immigrant rights organizing through her older sister, in fact her entire family has had a long history of movement activism in Chinatown: "I feel that a lot of us are fed this model minority myth but there is a culture of resistance here. My sister was involved in immigrant rights work, my grandfather co-founded the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance in 1933. He was the secretary for many years and had his own hand laundry business. He was a part of that wave of immigrants in Chinatown who were organizing

[153] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 2, 2016.

vehemently against the Japanese during World War II."[154] Inspired by her family history of activism and the desire to challenge the idea of Chinese immigrants as subservient, Yu became involved a campaign led by the Chinese Staff and Workers Association against Silver Palace restaurant. Silver Palace was where immigrant workers formed the 381 Restaurant Workers Union in 1981 making it Chinatown's first unionized restaurant. In 1993 seventeen waiters sued Silver Palace for lost wages, misappropriated tips, and other labor violations, Yu recalled: "I have a very personal connection to that place, because that is when I got involved with organizing against Jing Fong and Silver Palace, which were connected. My sister, who passed away about six years ago, was a person who was involved with the work and was one of the hunger striker in 1995. Then in 2011 the owner Jonathan Chu and the Chu family decided to fire all the workers and turn it into a hotel. That was very symbolic for me. It brought too much anxiety and too much pain."[155] When Silver Palace restaurant was demolished in 2013 to make room for the 50 Bowery Hotel, Yu felt an indescribable sense of loss because that symbol of labor organizing in Chinatown was lost almost overnight. As psychiatrist Mindy Thompson Fullilove calls "root shock" these neighborhood changes led to much anxiety and other health related concerns for Betty, it took a while before she was able to create work related to Chinatown again: "For awhile I actually didn't go to Chinatown at all because of all the changes. It was very hard for me emotionally, like in the gut. It was giving me anxiety and it still gives me anxiety walking through Chinatown. Because everything that was once there is now gone. It's very difficult for me but if we keep going on that route, look at what is happening to Chinatown. There has been this emergence of resistance where people are organizing who are from the community and to me that is inspiring and is pulling me in back into the work."[156] Yu has taken her documentary work beyond New York's Chinatown and collaborated with a coalition of anti-gentrification activists in Brooklyn. In 2015, she

[154] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 2, 2016.
[155] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 2, 2016.
[156] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 2, 2016.

organized "City of Justice: New Year, New Futures" an anti-displacement arts activism event at the Brooklyn Museum First Saturday and co-created "A People's Monument to Anti-Displacement Organizing" in the Agitprop! Show also at the museum. Like Arai and Kong, Yu views her work with CAB as part of a much larger legacy of grassroots resistance and cultural activism in Chinatown.

The three women came together in early 2016 to discuss possibilities for the collective and with guidance from CAAAV's Executive Director Cathy Dang strategize how CAB could produce cultural work while being accountable to those most directly impacted by displacement. For Yu, those conversations were the beginning of CAB coming together, she recalled: "I never worked with Tomie or ManSee in any kind of collaborative way, so this was a total experiment. We did see this as an opportunity to create new platforms for tenants to tell their stories. What was key to us was when we met with CAAAV over a period of a couple months to discuss how we could amplify their work and to not reinvent the wheel. We're amplifying, it's an add on. Otherwise we wouldn't do it because it would waste their time. For us our objective and goal as artists is to work with CAAAV and to advance their tenants' rights work and the Chinatown community-led rezoning plan, our solidarity work with them is really central to our entire cultural production process."[157] At a panel on socially engaged art titled "Parallel Fields: Housing Justice" organized by A Blade of Grass, Dang echoed the importance of cultural work that uplifts and amplifies the immediate needs of residents rather than extract from them: "Three years ago we had a flood of artists coming to us saying 'we got this grant, can we do this work with you' and it drove us up the wall. We had so many people coming to us asking if we could do something but our tenants' primary concern is not their art project. Their primary concern is to stay in their homes. We tried to work with one or two but it became too much on our side and our tenant members wouldn't participate either. What's different with CAB is that we actually have personal relationships, we know each other, they volunteer with CAAAV. I think Tomie and her work

[157] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 2, 2016.

with CAAAV goes back to over a decade ago. They're very, very familiar with CAAAV's work, and they're very, very familiar with who they need to be accountable to which is to the tenants."[158] When pressed on what that collaboration looks like on a daily basis, Dang responded: "What the collaboration looks like is a tennis ball going back and forth. CAB would come to us with questions like 'Is this messaging right? What's the message we need to get out there? Where's the status of the campaign? Who's the target now? Whose name do we call out in the projections?' The constant back and forth of texting, calling, emailing, meetings, made sure that the messaging was on point. As an organizer what I respected was them checking in about the message and making sure it was on point with our campaigns and they weren't just running around with their own."[159] Arai who has the most experience of being active in cultural collectives explained why this collaboration was different from others and how CAB offered a new model of cultural production in Chinatown: "In terms of working with community groups, I feel like very often people are looking for a formula for how to make it work but every situation is different. We are certainly guilty of making assumptions of what this kind of work entails. We certainly came in with our own agenda and we certainly needed to spend some time with the tenants. We are accountable to those who are most impacted. The past cultural collectives never worked directly with a community organization in the way that we do, with constant contact, issue identification, and base building. We are still working to understand what it means to be accountable not only to the community but also to the people who are supporting us."[160] In the fall of 2016 CAB applied for and received grants from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and Asian Women Giving Circle, this support helped to launch their first collaborative project with CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union titled Here To Stay.

[158] Cathy Dang. From the "Parallel Fields: Housing Justice" Panel Discussion. October 26, 2016.
[159] Cathy Dang. From the "Parallel Fields: Housing Justice" Panel Discussion. October 26, 2016.
[160] Tomie Arai. From the "Parallel Fields: Housing Justice" Panel Discussion. October 26, 2016.

In addition to building community power with CAAAV and tenants who are most at risk of displacement, CAB's cultural production work importantly combats creative placemaking, one of the most insidious tools used by real estate developers to gentrify poor neighborhoods like New York's Chinatown. After Richard Florida's (2002) *Rise of the Creative Class*, city governments, developers, and urban planners have come to realize the effectiveness of arts, culture, and aesthetics to make certain neighborhoods appear more desirable for real estate speculators and wealthier renters. The practice of creative placemaking involves developers incentivizing artists to move into certain neighborhoods to pursue artistic environmental projects that would increase property values (Markusen and Gadwa 2010). Through partnerships with the city government, non-profits, private financial investment, and independent artists, one of the first tactics used by real estate developers is to create art districts, cultural industry clusters, mixed-use developments, and artist relocation projects. As neighborhoods are morphed into art districts, developers adopt creative placemaking discourses like "sustainability" and "vibrancy" to shape the narrative of who belongs and who doesn't belong in the neighborhood (Webb 2013). According to Artscape, a non-profit urban development art organization and one of the largest proponents of creative placemaking, the process involves: "Intentionally leveraging the power of arts, culture, and creativity to serve community interests while driving a broader agenda for change, growth, and transformation that builds character and quality of place."[161] However, groups like Artscape play a major role in gentrification because they openly partner with developers who use artists to cover, whitewash, legitimize, and neutralize the effects of displacement (Buser, Bonura, Fannin, and Boyer 2013). In Toronto's Regent Park, Artscape worked directly with Daniels Corp. which demolished half a dozen affordable housing complexes and constructed over 3,000 market rate residencies, leading to mass displacement of the new immigrant community, many who are from the

[161] The quote is directly from Artscape's website: http://www.artscapediy.org/Creative-Placemaking/Approaches-to-Creative-Placemaking.aspx.

Carribean, China, Vietnam, Southeast Asia, and Somalia (Catungal, Leslie, and Hii 2009; McLean 2014). In New York City, developers have relied on art galleries to change the physical aesthetics of certain poor neighborhoods under the guise of communal health and public space enhancement (Deutsche and Ryan 1984; Zukin, Trujillo, Frase, Jackson, Recuber, Walker 2009). The term artwashing is used by cultural organizers to describe this process in which developers, artists, and the state have come together to inflate property values by transforming spaces to make them palatable for wealthier residents (Auge 2017). In certain neighborhoods like New York's Chinatown, as more artists, galleries, commercial art projects, and art development organizations are incentivised by real estate developers to move into the neighborhood to increase land values, the more existing tenants, small businesses, and artists are at risk of mass displacement.

Gentrification is not only about the influx of luxury towers and changes in land use, it is also about the art that a community chooses to create and who has access to it. Recognizing that creative placemaking and artwashing are symptoms of gentrification, there are local artists, cultural workers, and grassroots groups in cities across the country that are trying to hold newer artists, galleries, and arts non-profits like Artscape accountable for their role in being complicit in displacement. In Boyle Heights, a group called Defend Boyle Heights was formed in East Los Angeles to fight artwashing through direct action protests and strategic campaigns.[162] Given its proximity to The Arts District in Downtown Los Angeles, a dozen of art galleries have moved into Boyle Heights driving up rents for the predominantly low-income Mexican immigrant community who lives there. A few of the same art galleries in Boyle Heights have opened in New York's Chinatown, indicating that the economic forces behind artwashing and gentrification are connected across cities. In Vancouver's Chinatown the Chinatown Action Group 華埠行動小組, which was founded as a collective of local residents, artists,

[162] Defend Boyle Heights is part of the Boyle Heights Alliance Against Artwashing and Displacement, which is a coalition of multiple anti-displacement affinity groups in Los Angeles.

youth, and elders combats the artwashing of Downtown Vancouver's Chinatown through direct action policy campaigns and community outreach. The intergenerational group campaigned to stop a high-rise development hotel from being built at 105 Keefer Street and successfully prevented Artscape from taking up further space in the neighborhood. In 2017 Artscape signed a ten year lease with real estate developer Sun Wah Group to turn a six story building into an art hub with galleries. These groups have importantly identified the insidious role of artwashing in their communities and have taken steps to hold various actors accountable for their role in the process. The notion that art influences gentrification is not new, a quick read through the piece "The Fine Art of Gentrification" by art historians Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan reveals how artists have benefited from displacement long before the term gentrification was even coined by sociologist Ruth Glass in the 1960s. However, what the work of these neighborhood collectives like CAB importantly sheds light on is how existing residents themselves have been responding to cultural erasure and how artists can be complicit in displacement but also play a critical role in the fight against gentrification. CAB as a collective of artists might not represent the voices of Chinese immigrants in the neighborhood, but they are taking ownership of their own positionalities as artists and choosing to use arts and culture work to fight the systems at work behind gentrification rather than to be part of it. I focus on CAB's work and show from several of their projects how cultural production has been a powerful tool to combat artwashing and to help residents remain creatively rooted in New York's Chinatown.

1.4 Here To Stay Outdoor Mobile Projections and Placekeeping

In the Spring of 2016, CAB grew to include other artists and local residents including Mimi Yaw, Liz Moy, Emily Chow Bluck, Huiying B. Chan, KahEan Chang, Linda Luu, Anna Ozbek, Lena Sze, Louis Chan, Daphne Xu, and Si Wang. The conversations with CAAAV staff continued for five months before culminating in their first large-scale art project titled "Here To Stay" which involved a series of workshops with CTU tenants and culminated in an outdoor mobile projection. The goals of

this collaborative art project was to visually chronicle narratives of gentrification, displacement, and resilience in Chinatown. On a humid night in August of 2016, dozens of Chinatown residents crowded around the Middle School M.S. 131 on Hester Street. There were crowds of children and elders standing around the building and pointing up towards the illuminated images, graphics, and hand drawn messages that were projected from the top of a parked van. The content that was projected came from the oral histories, photographs, graphics, and videos that were gathered over the span of an entire summer from a series of peacekeeping cultural production workshops with CAB and CAAAV's CTU tenant members. According to Yu who helped to organize the series of summer workshop, the conversations with tenants were critical in determining the direction of the project and nature of their creative collaboration: "Throughout these summer workshops we worked with CTU tenants and people who lived in Chinatown. Through placekeeping walks, mapping, photography, story circles, and drawing exercises, together we created what would be projected onto the walls of buildings in Chinatown. That was key to our work because it wasn't like we were "parachuting" in to extract from the people, the process of co-creation was important to us."[163] As a community engaged project, there were a total of six workshops held throughout the summer at the CAAAV's office on 55 Hester Street.

The first of the summer workshops began in early June with a story circle. The meeting was held on a Sunday afternoon and a group of fifteen people sat around a table to share stories about their experiences with gentrification. The purpose of the story circle was to provide everyone a chance to express their immediate concerns while at the same time create a space for intervention. The story circle provided a unique space for CAB members and CTU tenant members to become more familiar with one another and to cultivate relationships across age and language differences. Many of the CTU tenants who were there including Ms. Zheng, David Tang, and Mimi Yaw shared their own personal

[163] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 2, 2016.

encounters with eviction and how they got involved with housing justice work in Chinatown. The younger members spoke about their relationship to the neighborhood and some of the gentrification induced changes that they observed in their schools and on streets. In the second workshop, the three CAB co-founders Arai, Kong, and Yu shared some of their artwork from the past and discussed with tenants how arts and cultural production could support their struggle for fair and affordable housing. The group then engaged in a collaborative mapping exercise which involved locating places in Chinatown that people had connections to like specific buildings, parks, bakeries, and street intersections. During the three hour long workshop, attendees collaboratively created a map of all the locations and named it the People's Placekeeping Tour of Chinatown. The title of the tour was intentional because it challenged the creative placemaking tactic used by developers, artists, and city planners to gentrify neighborhoods, according to Betty: "We called it a placekeeping walk as opposed to placemaking because creative placemaking is a thing that has been used across the country by developers who are teaming up with artists and gallery owners to artwash communities. Look at what's happening in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles or in Greensborough, Kansas — artists are hired by real estate developers for creative placemaking projects. What happens is they "beautify" a neighborhood so that artists can occupy it for a little bit before being displaced themselves. We see that historically, look at SoHo, look at Williamsburg, and now look at Bushwick. What we said is that we're going to take this back. We're going to do our own placekeeping walk, led by people who are directly impacted by this gentrification."[164] The actual placekeeping walk happened one week after the mapping exercise. During the walk, Liz Moy who is a lifelong resident of Chinatown took the group to where she grew up on Bayard Street next to the Chinatown Ice Cream Factory and then to her family run business Great NY Noodle Town on Bowery Street. Mimi Yaw walked everyone to where she and her mother lives on Canal Street and spoke about the many struggles she has endured with their predatory landlord

[164] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 2, 2016.

who has tried to evict them under the guise of renovating the building. Mimi invited everyone into her apartment building and while walking up three flights of stairs, she explained what motivated her to become a tenant organizer with CTU. Ms. Zheng, who started out with CTU in 2005 as a tenant intern brought the group to the garment factory that she worked at for three decades as a seamstress and then to her modest apartment unit on Delancey Street. Ms. Zheng spoke about how she formed a tenant's association in her building to fight back against her predatory landlord. There were several other residents who shared their stories on the placekeeping walk. As Yu reflected afterwards: "We made stops at places that tourists do not know or care about. Like, where the first unionized restaurant was in Chinatown, or where there was a mural that Tomie did in the 70s. The theater called Music Palace where all of us used to pay three dollars and watch movies. These places are coded and filled with memories, it's really important to us that cultural memory and personal associations are well preserved for future generations. We used this placekeeping walk to gather oral histories, images, and visuals that can be projected onto Chinatown buildings as messages for others to see."[165] As Yu alluded to in her reflection, gentrification is much more than how people live in their neighborhood, it has a lot to do with how people see, sense, and relate to personal and collective cultural memories. During the placekeeping walk, Kong brought her film equipment to document the stories and anecdotes that residents shared with each other on the tour.

To incorporate the materials collected from the placekeeping walk into their first projection, CAB worked in collaboration with CAAAV's CTU tenants and the Illuminator to create a slideshow montage with materials that could be projected onto a building. The series of workshops leading up to the projections allowed tenants to develop their visual and storytelling skills, Arai recalled working with CTU tenant leader David Tang and another tenant who were active in projection production process: "David is super involved in CAB and wants to see more projections, he told me at the other

[165] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 2, 2016.

meeting that we should have projections every weekend. David is a creative person and I feel like he has not been acknowledged enough for this. I mean, he independently took photographs of the conditions in his apartment, created photo albums, burned these discs with the images, designed posters for actions. And another tenant that we met told us he was an artist. I was so touched by how he came forward and shared with us that he used to teach art. He is a janitor now but he was an artist before. The workshops were a process where we learned from each other." After several back and forth feedback sessions with CAAAV core staff and CTU tenants during their monthly public meetings, the result was a slideshow that included dozens of photographs, messages, and graphics that came from the placekeeping walk, story circle, and community workshops. The feedback sessions were critical leading up to the first night of projections because they helped to identify a clear message and identify a target audience which were Chinatown residents, elected officials, and the media. For Yu the most important part of cultural production work is the production process where people come together: "The cultural production process wasn't designed to have people make things so that we could project it. It was more important for all of us to see relationships be built, so trust could be built, so that community could be built. Trust goes hand in hand with cultural organizing or any kind of community building work."[166] Many of the projections were images and quotes from the placemaking walk, there were others that were chant slogans, tenant demands, and names of specific predatory landlords or elected officials like City Council Member Margaret Chin. In order to recognize the interconnectedness of the struggle against displacement in Chinatown and the Lower East Side, all of the projected images and messages were written and translated to English, Chinese, and Spanish.

The idea of the projections originated with Kong, who had been working with CAAAV and CTU tenants for over a decade and wanted to bring conversations beyond indoor meetings onto the streets. After strategizing with CTU tenant leaders, CAB determined that the immediate goals of the

[166] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 2, 2016.

projections were threefold: support active tenant campaigns, uplift the Chinatown community-led rezoning plan, and publicize for CAAAV's upcoming rezoning town hall forum. Reflecting on the specific goals of the projections, Yu shared that: "We're learning about how tenants are resisting, As a cultural collective we continue in this tradition. We hope to project messages onto buildings to reach more tenants. I imagine tenants who are facing eviction can feel extremely alone. We are reaffirming that their experiences are not isolated and that residents are fighting back. We're not just fighting day to day conditions; we're fighting for a community-led rezoning plan that would bring long term protections to families who have been living here for generations. CAB is challenging the notion that this neighborhood needs cultural revitalization because there is a culture that already exists. We're sending messages to gentrifiers by asking critical questions like who did you displace to be here? This fight determines the future of Chinatown."[167] On the first projection night, dozens of children and elders from the adjacent Sara D. Roosevelt Park stopped to observe the images and messages illuminated on the middle school building. Those who were walking by were also invited to write their own personal messages on the People's Pad which was live projected onto the building. Emily Chow Bluck who is a CAB member and took part in the summer workshop series described the outdoor scene in a reflection: "Tons of people from the community were there, monolingual Chinese residents who were like 'what's going on?' because there is this big van and light shining on this wall. We had a couple of interactive moments. We had the People's Pad where people could contribute their own words to the projections. We did karaoke. We rewrote lyrics to this well-known Chinese song and sang it in public."[168] Cathy Dang, who is the Executive Director of CAAAV, felt that it was important that the projections were able to create space for dialogue between organizers and residents, she reflected: "In the August projection I had one memorable moment where our teams of volunteers

[167] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 2, 2016.
[168] Emily Chow Bluck. Interview conducted by Betty Yu Personal Interview. October 21, 2016.

were trying to flyer for the rezoning town hall forum. There were hundreds of residents playing Mahjong and weren't paying us that much mind at all but once the projections were on the building wall everyone stopped to look. It gave us a chance to have real conversations with the residents and to hand them the flyer about our rezoning townhall. They shared with us their stories for Chinatown. As an organizer it's not the easiest to do outreach while also engage in deep conversations but the projections helped to create that space with residents."[169] This is in line with what sociologist Elijah Anderson in his book *The Cosmopolitan Canopy: Race and Civility in Everyday Life* calls the "cosmopolitan canopy" in which there are certain public spaces where societal issues can be put on hold and diverse people can come to gather, observe, and interact with each other in a civil manner.[170] Anderson suggests that these public realms nurture new forms of civic life which can lead to social benefit that is conducive to democracy. For Arai the most memorable moments were from the reactions that people showed on their faces: "One of the moments that stood out for me was the reflection of the projections onto people's faces as they were looking up. I remember there was a crowd of people in the park looking up at the projections and there were smiles, I felt at that moment that we had not only succeeded in sharing a message but somehow it was also a sense of celebration, a sense of common purpose."[171] The tenants who were there to support and help flyer for the rezoning town hall included Ms. Zheng, David Tang, Kenny Mai, and Mimi Yaw who all felt as though the projections had an immediate impact on those seeing it for the first time, Yaw reflected: "Even if it made people think of these issues for a second it had an impact."[172] After the night of the first projection there were two others were held on the corner of Grand and Chrystie Streets. For the most recent projections, CAB intersected the issues of displacement, xenophobia, and deportations and put out a call for entries

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[169] Cathy Dang. Interview conducted by Betty Yu Personal Interview. October 21, 2016.
[170] Elijah Anderson *The Cosmopolitan Canopy: Race and Civility in Everyday Life* (2001).
[171] Tomie Arai. Interview conducted by Betty Yu Personal Interview. October 21, 2016.
[172] Mimi Yaw. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. September 18, 2016.

from artists and residents around the world who were engaged in resisting an anti-immigrant agenda, their flyer stated: "We are expanding our work to include projections that will oppose the ban on refugees and immigration from Muslim countries. As artists we recognize the urgency to act now to protect our communities from an uncertain future. Our communities have been targets of policy decisions designed to deny us citizenship and discriminate against us on the basis of race. We believe we have a responsibility to show the world that we will not let America's racist history repeat itself." From the open call for submissions, CAB received over thirty visuals from across the country and selected twelve to show as part of their final Here To Stay Placekeeping projection.

There were several obstacles that came up throughout the cultural production process that CAB had to work through as a collective. According to Yu one of the main challenges was honoring the time of tenants, she explained: "The one thing we learned early on was that we really had to respect the time that tenants have. You have to respect everyone's time but particularly with tenants who are already coming to meetings and who are already engaged in their own fight. Tenants are working five, six, or seven days a week and have families to support. We were always checking in with CAAAV and with CTU to figure out how to re-calibrate or re-adjust certain things throughout the workshop series. You know, instead of asking tenants especially elders to come to us we went to them. If there were tenant organizing meetings or active building campaign meetings, we met them there and supported their efforts by helping them make banners or sharing creative tools to amplify their fight against displacement. We were taking cues from them and they were the ones leading the direction for the campaign. Because we're dealing with real lives, real issues, real legal battles, we had to be flexible and we learned how to lend ourselves up."[173] What Yu importantly reveals here is that effective socially engaged art focuses on people, not issues, at the heart of their efforts. That cultural production work is not only about solving community problems but that it is more urgently about enabling those most

[173] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 2, 2016.

impacted to mobilize their own resources to solve it. Arai mentioned that one of the more difficult moments involved responding the flash flood of emotions that the projections conjured for people: "Many of the images that we were showing were of places that no longer exist. So we had photos of Music Palace, the dried goods store on Elizabeth Street, and other landmarks. For someone who has lived in Chinatown their entire lives, these places can mean a lot to them. I remember ManSee was speaking to an elderly man who was having a tough time after seeing a projection of the theatre, I think that image carried weight because his grandfather used to take him in the 70s. This creative process opens some wounds and so for me if we invite this trauma back into someone's life we have to be there to help them pick up the pieces."[174] These cultural memories are formed by symbolic moments in time and embodied in specific sites, streets, or sounds that serve as a link between the past, present, and future. Gentrification is the fragmentation of cultural memories that matter, and as scholars have shown can lead to mental health problems like trauma, stress, and other long-term public health consequences (Fullilove 2004; Gibbons and Barton 2016). Although overcoming past and ongoing trauma caused by gentrification is not easy, these summer workshops and projections created the space for Chinatown residents to have these difficult conversation and to collectively explore what healing, validation, and affirmation can look like in the aftermath of dispossession.

There were also language and interpretation challenges throughout the project, Arai recalled: "We had to deal with issues of language equity and not just in terms of Chinese dialects but trying to understand how to even talk about art. That took a long time, it was actually a bit of trial and error. But what I found interesting was that over the last six months we've been working with them not a single person ever came and asked, "How is this art?" or "How come it doesn't compare to what we see in galleries?" I felt like we were on the same playing field trying to explore what art is and how to

[174] Tomie Arai. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 6, 2016.

do it in a way that is accessible."[175] Kong shared her thoughts on the immediacy of language justice and interpretation: "We are very much aware and mindful of language access. Just because of how the CTU operates, which is mostly in Chinese, there are some challenges that result from dialects. Mandarin is the unifying dialect but there has been Fujianese, more so in the past decade. We've had Wenzhounese, Shanghainese, Cantonese, Taishanese, communicating across dialects has always been a part of this cultural work. We are currently exploring the idea of creating an interpreter's collective that would be centered around language justice and social justice. This was an idea that came out of our work, as part of the Brigade."[176] Kong later became active in the formation of 共鳴 Gòngmíng Chinese Interpreters Collective, a group of individuals located in the city who provide interpretation, translation, language capacity building in Chinese with a community-based perspective. Kong indicates in her reflection that for cultural organizing to be effective it has to be accessible, intersectional, intentional, and most importantly done with and not for communities most impacted. These challenges illustrate that in any kind of cultural work, it is vital to consider whether or not the project reinforces existing power relations and empowers people to envision a future with room for everyone to get free.

CAB's Here To Stay placekeeping project drew attention from across the city and it stirred interest among younger Asian Americans, Yu reflected on this in a conversation over a meal: "We've seen wide interest among young Asian Americans and that's because folks are finally acknowledging the housing crisis, particularly gentrification and how it's displacing people of color, poor people, low-income people from their communities. Younger Asian Americans see CAB as an opportunity to tap into collective creativity to bring voices together, tenants, elders, and young folks who all feel a commitment to Chinatown and to making sure it remains affordable."[177] As a critique to creative

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[175] Tomie Arai. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. November 6, 2016.
[176] ManSee Kong. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. March 4, 2016.
[177] Betty Yu. Interview with Diane Wong Personal Interview. February 12, 2017.

placemaking practices used by real estate developers, Here to Stay was CAB's first large scale cultural production project and it paved the way for critical conversations and grassroots actions against the gentrification in New York's Chinatown and beyond. Recently in March of 2018, CAB brought their Here To Stay placekeeping project to Philadelphia's Chinatown and collaborated with the Asian Americans United's Chinatown Youth Organizing Project and VietLead to design a series of visual narratives that would amplify housing insecurity, gentrification, displacement, and immigration at the local levels. The collaboration was in direct response to the increase in the number of deportations and detentions carried out by ICE on Philadelphia immigrant communities. The projections were held at the Chinese Christian Church close to the Vine Street Parking Lot and uplifted narratives of keeping immigrant families together and building cross-community solidarities. CAB's Here To Stay projection series supported the self-determination of residents by providing a platform for frontline communities to tell their own stories of neighborhood change, identity, and struggle. The socially engaged art work that cultural collectives like CAB does is important because it calls people into a broader vision for social justice which requires conceiving new spaces of democratic involvement and creating new possibilities for political change for those most impacted by gentrification.

1.5 Artwashing and Dialogue to Hold Galleries Accountable for Gentrification

One of the most dangerous narratives about New York's Chinatown is that it has remained the same while other working-class neighborhoods in the city have been taken over by gentrification. In a *NYMag* article by journalist Nick Tabor, he profiles several stakeholders in the neighborhood to show how Chinatown has managed to survive, he writes: "Here are portraits of what could be called the Chinatown Establishment: a collection of people with roots in the neighborhood and unusual influence in shaping its future. Some wield familiar levers of power, like political position and real estate portfolios. Their visions for the future, and their worries for it, vary considerably. But overall

they stand a fighting chance of controlling the fate of some of the most valuable land in the city."[178] The trouble with this narrative is that it obscures the fact that massive changes have already taken place in the neighborhood. It inaccurately frames gentrification as solely a housing issue when it is inextricably related to cultural space, displacement, and erasure. The article features mostly men and those who wield power when in reality it has always been ordinary people and women who have done the most to protect Chinatown. Liz Moy, a fourth-generation resident and member of CAB, created a map of new galleries in the neighborhood to challenge the narrative that Chinatown is untouched by gentrification. Her map shows that there are currently over one hundred galleries occupying Chinatown, Two Bridges, and the Lower East Side. In a panel conversation held at Artists Space at 55 Walker Street, Moy spoke from her own experiences about how artists and galleries were artwashing Chinatown and agents of gentrification: "There's a range of galleries, together they create intense pressure for long term tenants because they're increasing rent burdens either inadvertently or knowingly. Also when we have all these galleries in place, the people they invite to the neighborhood are often engaging in behavior that is detrimental to community residents, they are people who use Airbnb, people who encourage nightlife. When long term tenants get displaced, they are being cut off from social and cultural resources that make up their life — like food and language which makes it important for them to stay. The other Chinatowns this city has to offer are becoming increasingly expensive, Sunset Park, Flushing, and Elmhurst, and are no longer options."[179] As artists themselves, part of CAB's ongoing work is to hold other artists, especially non-resident and non-Asian artists, accountable for their role in gentrification and to show how artists can concretely work against the process by participating in housing activism, centering the voices of those most impacted, sharing

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178 Nick Tabor's "How Has Chinatown Stayed Chinatown?" in *New York Mag* September 24, 2015.
179 Nick Tabor's "How Has Chinatown Stayed Chinatown" in New York Mag September 24, 2015.

resources with neighbors fighting to save their homes, supporting businesses that are essential to the neighborhood, and joining the struggle to pass comprehensive rezoning plan.

On July 19, 2016, CAB partnered with Mei Lum and The W.O.W. Project to host a dialogue titled "Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene?" in efforts to address the increasing number of galleries in the neighborhood. The discussion was moderated by Arai and included two panelists, Herb Tam, who is the lead curator at the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA), and Michelle Marie Esteva, who is the founder of Chinatown Soup, a non-profit art space in the neighborhood. The dialogue was divided into three segments and lasted about two hours. The first part involved Tam and Esteva introducing themselves and their relationship to Chinatown each with a five-minute statement. The introduction was followed by three respondents, Liz Moy, who is a core member of CAB and longtime resident of Chinatown, Ryan Wong, who is an arts curator and writer, and Shawn Guilder, who is a visual artist and new resident of Chinatown. The conversation then opened up to the general public for a Q&A session. Before the conversation started Arai prefaced that out of the dozens of art galleries in the area, Chinatown Soup was the only one that responded to CAB's invitation to participate in the event. The conversation brought dozens of residents, artists, activists, gallery owners, and reporters in the same room, the event was live streamed and sparked a national conversation about artwashing and its effects on working-class communities. It ended with members of CAB asking everyone in the room to recite a pledge that provided concrete methods for artists to mitigate their role as agents of mass displacement. The pledge included ten action steps that would turn pre-existing artists and galleries into allies in the grassroots struggle against gentrification.

The conversation began with a short mapping exercise, Arai asked everyone in the room to share what they thought the boundaries of New York's Chinatown were for visualization purposes: "Let's establish that when we say Chinatown, we mean — to the north, Delancey, to the west, Broadway, to the south, the Two Bridges area of Cherry, and to the east, Clinton. Given these

boundaries can I get a show of hands in this room of how many people live in here?"[180] More than half of the people in the room raised their hands in response. Arai then asked the first panelist Herb Tam to introduce himself and to describe his relationship to Chinatown. As the lead curator of exhibits for MOCA and co-founder of Godzookie, Tam began the dialogue by contextualizing the political history of cultural production in Chinatown: "In the very beginning, a group of people at Basement Workshop, which was a collective of Asian American cultural producers and historians, saw how things were changing in Chinatown. You know, shops like this were closing, things were being left out in the streets, and old folks were dying. There was nobody here to keep the memories of these people and places, that was because the neighborhood was changing. This group decided to collect all this stuff that was being tossed out to capture people's memories through a Chinatown documentation project. So over the years, we started to do exhibitions of the collection, that is how MOCA started, and because of that we started to work with the artists many who had started the Basement Workshop."[181] For Tam, gentrification comes with cultural colonialism and erasure of the culture that already exists in a neighborhood, he explained how this made him feel conflicted as an artist in Chinatown: "I love art, I love going to galleries that sell art, I love museums that show art, I love alternative spaces that challenge us about what art should do and what exhibitions can do. But I feel conflicted about all of these new galleries coming into the neighborhood. It has to do with the contrast between what they're showing, who they're showing it for, and what else there is around here. I remember I moved here in 1998, the only spaces for art in Chinatown that I knew about were Bob Lee's Asian American Art Center and Art In General who I used to intern for. There's an interesting connection between the art market and real estate, there's a reason why these new galleries are now thinking that Chinatown is the New Frontier, covering up everything that came before them."[182] Tam

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[180] Tomie Arai. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.
[181] Herb Tam. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.
[182] Herb Tam. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.

expressed to the audience that the reason why he is acutely aware of the new gallery induced changes in because their presence erases the already vibrant culture that exists in the neighborhood: "There is already culture here but these galleries are coming in and "enlightening" people about what culture is. That's the part that's really offensive."[183] For many artists and cultural workers like Tam who are committed to neighborhood preservation, gentrification is not only a matter of luxury development but it is inextricably tied to the practice of artwashing and the cultural erasure of immigrant communities which has consequences for how future generations form their values, attitudes, identities, and a sense of belonging.

The second panelist to speak was Michelle Esteva who recently opened Chinatown Soup, a creative non-profit hub for artists located nearby on 16 Orchard Street. Esteva explained to the audience how the space was first conceived: "The idea originated from an assignment I completed for my first semester of graduate school about a new approach to urban planning called creative placemaking. It's based on the idea that arts can introduce cooperative logic to urban communities and enhance inclusive development of neighborhoods as an alternative to institutionally driven master planning of Robert Moses urban renewal variety."[184] However as described earlier, creative placemaking has been widely used by real estate developers and individual artists to gentrify poor neighborhoods. Esteva went on to describe how she turned her graduate school assignment into a grant proposal: "I interviewed the current president of Detroit Soup, Amy Kaherl. Detroit Soup was a monthly micro-funding dinner started by two women in their twenties. The idea was to support emerging artistic projects in downtown Detroit, which was revitalizing at the time through public participation. Amy encouraged me to look at the "Start Your Own Soup" template on the website, and that turned into a concept presentation for my final submission to the class, and then a business

183 Herb Tam. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.
184 Michelle Esteva. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.

plan submitted to New York State to become a legit business."[185] In addressing why she specifically chose Chinatown as the site for her art space, Esteva continued to explain to everyone in the room: "That spawned a crazy search for cheap real estate, the emptying of my savings account, donations from family and friends, and a Kickstarter, to take the lease that we have on Orchard Street. The overarching framework for our approach is the "stone soup" parable that's a multicultural story, interpreted as a lesson in teamwork. It's about strangers who enter a hungry village and collaborate with locals to make stone soup for everybody to enjoy. We're a multicultural, multidisciplinary, and multipurpose space that is a haven for creatives."[186] Esteva also alluded to the fact that Basement Workshop had inspired her to build a creative underground space that encourages civic engagement. Chinatown Soup has since hosted a series of art exhibits such as "In Bloom" which was a week long exhibition that featured the work of Cooper Union art students and LAWLESS that interrogated stereotypes through Chinatown youth gangs and urban counterculture. While Esteva articulated her commitment to critically engage and support the cultural needs of the community, many attendees were apprehensive due to her positionality as a non-resident and non-Chinese artist.

After Tam and Esteva shared their individual five minute statements, Arai asked several respondents from the audience to share their thoughts. The first respondent was Moy who spoke candidly about why she thought Chinatown Soup was offensive to her as a lifelong resident of the neighborhood: "Your website states that the community goals include instilling neighborhood pride, empowering residents, responding to gentrification and fostering critical dialogue. But I don't think that is the case. I personally went to visit your gallery last year for LAWLESS, and I found it offensive. It was poorly researched, and I didn't feel like it told any narrative at all. Actually, I think in one of the wall texts it described Chinatown as a "shanty" and that was a wall text written by either you or one

[185] Michelle Esteva. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.
[186] Michelle Esteva. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.

of your team members. If you could speak about your background as a non-Chinese or non-Chinese American person and how you are authorized or have the credentials to be running this space that's claiming to give back to Chinatown."[187] In her response, Moy continued to explain why she thought the name itself was cultural appropriation and questioned how the gallery space was being inclusive to low-income and Chinese immigrant families: "I would like to ask about future programming, and how you plan to shift your programming to fit community goals, because outside of LAWLESS, the shows that you programmed were about skateboarding, which is contentious in Chinatown since skating tends to pose a safety issue for the elders who use the bench spaces and public parks. How was that reflective of your community goal to empower Chinatown residents?"[188] To connect the discussion of galleries to issues of displacement, landlord harassment, and eviction, Moy held up her sites of mass displacement map that she created and asked each panelist to address how galleries can relieve the rent burden they place on Chinese tenants and their families, she said: "That's a huge part of the problem, the presence of these galleries, and mostly majority white or non-Chinese galleries — their presence, and just the visibility of them, affects the way landlords see their buildings and the profit they can potentially gain from evicting longtime residents like me who are at risk of homelessness."[189] In cities across urban America, evictions are linked to poverty in that those who are most vulnerable to forcible evictions are more likely to live in economically precarious situations (Desmond 2012). New York's Chinatown has one of the highest poverty rates in the city, over one third of the population lives in poverty and that number escalates to 35 percent of elders and 40 percent of children who live in poverty (Asian American Federation 2012). Moy identifies the practice of artwashing as contributing to evictions which worsens poverty and inequality rates for mothers, children, families, and the new often undocumented immigrants. This is in line with what sociologist

[187] Liz Moy. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.
[188] Liz Moy. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.
[189] Liz Moy. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.

Matthew Desmond uncovers in *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (2008), that housing insecurity is a lead cause of poverty and homelessness in cities across the country.

The second respondent Ryan Wong approached the dialogue from a different standpoint. Wong began his response by asking everyone to breathe in order to diffuse some of the tension and nervousness that had built in the room. Wong contextualized the gentrification of Chinatown from a historical perspective, he reminded everyone: "The reason we are here in America is because of the violence of colonialism, of war, of poverty, that's the whole reason I'm in this neighborhood. When we're talking about gentrification, we're talking about the exact same forces except on a micro scale. On a block to block, store to store, neighborhood to neighborhood basis. When we talk about these deep and intense emotions that come up around gentrification, we're talking about this history that stretches several hundred years. We're talking about what it means to have a home, what it means to be in the diaspora, and how people in the diaspora are able to form or not form homes."[190] Wong spoke about gentrification as stemming from deep material imbalances, and how it is impossible for newer art galleries and small neighborhood businesses to co-exist: "A lot of the galleries on Orchard Street sell single works of art for $5000, $10,000, and they're right next to wholesale fabric stores, they're right next to bakeries. You have to sell a lot of *cha siu bao* to make $5,000. There's no way that that's a tenable situation for these things to co-exist."[191] To close out his response, Wong challenged the conventional art world notion that art has to be removed from community, and suggested that a look at Chinatown history proves that alternative models of art are possible: "I want to touch on this question of history and community on the one side and arts and the avant garde on the other. Often, we are told that they are separate and mutually exclusive and that's not true. I think that's one of the most insidious myths of the contemporary art world, that one cannot be creative and artistic while

[190] Ryan Wong. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.
[191] Ryan Wong. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.

also engaged in community and with history. Even before the Basement Workshop there was the Chinatown Hand Laundry Alliance, which merged working-class organizing with a self-published newspaper, which was a radical act from the thirties to the fifties destroyed by McCarthyism. We have Basement Workshop, the kind of seminal Asian American Movement space in New York City, that was an activist space, and an art space, they were screen printing posters for rallies the next day, and also creating music and art. There was Godzilla, Asian American Art Center, all these spaces in one way or another tried to break that boundary between community work and cultural production. That is the challenge for anyone coming into that lineage, whether it's Chinatown Soup, or MOCA, how does one do that for the contemporary moment. This is not to say that any of those spaces of the past were perfect, but that the ideal that we are holding ourselves to."[192] Wong importantly draws attention to the histories of Asian American art activism and cultural production and its relevance to contemporary issues of displacement, however what he voiced also calls into question larger issues of preservation, what preservation should look like, and who has authority to determine what gets preserved in a neighborhood.

During final segment of the forum, one of the audience members who was a featured artist at Chinatown Soup expressed concerns about the conversation: "I feel like I am being discriminated against because I can't come into Chinatown and photograph when I've been coming here my entire life. My best memories of my family are in Chinatown. Chinatown is historical. There brilliant things about Chinatown, and each person should be able to have a perspective, to bring it outside of this spot on the map. I feel that the controversy is in the controversy of saying that it's controversial that I shouldn't be able to show my work as a white artist."[193] In response Wong acknowledged the fact that art should be inclusive but reiterated his earlier argument that it should not at the expense of

[192] Ryan Wong. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.
[193] Anonymous. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.

existing residents: "Discrimination to me entails a history of racialized violence, I don't know if you had violent interactions in Chinatown but I don't think that's discrimination. We have people who have high emotions for reasons they outlined. I respect those emotions, I respect everyone's right to do the work they need to do in Chinatown but please try to listen to what is beneath those questions of you. The only way we're going to grow collectively is if we try to embrace discomfort. Try to open yourself to criticism."[194] Building on what Wong said, an elderly Chinatown resident stood up from his chair in the back of the room to share why he felt intimidated by the art galleries in the neighborhood: "The reason that so many Chinese people feel this fear anger and anxiety is because if you go back to the roots of why we exist here, it's because nobody cared about us. We had to come to this place to fend for ourselves. And we're proud of that. And to see it being taken away is very scary. And it hurts. It's disrespectful to the previous generation, to my family, to their families, and to the current people living here. So when you have spaces like an art gallery, a hotel, a bar, or a restaurant, we're skeptical if are you're here for the community. And chances are, you're probably not."[195] He continued to talk about how out of place he felt when he walked into one of the galleries on Orchard Street and how self-conscious he felt about his own presence in the space, he said: "I had to pinch myself. I felt surreal to see that art had more breathing space than we do as residents. Before he passed, my father used to live in one of the SROs on East Broadway, he even couldn't fit a bed in his nook. Now imagine if he walked into one of these galleries so spacious that one 8 by 11 painting can take up an entire wall. I really wondered if I could still call Chinatown home after that."[196] What this resident described is more than the physical displacement of losing a home, his words echo a sense of dissociation and depersonalization that comes from cultural displacement. In clinical psychiatry, depersonalization happens when a person becomes detached to the world around them. They begin

194 Ryan Wong. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.
195 Resident. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.
196 Resident. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.

to feel out of touch with their surroundings almost as if their environment has become unrecognizable, unreal, and devoid of any significant meaning (Simeon, Knutelska, Riggio-Rosen, and Nelson 2008). The person can also develop emotional numbness toward their environment or become preoccupied with checking that they exist or if their experience of the world is real. This is what many residents who live through cultural displacement experience on a daily basis, where they move through places as an external observer because nothing seems real anymore.

In order to address cultural displacement and its detrimental effects on existing residents, Yu reiterated the need for accountability and questioned whether or not galleries could be possible allies in the current struggle against gentrification, she expressed: “Once you are here, you have a footprint in this community, it’s changing. So what does that mean in terms of your own relationship to the community. How do you choose to engage and what does accountability looks like? It’s important to align ourselves with the organizing that’s happening already in Chinatown, CAB and other groups that have been fighting to have a wider vision of protecting Chinatown. As a few people have said, how we keep our eye on the prize of protecting Chinatown for working-class immigrants who have been here for generations. The galleries are one part of it, and I think some of these folks can be allies.”[197] Although gentrification has escalated in Chinatown and all over the United States, it is not inevitable. Yu asked the audience to find points of unity between artists, galleries, and residents, and restated several of the actionable steps that artists and galleries can take to mitigate the effects of gentrification. Arai brought the conversation back full circle to reflect on the role of artists in the city, she said: “I think that when we talk about places being frontiers, implicit in that is that people think no one lives there or that rent is cheap. It’s just open season to go in and develop it into something else. I think that everyone here now understands how artists and galleries are used as the Trojan Horse of gentrification in Chinatown, Boyle Heights, Bushwick, and Harlem. But in terms of activism, arts and

[197] Betty Yu. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.

cultural work in the neighborhoods like Chinatown, I think that artists can sort of be the vanguard of talking about how they can turn this around. This kind of conversation is the beginning of reaching out to more galleries and finding out perhaps how we can build an exchange, whether or not we can get some recognition or possibly programming to give back to the community here."[198] By this time it had been more than two hours since the conversation began, Arai closed out by reciting their ten point anti-displacement pledge and encouraging those in attendance to become involved with CAB, CAAAV, or other community groups engaged in anti-displacement work. Even though the townhall does not guarantee immediate changes or policy outcomes, cultural change often precedes political change. As historian Robin D.G. Kelley writes in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imaginations* (2002), it is critical for people to talk about the present condition and to be visionaries where they can create and envision a different world in which there is no displacement or cultural dispossession.

1.6 From Dialogue to Action: Mobilizing Against Yellowface Galleries

While conversations about neighborhood change are important, sometimes changes happen so quickly in Chinatown that a more immediate response is necessary. In response to the yellowface gallery that I described in the introduction of this chapter, CAB organized a large-scale public action in front of James Cohan Gallery. One week after the artist Omer Fast installed his exhibit and transformed the facade of the art gallery to look like a dilapidated Chinese bus station, Moy brought it to the attention to the rest of CAB and was appalled at how offensive it was. The collective met over a series of late-night strategizing sessions and conference calls to discuss action steps. Most of the CAB members were visibly upset at the installation and everyone agreed that it was necessary to pursue some sort of direct action. Moy volunteered to draft a statement in order to notify allies and other Chinatown residents about the exhibit. Arai suggested a performative action which would require CAB and Chinatown residents to takeover the gallery space. She suggested that they could

[198] Tomie Arai. Chinatown: New York's Newest Gallery Scene? Conversation Held at 永安和. July 19, 2017.

mobilize residents to occupy the gallery space and pretend as if it were their own homes. Moy built on that idea and proposed that everyone who participates in the indoor intervention should bring smelly foods to eat like durian or stinky tofu.[199] After three hours of brainstorming ideas and assessing resources, a direct action and mobilization was planned for Sunday, October 15 in front of 291 Grand Street. With the support of Decolonize This Place, Artists Space, Chinatown Tenants Union, Mothers on the Move, and Occupy Museum, the action against James Cohan and Omer Fast's installation caught the attention of dozens of local and national media.

Three days prior to the direct action Yu sent out the statement that Moy wrote to allies and asked them to come out to support in solidarity. In the email Yu reminded everyone to keep the action "on the low" so that no information leaked to James Cohan Gallery or its staff, the beginning of the statement read: "James Cohan symbolizes the gentrifying force that has spread throughout Chinatown. Fast's exhibition further cements the blatant disrespect and disregard that galleries have shown for our community. This exhibit reinforces racist narratives of uncleanliness, otherness, and blight that have been projected onto Chinatown. This show is another example of how gentrifying art institutions appropriate histories of violent oppression to garner cultural, monetary, and artistic clout. The artist ignores the presence of a thriving community filled with families and businesses and reduces their existence to poverty porn. This has a real impact on how Chinatown is perceived by non-residents, politicians, and developers who view low-income communities as wastelands ripe for gentrification, real estate investment."[200] This incident happened less than two months after a similar incident in Crown Heights, where a new restaurant lounge called Summerhill advertised fake bullet holes in which residents called out as insensitive stereotyping or a blatant form of poverty porn. CAB's statement connected the yellowface artwashing happening in New York's Chinatown to the struggles in other

[199] These observations are from my own fieldnotes and participation in these planning meetings that lasted over the course of three weeks in September and October of 2017.
[200] Liz Moy statement for the Chinatown Art Brigade on James Cohan Gallery published on October 2 2017.

low-income neighborhoods across the city, it statement continued to state: "We must expose gentrifiers like the James Cohan who are using 'racism disguised as art' to demean the neighborhood and justify their presence in the community. Galleries and luxury condos have a direct hand in raising rents and displacing low income rent-subsidized tenants. These days, developers and landlords are likely to keep storefronts unoccupied for months on end, waiting to rent to the next gallery, hipster bar or high-end restaurant that comes along. Some landlords in Chinatown will now rent exclusively to galleries. These spaces are often the Trojan Horses needed to raise the value of property and neighborhood. We know this is not unique to Chinatown and it's happening all over New York City — in Bushwick, Harlem, Crown Heights, and the South Bronx to name a few. This is a national and global fight."[201] The statement contextualizes the incident at James Cohan Gallery in a broader history of orientalism, whitewashing, and cultural erasure of Asians emphasizing that these are all reproducing colonial paradigms. Given that artwashing is framed by developers to be a benign process and one that serves the public good, it was important for CAB to explicitly link real estate developers and their use of galleries as pawns in gentrification and to contextualize James Cohan Gallery and artist Omer Fast as part of a much larger system of dispossession.

The night before the action CAB organized an art build at CAAAV's office at 55 Hester Street to create banners and prepare for a Chinese media press conference that would be held inside the gallery. The goal of the Chinese media press conference was to ensure that the stories of tenants were circulated and centered the media narratives of the event. CAB invited longtime Chinatown residents to take part in the press conference. On the day of the action itself dozens of Chinatown residents, activists, and creatives came from all over the city to protest the installation by helping to document the event for social media, taking part in the chants, and dropping a large banner that read "racism disguised as art" from the second floor of the building. Those who prepared statements for the

[201] Liz Moy statement for the Chinatown Art Brigade on James Cohan Gallery published on October 2 2017.

Chinese media press conference include Mei Lum, fifth-generation owner of 永安和, Chen Yo Chi, organizer with CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union, and lifelong Chinatown residents Annie Tan and Ms. Chen. As an active member of CTU and educator in the public school system, Tan read her statement in the middle of the makeshift room in front of the fake ATMs: "The media has always reinforced the idea that Chinatown is squalid, and its people primitive. That Chinatown was run-down, broken, and needed to be fixed by gentrification. The idea is that new businesses and art galleries should replace the old and supposedly beautify those spaces. This gallery adds to this racist narrative of Chinatown. It is one more addition to the hundreds of years of abuse, harassment, and attack against Chinatowns and Chinese American people. It is a direct threat to my neighbors and community. I moved back to my hometown after five years in Chicago to be a part my community's full vibrancy and humanity. Chinatown created a space for my family and myself to be fully Chinese and American. There are very few places in the world with this vibrancy and we as tenants are here to protect that community and others like it. As a teacher in Sunset Park, I teach my students not just to love reading and math, but to love their languages and their cultures. We learn together not just to be tolerant of but respect and appreciate cultures other than our own because that is a gesture to community. An art gallery coming to a neighborhood, pushing a racist vision of Chinatown onto Chinatown residents? That is an insult."[202] Xiao Ling Chen, who is a lifelong resident of 135 Eldridge Street and an active member of CTU spoke about how offensive the artwork was to her as someone who has directly been impacted by the uptick of galleries on her block. Ms. Chen explained how her predatory landlord R.A. Cohan had been trying to evict her and other Chinese tenants in her building for years already. Similar to the situation at 90 Elizabeth Street, Ms. Chen explained that her building had over seventy open housing violations including mold, lead based paint, rat infestation, and defective appliances. Throughout her statement which she read in Cantonese, Ms. Chen called out

[202] Excerpt from Annie Tan's speech at James Cohan Press Conference October 15, 2017.

artist Omer Fast for using poverty porn to profit off tenants like her who are on the brink of homelessness because of real estate speculation and escalating rents, she said: "In the past 10 years, as the number of luxury developments, galleries, and bars increase on our block, so does our rent. The conditions we live in have become more difficult. The galleries on our block are paying close to eight thousand dollars in rent. My rent has gone up eight times. Even though our livelihoods have become more difficult we continue to resist. We want to send a message to the real estate developers and the city government that Chinatown is not for sale."[203] As Ms. Chen read her statement aloud in the gallery space in front of a crowd of media, there were dozens of protesters standing outside in support including many New York City allies including Mothers on the Move, Equality for Flatbush, Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network, Queens Neighborhood United, and Defend Corona.

There were also anti-displacement organizers who came to support CAB's action from other cities. Nancy Meza, who is an immigrants rights organizer with Defend Boyle Heights appeared in person to support CAB's efforts and to connect the struggles between Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles to New York's Chinatown, she expressed: "The same galleries, the very same forces that are gentrifying New York City are making their way to Boyle Heights. Very similar to Chinatown, 80 percent of Boyle Heights residents are renters, we're low-income and working-class people. As our communities demand grocery stores, laundromats, shelters for the homeless, job placement centers, what we keep on getting are galleries and high end bars. The city created its own Boyle Heights Arts District just for them, these developers are hawking over Boyle Heights as the next museum or art center of the world."[204] Another grassroots group from Los Angeles called the Chinese Community Development Center wrote a statement in solidarity linking the struggle across Chinatowns: "Here in Los Angeles, we also witness the increasing creep of galleries contributing to rising rents. Most of

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[203] Excerpt from Xiao Ling Chen's speech at James Cohan Press Conference October 15, 2017.
[204] Excerpt from Nancy Meza's speech at James Cohan Press Conference October 15, 2017.

these art spaces are not accessible to long-time residents and have not held themselves accountable to community. Like Chinatown New York, developers have also evicted immigrant businesses and left storefronts vacant for months to attract higher end shops. In recent years, many low-income tenants we work with have found it harder to find jobs in the neighborhood and are facing evictions or living in poor conditions. This is why we must stand up for each other. Like our neighbors in Boyle Heights who are fighting artwashing, we see the root cause as a system of capitalist forces trying to profit from our culture and displace us at the same time. Like our ancestors who fought to build Chinatowns as safe havens for migrant laborers over 150 years ago, we refuse to "be erased and be recreated" by those who know nothing about our struggle. Like our sisters across the nation in New York City, we are here to stay and will fight for the dignity and well-being of our Chinatown community."[205] In the past three years, a large section of Los Angeles Chinatown has been rebranded as the Chinatown Arts District and more than half a dozen of galleries have opened up on Chung King Road. Many of these galleries similar to Omer Fast's exhibit engage in yellowface prosthetics, keeping the facade to look Chinese but transforming everything about the interior. There was also an intergenerational anti-displacement grassroots organization from Vancouver Chinatown called the Chinatown Action Group that sent over a statement in solidarity with the action: "We stand in solidarity with CAB in their protest of James Cohan Gallery and in the global fight against racism, gentrification, displacement, and cultural colonialism. We are a collective of people of Chinese descent fighting for social justice in Vancouver's Chinatown and building a progressive left voice within the Chinese community. In Vancouver, we have witnessed luxury condos and galleries raise rents, displace long-time working-class residents, and disrespect cultural sites and communities in Vancouver Chinatown. James Cohan is symbolic for what's happening in many Chinatowns across national borders, not just

[205] Excerpt from Los Angeles Chinese Community Development Center's speech at James Cohan Press Conference October 15, 2017.

in New York. Chinatowns around the world are not for sale. We support CAB by calling on galleries to hold themselves accountable and complicit in gentrifying our homes."[206] This work is significant because it not only challenges the gentrification that is happening in New York's Chinatown that results from artwashing, it amplifies the voices of existing tenants like Ms. Chen and builds solidarity with other communities across the country that are undergoing similar changes.

In a response to CAB, artist Omer Fast posted his own statement through the James Cohan Gallery website justifying his installation as a social commentary: "I decided to transform the facade and interior in a symbolic and temporary act of erasure. I wanted to erase the passage of time and recreate what the space looked like before the gallery moved in two years ago. The tall glass facade and white-cube interior would disappear, and the space would lose its more recent identity as an upscale gallery. I'm aware how superficial such a transformation might seem, but I was precisely interested in this conflict between appearance and essence."[207] Fast drew from his own experiences as an immigrant in the United States to explain this tension he felt compelled to capture, he argued that CAB was censoring his artistic freedom: "The gallery is used as an immigrant surrogate: a transplant that tries to affect an appearance and blend in, even while its essence is undeniably foreign. I'm not surprised there have been critical reactions. I completely understand people's need to push back. We all have unseemly baggage, racist, and otherwise, that needs to be sorted through. But I am surprised and distressed by the vitriol and name-calling. A group of protesters hung a large poster outside the show, which accuses the gallery of representing "a non-US and non-New York artist." I expect this sort of characterization from right-wing trolls carrying tiki-torches and howling for walls to be built. I don't expect it from left-wing activists in lower Manhattan."[208] His response dismisses all of CAB's concerns about gentrification, which he does not substantively address and instead chooses to center

[206] Excerpt from Chinatown Action Group's speech at James Cohan Press Conference October 15, 2017.
[207] Omer Fast response published on the James Cohan Gallery website on October 18, 2017.
[208] Omer Fast response published on the James Cohan Gallery website on October 18, 2017.

himself as a victim. In fact, his effort to shift the narrative to illustrate himself as a censored artist is detrimental because it normalizes and legitimizes the erasure that Chinatown residents experience as a result of artwash gentrification.

In order to reframe the narrative, Moy drafted another statement for CAB that brought the conversation back to the core issues of displacement and to amplify the concerns of tenants, a short excerpt stated: "The Brigade is not surprised that James Cohan's immediate reaction to Sunday's action would be to cry censorship, and simultaneously claim that our protest was exactly what their artist intended. In an attempt to avert substantive dialogue, both the gallery and artist have chosen to ignore our concerns and assert that they are the victims in a debate about artistic freedom. For this reason, we are not interested in responding to these comments by the gallery or engaging in future dialogue with the artist and his apologists."[209] The statement continued to describe CAB's mission and described what used to be at 291 Grand Street before the gallery took over: "Before James Cohan Gallery moved into its space at 291 Grand Street, it was HK Manpolo Market, a local supermarket that served the needs of Chinatown's low-income immigrant tenants. The faceless immigrants that the artist claims to identify with, who live and work in the neighborhood, are families and residents who are deeply offended by this depiction of the community as derelict and foreign. Our lives and livelihoods are facing erasure because of galleries like James Cohan and artists who believe that their privilege and entitlement gives them the right to occupy the spaces we call home. By celebrating resistance, we believe that CAB is just one of many new and powerful organizing models for change. Our close collaborations with grassroots organizations bring us closer to understanding how art and culture can have a significant and lasting impact on the communities in which we live."[210] Their response to Fast gained traction across the city and galvanized more people to become actively

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[209] Liz Moy statement for the Chinatown Art Brigade on James Cohan Gallery published on October 19 2017.
[210] Liz Moy statement for the Chinatown Art Brigade on James Cohan Gallery published on October 19 2017.

involved with the anti-displacement grassroots organizing efforts in New York's Chinatown, including pressuring local officials to support the community-led rezoning plan which would protect the existing affordable housing stock in the neighborhood. It was the result of their work to hold James Cohan Gallery and Omer Fast culpable for their role in gentrification that CAB's work gained attention in the media and was featured in news outlets like *Hyperallergic, New York Times, NBC, Bowery Boogie,* and *DNAinfo,* propelling the issue of artwashing in New York's Chinatown into a national dialogue.

1.7 The Power of Culture in Creating New Political Arenas

New York's Chinatown has been a critical site for cultural production and artistic resistance that has led to new political possibilities for democratic participation. CAB continues in a long legacy of Asian American cultural workers and collectives that have found their beginnings in Chinatown, all of them in their own ways have been committed to improving the social and material conditions of frontline communities. CAB's work illustrates how arts and culture can play an important role in combating gentrification by bringing people together to discuss issues that impact their daily lives. CAB also shows how art making has the potential to impact policy change. Their work has amplified many of CAAAV's CTU housing campaigns from the community-led rezoning plan to individual building mobilizations to push for more tenant protection laws. In addition, the collective has held new galleries in the neighborhood accountable for being instrumentalized towards the displacement of residents and small businesses. Since the James Cohan action, a new organization called Artists Against Displacement was founded in Chinatown by a coalition of artists and arts professionals seeking to amplify the demands of those whose lives and livelihoods are placed at risk by predatory development and to work in solidarity with grassroots groups pressuring elected officials to pass the community-led rezoning plan. Fundamentally, CAB's community-driven cultural work demonstrates that cultural change precedes political change. Their creative projects offer another way for people to see their neighborhoods and their sustained relationship with frontline communities redefines what

democratic citizenship looks like in practice whether that involves sharing housing struggle narratives through mobile projections or occupying space in a yellowface art gallery. In this chapter I suggest that a renewed focus on cultural production will allow researchers to reconfigure and reimagine what democratic citizenship, agency, identity, and empowerment looks like for Chinatown residents in the face of displacement. These place-based cultural collectives importantly generate an arena for artists and local residents to come together outside of formal political institutions to talk about neighborhood issues that are most immediate and to collectively find solutions through dialogue, grassroots action, and forms of creative expression.

Chapter 5: Before the Bulldozers: The Battle for Chinatown in San Francisco and Boston

Image: View of San Francisco's Chinatown from the top of the I-Hotel on Kearny Street.

It was a Monday afternoon and I sat across from Leland Wong inside a wooden booth at the Pork Chop House on Jackson Street. Leland is known by residents as the "official" photographer of San Francisco's Chinatown, we sat there for hours over oxtail stew talking about changes in the neighborhood. As a third generation Chinese American and lifelong Chinatown resident, Leland has never really left the neighborhood and he still lives in the building that he and his siblings grew up in on Kearny Street. Leland talked about the series of events that had a formidable impact on his political identity including Watts Riots, Civil Rights Movement, I-Hotel, and Third World Liberation strikes. Although he had never been involved in any formal organizations, he reminisced about how he would hang out in neighborhood movement spaces to socialize like at Leeway, a pool hall for radical youth involved in the Red Guard Party and Kalayaan. During the 1970s, he got involved with the Kearny Street Workshop, an artist collective where he produced posters for protests, conducted workshops, and painted murals for various Chinatown and Manilatown neighborhood organizations. As an artist

and photographer, he continues to document life in the neighborhood but lamented that San Francisco's Chinatown no longer feels like a real community, most of the small businesses he grew up with had closed down and his close friends have moved out. Leland observed that many of the newer residents are not Chinese people but are younger tech professionals who work in the neighboring Pioneer Square and South of Market neighborhoods. After our conversation at Pork Chop House, Leland walked with me around the neighborhood and we visited several of the places he mentioned that were either historic establishments like the fourth generation owned Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Factory in Ross Alleyway or newer businesses like Mister Jiu's on Waverly Place and a new controversial co-working space on Grant Avenue called 1920c.

Located at 950 Grant Avenue, 1920c is one of several coworking spaces that have opened in San Francisco's Chinatown. As I walked up the stairs to the second floor with Leland, I noticed the spacious yellow interior of what used to be a Cantonese restaurant called the Grand Palace. After the restaurant closed down the building was empty for eight years and recently in 2012 Andy Young, whose family had owned 950 Grant Avenue for three generations, sold it to Jackie Li who renovated it. In 2016, Li rented the space to Jenny Chan, who is one of the co-founders of 1920c. 1920c is a co-working space for young professionals who are able to rent out office desks on a daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly basis. According to Chan, the date 1920 represents the year of women's suffrage and the "C" stands for collaboration, so the space is intended to cater to women in tech professions. The ground floor of the three story building houses Oriental Treasures which is a gift shop and the top floor has eleven single room occupancy units with shared bathrooms that rent for $1,100 a month. Leland told me about how before the grand opening of 1920c, residents and community organizers on the staff of the Chinatown Community Development Center (CCDC) gathered across the street to protest the space. Leland showed me photos he captured of the protest, which included CCDC staff and residents holding up poster size maps of the 1986 Chinatown Rezoning Plan, which were a

set of codes passed to prevent downtown Financial District offices and financial institutions from encroaching into Chinatown. Leland explained that those protesting the 1920c co-working space felt as though it violated the 1986 zoning regulations which limited land use in Chinatown to housing, institutional services, and small retail operations such as gift shops, travel agencies, and restaurants. The presence of 1920c would invite speculative investment and serve as a loophole for other tech companies to open in Chinatown which would lead to the loss of even more affordable housing. In July of 2015, the Planning Commission issued a notice of enforcement and held a public hearing to determine whether or not 1920c violated compliance with Chinatown land use plan.

In response to the backlash, Jenny Chan organized a press conference in Portsmouth Square, a park located on Kearny Street. The occasion was advertised to the media as "Rethink, Replan, and Rezone," and it emphasized the need for economic revitalization and modifying zoning regulations in Chinatown to permit the opening of new businesses. A number of 1920c members and pro development realtors came out in support of the press conference including Richard Ow, who is a longtime resident of North Beach Houses and prominent Chinese American conservative lobbyist for realtors. Ow along with other conservative Chinese lobbyists including Mary Jung, Wilma Pang, and Jay Chang paid a crowd of Chinese seniors to stand as props in support of 1920c for the media to capture. On the day of the press conference, there were almost two dozen seniors standing under the Portsmouth Square pagoda holding posters in bold letters that read "Too Many Vacancies" and "Revitalize Chinatown." In her statement to the public and media, Chan pulled findings from a survey that had she conducted of vacancies in the neighborhood citing that there were at least forty vacant storefronts on the main streets of Chinatown including Grant, Kearny, Stockton, and Powell. Chan contended that current shopowners are retiring and that there had only been a handful of younger generation Chinese American shop owners who are opening stores. Chan argued for need to change old zoning regulations to allow for easier conversion and new business opportunities for the

neighborhood to grow with the rest of the city. Ow and the other lobbyists for realtors insisted that there was a need to build higher density buildings and to expand Chinatown for a wider range of businesses that are able to pay the rent. Two weeks later, the Planning Commission decided to shut down 1920c due to its violation of the zoning code and lack of permit. Cindy Wu, who is the Deputy Director of the Planning Commission, cited that without a permit, 1920c was not allowed to operate as an office space in a strip designated for retail and restaurants. The battle for space in San Francisco's Chinatown continues and the future of the neighborhood remains uncertain as the real estate and tech industries continue to grow in influence.

This chapter expands our focus from New York's Chinatown to comparatively examine how Chinatown residents in San Francisco and Boston are shifting the scales of urban governance and challenging the power of real estate elites, banks, and developers through local political processes and policy campaigns. In the next sections, I provide a historical overview of both Chinatowns and document in detail some of the gentrification led changes happening. In San Francisco's Chinatown, I draw from several months of ethnographic fieldwork and oral histories collected during my time with the Chinatown Community Development Center, a community development organization that primarily serves Chinatown but also surrounding areas like the North Beach and Tenderloin. I worked with longtime housing organizer Gen Fujioka as well as with the rest of the policy team on city-wide ballot measures for 2016 municipal elections. I chronicle the process of running a bilingual campaign around four specific ballot measures that would have major policy implications and drastically change the landscape in San Francisco. In Boston's Chinatown, I document the battle to save Reggie Wong Memorial Park, also known as Parcels 25 and 26, from being redeveloped and privatized by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). I draw from personal interviews and oral testimonies shared at MassDOT's public meetings by Chinatown residents and members of the Boston Knights 9-Man volleyball team. From the perspective of local residents and community

organizers, I demonstrate how marginal actors in both cities are able to affect change to save their homes outside of elite level politics. At the end of this chapter, I discuss future directions and the broader implications of this work for scholars, residents, organizers, academics, elected officials, urban planners and others who are invested in making cities more livable for everyone.

1.1 A Condensed History of San Francisco's Chinatown

San Francisco's Chinatown is one of the oldest ethnic neighborhoods in the United States and has served as a major gateway for various Asian immigrant communities. Since it was formed in 1848, San Francisco's Chinatown has experienced many changes as a result of immigration laws and transnational migration patterns that have made the neighborhood home to Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino, and later Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian refugee communities (Lee 2001; Yung 1995; Chinn 1989; Pamuk 2004; Geron, De La Cruz, Saito, and Singh 2001). The current version of San Francisco's Chinatown was formed after the 1906 earthquake and fire that razed eighty percent of the city (Fradkin 2005; Eng 2001; Henderson 2005; Choy 2008; Genthe and Tchen 2013). Today the neighborhood is tightly sandwiched between affluent areas like North Beach, Financial District, and Nob Hill, it is twenty four square blocks and bounded by Kearny Street to the east, Broadway to the north, Powell Street to the west, and Bush Street to the south. Much like New York's Chinatown, San Francisco's Chinatown continues to serve as an important destination for new Asian immigrants since community institutions, temples, family associations, hospitals, language resources, and other infrastructure still caters to the diverse needs of low-income immigrant families (Choy 2012; Chin 2015). Similar to other Chinatowns in the United States, San Francisco's Chinatown is comprised of seniors and multigenerational families, many of whom live below the poverty threshold and in single room occupancies. The poverty rate in San Francisco's Chinatown is three times than that of the rest of the city and the unemployment rate is two times the city average (Vorsatz and Speeth 2015). The poverty levels in the neighborhood have increased from 18 percent in 1980 to 26 percent in 2013

while the median household income has dropped from $45,797 to $23,261 (Crispell and Montojo 2016). San Francisco's Chinatown has experienced a large outward migration to satellite Chinese immigrant communities in Richmond and Sunset districts (Laguerre 2005). This outward migration trend is largely attributable to rent increases and pressures from real estate speculation and development that have transformed the neighborhood.

Like other Chinatowns across the United States, San Francisco's Chinatown was the result of discriminatory and exclusionary policies aimed at Chinese immigrants throughout the 1800s until the mid 1900s. The earliest Chinese immigrants who arrived in San Francisco during the Gold Rush era were primarily from the Taishan and Zhongshan regions as well as Guangdong province (Chen 2002; Okihiro 2001). In 1849, there were only a few hundred Chinese people who lived in California but by the early 1950s, the population of Chinese immigration rose steadily, with 20,000 arriving in 1952 alone (Chan 1986; Yung 2006; Lee 2006). In 1869, the Chinese were the largest foreign-born population in the state of California, the majority of new immigrants settled in places outside of the San Francisco harbor including in Sacramento, Yuba, and San Joaquin (Chan 1984). According to the 1860 census, there were 35,000 Chinese people in California which amounted to one-tenth of the state's population at the time. As the number of Chinese laborers in California grew, so did anti-Chinese exclusionary measures that barred the early immigrants from all facets of American life (Salyer 1995; Lee 2015; Lew-Williams 2018). Beginning with the 1852 Foreign Miners Tax, the state of California placed a twenty dollar per month tax on each foreign miners who wanted to mine for gold. Until the 1960s, an overwhelming proportion of the Chinese population worked as miners, merchants, and artisans in the rural mining counties (Ong 1985; Takaki 1989). It was during this time, Chinese laborers became targets of violent attacks and were forced into other menial low-paying industrial jobs and many sought safety in San Francisco's already segregated Chinatown (Lee 2006; Okihiro 1994). In the 1880s, the Chinese population in Chinatown grew from 800 residents in 1848 to well over

26,000 residents (Chan 1986). However, this growth was halted when the federal government passed the Page Act on March 3, 1875 and the later Chinese Exclusion Act on May 6, 1882, barring all Chinese immigration into the country for nearly a century. In addition to these restrictions on immigration, federal law mandated that all Chinese people including those who were American born citizens to carry photo identification at all times or risk deportation.

For the Chinese Americans who were already living in San Francisco's Chinatown during the exclusionary era, there were local government policies, practices, and statues that placed restrictions on all aspects of life. The effects of Chinese exclusion were particularly evident in San Francisco where in the 1880s, almost 80 percent of the nation's 83,200 Chinese people lived (Chen 2002; Lim 1979). In 1885, the political code of the state of California was amended to enforce segregation of Chinese people in schools, hospitals, and all other public facilities (Shah 2001). As more Chinese immigrants settled in San Francisco, Chinese American parents demanded schools for their children as reflected in the 1885 California Supreme Court Case Tape v. Hurley (Chang 2004). In the landmark court case, parents of American born Chinese Mamie Tape challenged the principal at Spring Valley School for his refusal to enroll Mamie and several other Chinese children. The court ruled that the exclusion of Chinese students was unlawful and determined that all children were entitled to education (Lim, Chan, and Hsu 2008). However, since cities had little oversight from the state on whether to admit Chinese students into the public school system, the San Francisco school board pushed their own policy. In 1906 the school board passed a resolution that segregated school children and mandated that students of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean descent attend what was called the Oriental School in San Francisco's Chinatown. Besides from local policies that excluded Chinese immigrants from institutions, in 1913 the California State Legislature passed the Alien Land Laws which prohibited "aliens ineligible for citizenship" from owning land (Roger 1999; Gains and Cho 2004). In fact, of the 306 parcels of land in Chinatown in 1904, only ten percent were Chinese owned and the rest were

owned by white property owners (Chou 2014). Due to these restrictions and a halt on Chinese immigration, San Francisco's Chinatown did not expand much until after the 1906 earthquake and then again after the 1960s from immigration reforms which led to population growth and significant transformation of the built environment.

One of the turning points for San Francisco's Chinatown was the 1906 earthquake. Prior to the event, the neighborhood was known for its crime and large population of sex workers. The area was depicted by the mainstream media to be filled with prostitution and opium dens and inflicted with various venereal diseases (Craddock 2000). Largely due to a series of reports issued by the San Francisco Board of Health, Chinatown as a geography was conflated with disease and depravity (Shah 2006). This all changed on April 18, 1906, when Northern California was struck by a high intensity 7.9 magnitude earthquake and subsequent fires that razed eighty percent of the city. In less than one minute, San Francisco's Chinatown was completely destroyed and reduced to rubble (Choy 2012). At the time of the earthquake and fire, Chinatown had an estimated population of 14,000 but its inhabitants were never included in the death toll (Gonzales 2014). Since Chinatown was located at the epicenter of the city next to the financial district along Market Street, city officials including then Mayor E.E. Schmitz and real estate developers planned to relocate Chinatown to Hunter's Point, which was a mud flat on the margins of the city (Pan 1991). In response, Chinese family associations and the Chinese consulate came together to protest that Chinatown should be rebuilt as a tourist destination that could contribute to the city's tax base. The officials reluctantly agreed to reconstruct the area with the support of Chinatown elites including Look Tin Eli and other merchants. Look decided to commission American architects who had never traveled abroad to redesign buildings in San Francisco's Chinatown to look like China, this resulted in the construction of colorful pagodas and dragon gateways (Genthe and Tchen 1984; Choy 2008; Kyan 2013). The reconstruction turned San Francisco Chinatown into a premier tourist destination, and it set a precedent for other cities to

model their Chinatowns after. In addition to transforming the physical environment of Chinatown, the 1906 earthquake had another significant impact. The fires destroyed virtually all of the birth records that San Francisco held of Chinese immigrants. This allowed new immigrants to claim that they were citizens and granted them the right to bring family members to America (Yung 2016). This began the influx of paper sons and paper daughters, which shifted the demographics of San Francisco's Chinatown to include women, children, and families.

While the population of Chinese in San Francisco's Chinatown grew after the earthquake, the 1960s immigration reforms expanded the population even more. During World War II when China became an ally of the United States, public opinion towards Chinese people shifted to become more favorable and resulted in President Franklin D. Roosevelt repealing the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 and enacting the subsequent War Bride Act, which allowed foreign wives and children of military servicemen to enter the country (Lee 1956; Yung 1995; Lee 2012). In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, altered the course of immigration in the United States. The law eliminated the use of discriminatory national origin quotas and put in place an immigration system based on family reunification and skills, it also increased the annual quota for Eastern-Hemisphere countries including China from 105 to 20,000 persons. The number of Chinese Americans nearly doubled from 299,000 in 1980 to 536,000 in 1990, and then again from 989,000 in 2000 to 2 million in 2016 (Chan and Hsu 2008; Hooper and Batalova 2017). Many of these Chinese immigrants settled in urban areas like San Francisco's Chinatown, contributing to the expansion of social and cultural institutions in the neighborhood. Between the 1970s and 1990s, the Chinese population expanded outwards from the Chinatown core and into the surrounding neighborhoods of North Beach, Nob Hill, and Russian Hill (Tsui 2009; Choy 2012). By the 1990s, San Francisco's Chinatown became widely known as the most densely populated neighborhood in the country west of Manhattan. A consequence of the population growth was that the existing infrastructure did not

keep up, which led to severe housing shortages and overcrowding in single room occupancy hotels. San Francisco's Chinatown close proximity to the downtown financial district has also contributed to further shortages in affordable housing as foreign investments and urban development projects have driven up commercial and residential rents. In the span of ten years between the 1970s to mid-1980s, over 1,700 residential units in Chinatown were converted into office spaces.[211]

The battle for International Hotel epitomized San Francisco's struggle around affordable housing, displacement, and urban renewal. Located at 848 Kearny Street, I-Hotel was a three-story red brick building in the heart of Manilatown that housed retired Filipino laborers or *manongs* along with Chinese elders who paid fifty dollars a month for a single room. Located next to Chinatown, Manilatown covered ten blocks of Kearny Street and contained small Filipino-owned businesses like restaurants, groceries, pool halls, and barbershops (Habal 2007). I-Hotel was a hotbed for Asian American leftist activism in San Francisco, its labyrinth like basement spaces were occupied by many organizations that were mobilizing for racial and economic justice (Umemoto 1989; Dong 2002). In the 1960s when the movement for urban renewal intensified and high-rise skyscrapers, financial institutions, and coffee shops moved into downtown San Francisco, developers Milton Meyer and Co. targeted the I-Hotel for demolition in order to build a parking garage to accommodate the expanding downtown. In October of 1968, a demolition permit was acquired, and more than two hundred SRO tenants were ordered to leave over the span of one year. For the next several years, residents, students, organizers, and allies from across the city used the slogan "We Won't Move" and protested the I-Hotel demolition on streets, in courtrooms, and in front of city hall (Habal 2003; Liu and Geron 2008). Despite continued protests, on the morning of August 4, 1977, San Francisco riot police were ordered to evict the remaining fifty tenants from the building until all tenants and their families were physically

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211 For more details see the San Francisco's Chinatown report issued by the Urban Displacement Project in April 2016: https://www.urbandisplacement.org/sites/default/files/images/urbandisplacementproject_policycasestudy_chinatown_april2016.pdf.

removed from their homes. Although the I-Hotel was demolished, the battle for its preservation stood as a symbol of solidarity and resistance against displacement in Chinatown, Manilatown, and for the city of San Francisco. The struggle sparked an Asian American Movement led by newly formed grassroots organizations including the Chinese Progressive Association, Kearny Street Workshop, I Wor Kuen, and Asian Community Center (Choy 2005; Chin 2009; Managaong 1994; Habal 2007; Yamashita 2014). The battle for the I-Hotel also marked the formation of one of the most prominent housing advocacy groups in San Francisco's Chinatown called the Chinatown Community Development Center (CCDC). CCDC was established on April 1, 1977, three months before the final tenants in the I-Hotel were evicted from their homes (Chin 2009). After the I-Hotel parcel at 848 Kearny Street was left vacant for over twenty years, the Archdiocese of San Francisco purchased it and decided to turn it into an underground garage. They partnered with and worked in collaboration with CCDC to develop low-income senior housing above the garage and a cultural center run by the Manilatown Heritage Foundation on the ground floor. The new building is now fifteen stories and contains design elements, murals, and photographs that honor the legacy of the I-Hotel struggle.

1.2 We Still Won't Move: The Beginnings of CCDC and Neighborhood Preservation

Gordon Chin, who was the first Executive Director of CCDC, reflects in *Building Community, Chinatown Style: Half a Century of Leadership in San Francisco Chinatown,* about his time organizing in the neighborhood. Now considered as an OG activist and movement leader, he writes in his book: "The story of San Francisco Chinatown is a story about leadership sustained by Chinatown families across generations. Leadership is not something that is passed on from generation to generation. What can be passed on are values about giving back and loving this place we call Chinatown. For me and for so many others it is personal, the idea of sharing a place that was also my mother's place, and her mother's before her" (Chin 2009). In the spring of 1977, five grassroots groups merged to create the nonprofit community development organization called the Chinatown Resource Center. According to Chin,

Chinatown Resource Center comprised of young community advocates like himself who were involved in issues of tenants rights, affordable housing, transportation, health access, and land use — the groups that merged included the Committee for Better Parks and Recreation, Ping Yuen Residents Improvement Association, Chinatown Coalition for Neighborhood Facilities, Chinatown Coalition for Better Housing, Chinatown Transportation Research and Improvement Project. In direct response to the threat displacement from urban redevelopment in Chinatown, the Chinese Community Housing Corporation was formed in 1978 as part of the Chinatown Resource Center to provide safe, reliable, and affordable housing for low-income residents. Two decades later in January of 1998, Chinatown Resource Center and Chinese Community Housing Corporation merged into one as the Chinatown Community Development Center (CCDC) in order to streamline community organizing, resident outreach, and affordable housing development efforts. Today CCDC is one of the largest organizing forces in San Francisco's Chinatown and provides a mix of services including advocacy, organizing, housing development, construction, planning, and property management.

One of the most significant achievements of CCDC was the passage of the 1986 Chinatown Rezoning Plan, which was done in collaboration with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Asian Neighborhood Design. Many of the earlier staff members at CCDC were involved in the struggle to preserve I-Hotel, but as the threat of displacement intensified across the city in the 1990s, the staff quickly realized that pursuing individual building campaigns was simply not enough (Chin 2009). When the I-Hotel was demolished, the entire block lost 400 units of housing because three other single room occupancy hotels including the Bell, Victory, and Dante were also demolished. Thus, it was necessary to pursue more comprehensive structural changes to the neighborhood land use policy in order to preserve the existing affordable housing stock. CCDC's rezoning campaign began with a review of past studies of the neighborhood, in particular the Community Design Center's 1969 study "Chinatown Analysis of Population and Housing" and the City Planning Commission's findings in

"San Francisco Chinatown Housing and Recreation Study" (Chin 2009). In December of 1979, CCDC drafted their own study titled "Land Use Strategy for San Francisco Chinatown" and presented it to community stakeholders including the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Chinese Six Companies. In 1984, CCDC published their official "Chinatown Community Plan" which incorporated land use design recommendations from previous studies and conversations that they held with residents. It was around this time that the city began working on its own "Chinatown Planning and Rezoning Study" that was intentionally done separate from the downtown rezoning plan to acknowledge a need to preserve the neighborhood character of Chinatown. Fusing elements from CCDC's rezoning plan with a separate plan led by Chinese Six Companies, the San Francisco City Planning Commission published its official Chinatown rezoning plan titled "Chinatown: An Area Plan of the Master Plan of San Francisco" in April of 1986. The plan was supported by the majority of Chinatown organizations and associations because it called for reducing neighborhood height limits and building density, incentivizing new affordable housing, and creating a Chinatown Historic District. The 1986 rezoning plan continues to be in effect today and in many ways has shielded San Francisco's Chinatown from the high-rise developments that surrounds the area.

Today fifty percent of Chinatown's core housing stock has remained single room occupancy hotels and an estimated ninety percent of all the units are protected by the 1979 San Francisco Rent Control Ordinance. Despite these protections in place, there have been clear signs of displacement especially within the past ten years. Many landlords who own SRO buildings have exploited loopholes to increase rents for residents or have converted units into dorms for tech workers who are able to pay ten times higher in rent (Montojo 2015). This trend has taken a toll on Chinatown as many low-income tenants who are seniors, women, and families rely on SROs as last resort shelter. According to a report from the SRO Families United Collaborative, the number of families who live in SROs has increased 55 percent from between 2001 to 2015 (SRO Families United Collaborative 2015). The

majority of these SRO families or 74 percent live in San Francisco's Chinatown. Since there have been few new affordable developments in Chinatown, this indicates that many families live in overcrowded conditions in older buildings in dire need of repair. Nearly half of the families who live in SROs reported that their health had been negatively impacted as a result of their living conditions, 64 percent reported respiratory issues, 27 percent reported insufficient light, and 13 percent reported infections due to unsanitary conditions from exposure to mold, lead, rodents, and vermin.[212] In Chinatown North and Polk Gulch where tenants are not protected by the 1986 rezoning codes, there has been an uptick in no-fault evictions which include evictions due to Owner Move In, Ellis Act, and demolition, that have pushed out longtime residents, many who are low-income seniors. According to a recent City and County of San Francisco Board of Supervisors Policy Analysis Report on Displacement, from 2008 to 2013 there were 82 reported no-fault evictions in Polk Gulch and 73 in Chinatown North as compared to 1 in Chinatown Core.[213] After tech boom 2.0, many apartments in Polk Gulch have been subject to condo conversion, leading to major demographic shifts. The number of Asian households in Chinatown's Polk Gulch has decreased from 3,519 to 2,527 between 1980 and 2013 while the population of white residents has increased.

According to a report published by Nested, a UK-based housing start up, San Francisco has become the most expensive city in the world.[214] The threat of displacement and rising cost of housing in the city has become much more apparent in the wake of "tech boom 2.0" where the median rent for a one bedroom apartment is $4,500. San Francisco is home to approximately 2,300 tech companies including giants like Twitter, Pandora, Instagram, Salesforce, and Airbnb, along with hundreds of

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[212] For more information, see the SRO Families Report: Living in the Margins: An Analysis and Census of San Francisco Families Living in SROs," published in 2015 by SRO Families United Collaborative: http://www.chinatowncdc.org/images/stories/NewsEvents/Newsletters/sro_families_report_2015_.pdf.
[213] For more details see the San Francisco Board of Supervisors Policy Analysis Report of Tenant Displacement: https://sfbos.org/sites/default/files/FileCenter/Documents/47040-BLA%20Displacement%20103013.pdf.
[214] This is based off Nested's Rent Affordability Index which documents the costs associated with renting and which cities are becoming unaffordable: https://nested.com/research/rental/2017/us/all.

smaller startups. The dot-com boom in San Francisco in the late 1990s and early 2000s led to a prior wave of massive displacement in neighborhoods like the Mission District and Sunset (Centner 2008, Mirabal 2009; Stehlin 2015) The more recent "tech-boom 2.0" led by Google has ushered in another era of displacement and no-fault evictions in neighborhoods across the city (Opillard 2015). Between 2009 to 2013 as tech companies began to attract hundreds of thousands of high-paid employees to the Bay Area, the number of Ellis Act evictions has nearly tripled in number (Urban Displacement Project 2015). In 2013, Ellis Act evictions grew 175 percent from the previous year and more than half of these cases were filed within the first year of new property ownership.[215] San Francisco's Chinatown is only several blocks away from many of these tech companies and its proximity has fueled real estate speculation and predatory landlords who have resorted to various harassment tactics to force longtime tenants out of their homes. Airbnb has especially impacted the livelihoods of Chinatown residents because short term rentals reduce the existing housing stock for low-income families and often operate illegally. One summer in a burst of outrage, anonymous "wanted" flyers were posted all over the neighborhood featuring the names and photos of individual Airbnb hosts who had listed their Chinatown homes online (Wong 2016). In what CCDC's policy director Gen Fujioka calls the "tech creep," tech companies are changing the face of Chinatown and it is more critical now than ever to protect the 1986 Chinatown Rezoning Plan to ensure that the neighborhood has height and density protections in place. Fujioka and the rest of the CCDC staff recognize that it is not enough to prevent a single coworking space like 1920c or individual Airbnb apartment listings from operating, and that structural changes in the policy realm are needed to protect tenants from over development and mass displacement.

[215] For more comprehensive data, refer to the Urban Displacement Project Case Studies on Gentrification and Displacement in the San Francisco Bay Area full report published in collaboration with Causa Justa, Marin Grassroots, Chinatown Community Development Center, Monument Impact, People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights, San Francisco Organizing Project, Working Partnerships USA: https://www.urbandisplacement.org/sites/default/files/images/case_studies_on_gentrification_and_displacement-_full_report.pdf,

1.3 The Making of Alphabet Soup: A Guide to San Francisco Ballot Initiatives

In each election cycle, San Francisco voters face dozens of local and district ballot initiative measures on issues that range from education, affordable housing, homelessness, and everything in between. Typically, once a year and sometimes twice a year when there is a mayoral race, voters are expected to learn about the local measures on the ballot and develop a position for each one. In San Francisco, direct and representative decision-making means that the months leading up to election day are madness. In local and district elections, any individual voter or a group of voters can submit an initiative measure to be placed on the ballot. The Department of Elections mandates a multi-step qualification process, which is complicated but also enables voters to weigh in directly and to shape important policies.[216] The first step for people who want to submit a ballot measure begins with filing an initiative petition and paying a $200 fee to the Department of Elections. In lieu of the fee, the individual can submit a petition containing 400 signatures of registered San Francisco voters. If an initiative petition meets all of the legal requirements and is submitted to the Department of Elections within 120 days prior to an election, the measure will qualify for the ballot. The individual must then file all of the requested materials as outlined in the voter information guide, which is an encyclopedia sized booklet that is mailed out to all voters before each election. The Director of Elections then determines the title of the ballot measure and A-Z letters are designated to each one according to the procedures set forth in the Municipal Election Code. The Ballot Simplification Committee then prepares an impartial summary of each ballot measure in language that is accessible and written as closely as possible to an eighth-grade reading level. Over a series of public hearings at city hall, the language of each summary is carefully crafted to explain the purpose of the measure in four sections: 1) the way it is now 2) what the proposal is 3) what a "yes" vote means 4) what a "no" vote means.

[216] Most of this information about San Francisco Initiative Measures and Ballot Initiatives Process can be found in the Department of Elections guide that is published every year.

The summaries must be finalized by the Ballot Simplification Committee before they are printed word for word in the voter information guide. The final step of the process allows all voters to author arguments in favor or against a specific local ballot measure in the form of paid arguments. For any individual voter or a group of voters who choose to submit a paid argument, the argument text must be kept under three hundred words and hand delivered to the Department of Elections before their deadline. Typically, a simple majority or fifty percent of the total number of votes casted on a ballot initiative plus one is required for the city to adopt a measure into policy.

When I worked at CCDC as a part time staff member, I had the chance to witness first hand each step of the local elections process. I worked most closely with Gen Fujioka who is CCDC's Policy Director and several others on their policy team on a citywide campaign to preserve and build affordable housing. Since the November elections were fast approaching, CCDC in partnership with several other progressive organizations were mobilizing around four specific ballot measures under the unified banner: "Housing Forward SF, Yes on C & M, No on P & U." The two realtor backed measures that the campaign actively opposed were assigned the letters P and U, if passed they would change the housing landscape in San Francisco. Proposition P, which was backed by the local Board of Realtors, would require the city to find at minimum three bidders for any affordable housing project on city owned property. Proponents argued that the measure would enforce a competitive bidding process for affordable housing development. However, opponents like CCDC argued that critical affordable housing projects would be prevented from being constructed given the threshold of three bidders. The second realtor backed measure Proposition U, sponsored by the San Francisco Association of Realtors and Supervisor Mark Farrell, would raise the income maximum for access to affordable housing from 55 percent to 110 percent of the area median income. In other words, instead of earning $44,850 a year or less to qualify for an apartment, a family could earn as much as $89,650 and qualify for a below market rate unit. Proposition U proponents argued that the measure would

provide support to middle income families by allowing them to access affordable housing. However, opponents like CCDC argued that it would push low-income renters out of the existing and future affordable housing stock and worsen the homelessness crisis. The realtors used language that positioned Propositions P and U as good government measures that would pressure the city to produce affordable housing when in reality, they would create a more expensive and inequitable city.

The two ballot measures that CCDC along with the citywide Housing Forward SF campaign supported were assigned the letters M and C. The most controversial measure was Proposition M, which would establish a new Housing and Development Commission to oversee the Department of Housing and the Department of Economic and Workforce Development. Supervisor Aaron Peskin wrote the measure as a charter amendment to increase the levels of transparency, accountability, and oversight for the Mayor's offices which currently oversees decisions about economic development and housing. The brand-new commission would be comprised of seven members in total, three appointed by the mayor, three appointed by Board of Supervisors, and one appointed by the controller. CCDC and other proponents argued that the commission would increase community participation and provide public oversight of housing development processes. However, opponents argued that a commission would reinvent the wheel and slow down an already overburdened bureaucratic process. Proposition C, proposed by Board of Supervisors President London Breed and Supervisor Aaron Peskin, would provide funding to rehabilitate, buy, and build affordable housing by redirecting the unused bond authority that voters granted in 1992 to loan money to property owners for seismic upgrades and to preserve affordable housing. CCDC and other proponents argued that the remaining $260.7 million in bonds would retrofit hundreds of multi-unit residential buildings in need of safety upgrades and convert them into permanent affordable housing. There was very little opposition to Proposition C as compared to the other three local ballot measures. According to Peter Cohen, who is co-director of Council of Community Housing Organizations (CCHO), a nonprofit

coalition of twenty citywide community housing developers and tenant advocates, this was the first election that he has ever witnessed with so many ballot measures at once that put affordable housing at stake.[217] That election contained the largest number of local measures on a single ballot in the history of the city, ranging twenty five local propositions that ran from A to Z plus seventeen statewide ballot propositions.

1.4 Direct Democracy, Chinatown Slate Cards, and Ballot Education

CCDC is an active member of two citywide housing coalitions, the Council of Community Housing Organizations and the San Francisco Anti-Displacement Coalition, and one local coalition called the Chinatown Coalition for Housing Justice (CCHJ). Given the striking number of housing measures slated to be on the November ballot, CCDC pulled from these networks to form a broad progressive coalition to actively campaign around the four housing measures. In June, members of CCDC, Community Tenants Association, Mission Economic Development Agency, and Council of Community Housing Organizations (CCHO) came together under the campaign banner: "Housing Forward SF: Yes on C & M, No on P & U." There were several immediate tasks that CCDC and the rest of the Housing Forward SF campaign had to accomplish by the end of summer: 1) attend all of the Ballot Simplification Committee public hearings 2) submit and collect signature endorsements for paid arguments and 3) develop a strategy to communicate with Chinatown residents about the critical housing package. When I first joined CCDC towards the end of May of 2016, I attended a series of Ballot Simplification Committee meetings which were open to the public and held inside of city hall. The Ballot Simplification Committee consists of five voting members, two appointed by then Mayor Ed Lee and three by the Board of Supervisors. The members serve on a volunteer basis and have to be impartial enough to write a summary of each local ballot measure in accessible eighth grade English. Many stakeholders including proponents and opponents of specific measures filed into the room to

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[217] Peter Cohen. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview.. July 27, 2016.

clarify language use. Fujioka explained to me that he attends the hearings every year to ensure that the summaries for key measures are not dominated by realtor interests and that the language used in measure can be easily translated into Chinese. Since there were a number of contentious measures to cover, the Ballot Simplification Committee meetings lasted for over three weeks. It took five hours of clarifications and negotiations before the committee voted to accept the summaries for each of the housing measures. This is one of the most critical steps of the local elections process because the summaries as finalized by the Ballot Simplification Committee are printed in the voter information guide and shapes how individual voters read, comprehend, and decide to vote on each measure.

One of the easiest shortcuts that voters use in deciding their own positions on local ballot measures is scanning through the voter information guide to see where the neighborhood leaders or organizations they are ideologically aligned with stand on specific issues (Lewkowicz 2006). This is precisely why advocacy groups in the city spend an incredible amount of time, energy, and resources to submit paid arguments in favor or against specific ballot measures. In order to have paid arguments published in the voter information guide, a tremendous amount of paperwork is required. It is the most time-consuming part of the entire elections process because paid arguments require sustained strategizing, meeting with coalition members, collecting hundreds of signatures, and filing massive amounts of paperwork before the deadline approaches. According to Fujioka, the process is logistically challenging but politically critical because it offers a way to strengthen citywide coalitional relationships and inform Chinatown residents about policy issues that impact their daily lives. In July, the Housing Forward SF campaign team met to discuss how to strategically and logistically approach the collection of signature endorsements for the paid arguments. Peter Cohen, who has had years of prior experience recommended that the coalition create a paid argument "wish list" of elected officials, neighborhood leaders, and organizations to contact for signatures. Fernando Marti, who is the co-director of CCHO, volunteered to write all of the paid arguments and suggested to compartmentalize those on the

endorsement "wish list" into categories that could serve as easy ideological shortcuts to voters. After an entire afternoon of strategizing, the campaign narrowed it down to twelve categories: 1) Elected Officials 2) Democratic and Progressive Organizations 3) Tenants 4) Neighborhood and Community Development Groups 5) Nonprofit Housing Groups 6) Asian American Elected Officials 7) Asian American Housing Organizations 8) Labor Groups 9) Latino Elected Officials and Organizations 10) African American Elected Officials and Community Leaders 11) LGBTQ Groups and 12) Seniors. A number of the categories overlapped and some endorsements that were listed under one category also appeared in others. Fujioka calculated that a total of forty eight paid arguments had to be written and that two hundred signature endorsement forms had to be collected before the Department of Election August deadline.

CCDC was tasked to collect signature endorsement forms from tenant organizations and the Asian American elected officials and housing organizations. Before the signatures could be collected, CCDC had to meet with neighborhood stakeholders in order to discuss how to connect each ballot measure to the specific needs of Chinatown residents. Fujioka organized a meeting with the local coalition called the Chinatown Coalition for Housing Justice to strategize around the four housing measures. The CCHJ coalition was formed in 2016 in an effort to build tenant power and preserve affordable housing in the neighborhood, its members include CCDC, Asian Law Caucus, Community Tenants Association, and Chinese Progressive Association. The meeting took place in one of CCDC offices on Clay Street and began with each organization sharing updates about their work in San Francisco and Oakland Chinatowns. Joyce Lam, who is the senior community organizer at Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) shared that a new forty unit market rate development was being considered by the Oakland Planning Commission. The pair of buildings would be built in North Chinatown on 12th Street where Harrison and Webster Streets intersect. Longtime residents in Oakland's Chinatown have already experienced higher instances of displacement and evictions due to

gentrification. Lam told the coalition members that CPA and another Oakland based grassroots organization called Asian Pacific Environmental Network were organizing against the development. Katherine Chu, who is a housing attorney with Asian Law Caucus, spoke about a landlord who bought an SRO building on 9th Street in Oakland's Chinatown and had been harassing tenants by demolishing bathrooms and kitchens. Chu told the coalition members that ALC had already asked the landlord to have repairs done within twenty one days and to stop harassing existing tenants. Tan Chow, who is one of the lead organizers with the Community Tenants Association, brought up the 1920c coworking space and realtor media press conference held earlier on in the week. He expressed his concerns about the conservative push to reopen and chip away at the 1986 Chinatown rezoning plan for more development. Fujioka shifted the conversation to focus on public policies and the critical housing package slated for the November elections. He gave updates about the Housing Forward SF campaign and discussed in detail how each of the four measures would impact the lives of Chinatown residents and affordable housing in general. There was little opposition and the CCHJ coalition agreed to oppose the two realtor backed measures and support the $260.7 million housing bond.

The next part of the CCHJ coalition meeting focused on how to present the critical housing measures to Chinatown residents, as well as to develop a media strategy to reach state and local news outlets before information becomes saturated in September for the general elections. Tammy Hung, who is a lead organizer with Community Tenants Association (CTA), reminded everyone that there was going to be a monthly Super Sunday event at the Gordon J. Lau Elementary School next month. Hung said that Super Sunday would be an appropriate venue for to host a voter education activities and serve as a forum to discuss the local ballot measures with residents. Everyone agreed that Super Sunday would be an ideal place to invite elected officials and other city stakeholders to talk about the upcoming election and what is at stake for Chinatown residents. Fujioka asked CCHJ to brainstorm how to present the four critical housing measures as a package so that it resonates with Chinatown

residents. What seemed fairly obvious to everyone was that there were three groups of measures. First, there were the positive measures that would improve neighborhoods and address basic needs, this included the affordable housing bond. Then there were measures that threatened the livelihoods of residents and placed affordable housing at risk, this included the two realtor backed measures. There was also a slate of good government measures that increased democratic participation, this included the housing commission. For Chinatown residents to more easily make the connections between Propositions C, M, P, and U together as a critical housing package, Fujioka emphasized the need to discuss them together in conversations and any future actions.

One of CCDC's biggest tasks during election season is to work closely with the Community Tenants Association (CTA) to convey information about public policies and ballot measures to local residents. CTA is a membership driven organization and has 1500 active members, it is the largest community-based tenant group in San Francisco that organizes around housing justice and the rights of low-income Chinatown residents, many who live in SRO buildings (Chin 2009). CTA was formed in 1987 when a group of residents in Chinatown came together to stop the redevelopment and eviction of tenants above the Orangeland market on Stockton Street. CTA is a leader in the housing justice community and has spent the past twenty years working with CCDC to protect tenants from displacement and evictions, and to push for systemic changes in the policy realm. CTA has developed generations of Chinese immigrant leaders like Ms. Bao Yan Chan, who in 1988 became the first president of CTA through a battle to save her building from demolition. Through her three decades of leadership, Ms. Chan has inspired others to participate in local political processes and has built the political power of low-income tenants. Since CTA is a 501(c)(4) organization that can take part in partisan political campaign work, voter registration and education is a always top priority. I met Tammy Hung, who is the lead organizer at CTA, before one of their weekly general meetings held in the auditorium of Willie Wong Community Center. Hung introduced me to several of the CTA tenants

and said that there are two hundred members who attend the meeting each week. I saw that there were tables set up in the back, and one of the tables had copies of a health bulletin that one of the tenants hand writes weekly. At another table volunteers were collecting membership dues of twenty dollars per year, Hung told me that membership costs has not gone up since she started to work there in 2008. At the far end of the auditorium on another table, there were two women who had blood pressure machines that anyone could use. The weekly CTA meetings are conducted in Cantonese and the current president Mr. Wing Hoo Leung structures each meeting to be no longer than an hour. The meetings are primarily for tenants to learn about what is happening in Chinatown, it includes housing information that pertains to low-income tenants and often bilingual workshops from the police department, social service agencies, and local health clinics. According to Hung, the majority of CTA members are Chinatown residents and became involved through their friends or their own housing struggles. Even though CTA does not have a website or online presence, the organization continues to grow as a political force. Over the past three decades, CTA has emerged to become one of the largest political forces in San Francisco politics, Hung explained: "It expanded from tenant organizing to neighborhood advocacy on all fronts. After the Orangeland victory, Ms. Chan and other CTA members came together to protest Clinton's welfare reform — I was carrying the sound systems at Union Square filling the whole square. CTA then took on other issue areas like immigrant rights, healthcare, and transportation. CTA has become a political force — not only within Chinatown but a political force in local elections. It is a force of two thousand members, they are the most tangible force in progressive politics. I use the motto "anytime, anywhere, 24 hour notice, CTA will be there" because they always deliver at hearings, at rallies, at the ballot box." Hung continued to explain that three months before each election, CTA sends bilingual slate cards to their members with information about what they have endorsed on the California and San Francisco ballots. When I asked Hung what sets her work with CTA apart from all of the other Chinatown organizations, she said: "This

organizing is relational organizing. It's about being a part of their life, it takes time and trust. This work is seven days a week, it doesn't stop at five. You are part of the community. You have to realize that eviction doesn't take breaks. I mean, evictions can happen on the weekend."[218] One of CTA's most recent victories is the construction of Central Subway Project on Fourth and King Streets, which was something that Ms. Chan had long advocated for since the early 1990s.

After the CTA general meeting, I stayed after for the board meeting which lasted for about two hours. Before the meeting began, CTA's current president Mr. Leung handed out giant loaves of bread to everyone including all nineteen board members who are mostly seniors and women. At the start of the meeting, Hung wrote in Chinese the titles of all the important ballot measures on the blackboard according to how it was strategized at the CCHJ meeting. Hung went through all twenty five ballot measures but emphasized that there were four critical housing measures that had the potential to reshape the San Francisco housing landscape. Hung had prepared photograph cutouts of the Mayor and each of the candidates running for office with their names in Chinese. After a hour of dialogue and answering questions that tenants had about specific details of each measure, the CTA board members all voted to move forward with "Yes on C & M, No on P & U" on their slate cards. Mr. Leung said that they would prepare slate cards and share this information at the next CTA general meeting in order to give residents enough time to inform their own networks. Towards the end of the meeting, two candidates running for local office came to share their platforms while Hung translated their words into Chinese for CTA board members. Mr. Liang and others asked the candidates questions about their housing platforms and opinion on the 1986 Chinatown Rezoning Plan. As the board meeting concluded, I stayed behind to collect endorsement signatures from Mr. Leung who had to sign a total of sixteen forms for the paid arguments. When I asked him about how he first became involved with CTA, he told me about his encounter with Ellis eviction: "Five of the six units had

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[218] Tammy Hung. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. July 16, 2016.

seniors in them, one of the units had a Filipino World War II veteran who had been living there for forty years. We were all getting the same eviction notice. Then after we got the eviction notice, the son of one of the elderly tenants hanged himself in the building and I was the one who discovered his body. That moment had a big impact on me and the first place I turned to was CTA. We got a one year extension from eviction but that was not enough. With the help of CTA we held a community protest in front of the building, then the media came, then assembly men came, then our supervisor came to support. At that point, we had so much community support the landlord rescinded the eviction notice and that's how I was able to stay at home."[219] When I asked Mr. Leung why he decided to remain active in CTA even after he won his case, he told me that "we aren't home, until we all are home." Mr. Leung's continued involvement in CTA's political education work is his way of taking an active part in the movement to keep the city affordable for all.

The words of Mr. Leung stuck with me as I was running around the city collecting the rest of the paid argument endorsement forms. The weekend before the paid arguments forms were due to the Department of Election, Fujioka and the rest of the Housing Forward SF campaign team were still frantically running around the city collecting signatures. We gathered at CCDC's office on Clay Street to organize all of the paid argument forms into folders to ensure that the endorsement signatures were in the correct category folder for each ballot measure. The office was a mess and there were folders on every inch of the floor, but there was no other way to ensure that all of the endorsement forms were filled out correctly with the written argument text printed on. I spent the morning that the paid arguments were due at City Hall with Fujioka and the rest of the Housing Forward SF campaign team to do a final check and ensure that publication fee checks were attached to each paid argument. After all of the forms were submitted to the Department of elections, it was already late afternoon. I took the train back to the CCDC office with Gen and asked him how he was

[219] Wing Hoo Leung. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. August 17, 2016.

able to go through the madness of ballot season each year with so much at stake each time. He took a breath and responded: "Well, gentrification is happening and that's our biggest threat. At the core there are evictions, there are rent increases, there are conversions, but on the larger scale, the part that's harder to see, there are larger policy changes. There are larger investment strategies, banking practices, and constant fights at city hall to undermine protections. We're trying to hold down the line and every single election matters."[220] The core of Fujioka's campaign work is to build community power in the policy realm but also to protect the neighborhood from realtors. The 1986 Chinatown Rezoning Plan has protected San Francisco's Chinatown from major changes, but these protections are constantly being challenged by realtors each election cycle and it places CCDC on the defensive. Fujioka explained what that meant on a neighborhood and citywide level: "We're in a defensive posture because of the market, the reality is if the market were to have free range then Chinatown wouldn't exist at all. It seems that everything we do is about buying time sometimes. You saw what we accomplished — that quick formation of the city-wide coalition was something I haven't been involved in something quite like that. I've been on losing fights, but I haven't been in one that's been as successful. These city-wide coalitions and relationships matter because if Chinatown is to survive, our agenda needs to be bigger than our neighborhood."[221] He expressed that it was impossible to only fight from within Chinatown and that more work needs to be done to connect the the different levels of work being done at local, city, state, and national levels in order to truly curtail the effects of unregulated development and displacement.

The Housing Forward SF campaign continued onwards until the November elections. There were several large-scale actions organized by CTA and other members of the coalition. I had to leave San Francisco in September, but I closely followed the campaign until the November elections. Both

[220] Gen Fujioka. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. August 23, 2016.
[221] Gen Fujioka. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. August 23, 2016.

of the realtor backed measures failed to pass, Proposition P failed by a 67.3 percent vote margin and Proposition U failed by a 64.9 percent margin. Proposition M the housing commission measure was close but also failed at 56.5 percent. Proposition C passed with 75.9 percent of voters in support. Although I was unable to witness all that happened in the two months that lead to these results, before I left San Francisco I made it out to CCDC's Super Sunday as discussed in one of the CCHJ meetings. Super Sunday is a collaboration with Presbyterian Church in Chinatown and is held every fourth Sunday of the month at the Gordon J. Lau Elementary School. Super Sunday was created in efforts to bring together SRO families, elders, and youth to discuss important neighborhood issues over a free homecooked lunch. Each month, Super Sunday draws an average attendance of five hundred Chinatown residents in addition to the CCDC Adopt-An-Alleyway youth and high school students who volunteer at the event. According to Reverend Norman Fong, who is the Executive Director of CCDC, Super Sunday functions as a the largest townhall forum in San Francisco: "We inform our community and neighborhood about what is happening at the local, citywide, and national levels and what they can do to create change. Our neighborhood town hall Super Sunday is probably the most vital in this whole city, no other neighborhood pulls together six hundred people every month. The tenants look forward to shared meals and are excited to socialize and to educate themselves about essential issues and how to fight for their rights." Super Sunday has become widely known across the city as the non-partisan place for candidates, elected officials, and social service agencies to get the word out about important issues. The one I attended was as lively as Fong had described, I met several SRO families and saw CTA organizers Tammy Hung and Tan Chow who introduced me to some of their most active members. Once everyone had a plate of spaghetti with chicken and vegetables, the announcements began and were led by several CCDC youth and at times Fong himself. The announcements focused on the upcoming election and officials like Supervisor Aaron Peskin and Supervisor Jane Kim came out to talk about important ballot measures including the critical housing

package. Fong urged attendees to take the information back to their individual buildings in order to ensure that all residents are empowered with enough knowledge to vote. Before I left Super Sunday, I saw Fong and thanked him for inviting me and for introducing me to some of the CCDC youth members, he looked around the crowded room and said: "I promised my parents I would fight for Chinatown. My family got evicted from a place we lived for a very long time. I remember how scared my mom was when she showed me the sheriff's eviction letter, it was a thirty day notice. We're gonna fight for Chinatown to the death. When I started in 1990 there wasn't much Chinese monolingual leadership and voting power. And over twenty-six years we've come to this point. This is true democratic participation. They're all registered to vote, they'll learn about all the issues, they're not afraid to speak up anywhere."[222] When I asked Fong where he hopes to see San Francisco's Chinatown in the next ten years, he responded by telling me that: "So I'm pretty old. Okay I'm real old. I've seen activism in many different ways. And some people say, don't you get tired of it? And I do, cause I want to grow and expand too. But somebody has to stay. Some people need to stay with the base and keep growing it. This is the movement is to save Chinatown, to save affordable housing. That's my job, I'm cheerleader for the movement. To keep people coming here. To create a long term base — not only the grassroots leadership but the residents who we need to keep in the movement. There are power brokers who want to play the political game. There are organizers who will come and go. But the movement must be led by the residents who live in the community. You see, tenant based resident engaged organizing is the key principle behind it all. You need to keep the base alive. Once you ignite them you can't put them out. I don't know any other neighborhood that pulls together close to a thousand residents each month." [223] As complicated as the local politics and policymaking can be, community organizers like Norman Fong, Gen Fujioka, Tammy Hung, Mr. Leung and groups like

[222] Norman Fong. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. August 28, 2016.
[223] Norman Fong. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. August 28, 2016.

CCDC and CTA are critical to ensuring that the political awareness and voter education of residents translates to policy impact and social change.

1.5 A Condensed History of Boston's Chinatown

Boston's Chinatown is one of the city's oldest residential neighborhoods, it is tightly nestled between Tufts Medical Center, South Station, Boston Common, Downtown Crossing, Bay Village, South End, and the Massachusetts Turnpike. It is the third largest Chinatown in the United States, with a population of 4,400 residents (Nguyen 2015). Established in the early 1800s, the landfill area where Boston's Chinatown is now located was home to a succession of new immigrant communities including Irish, Jewish, Syrian, and Italian families (To 2008). Each group settled in the area to take advantage of the low-cost housing and job opportunities that existed before moving to other more desirable parts of the city. In 1870, seventy five male Chinese laborers were brought from California to North Adams, Massachusetts as strikebreakers at the Sampson Shoe Factory (Sullivan and Hatch 1971). By 1874, most of these early Chinese laborers left North Adams for Boston to find work in other industries and lived in clusters along Oliver Place. From the 1880s and 1890s, more Chinese laborers were brought over from California to Boston to work on downtown construction and in hand laundries. As the number of Chinese immigrants grew, so did the size of Boston's Chinatown which by then was four square blocks and had spread to the adjacent Kneeland, Beech and Harrison Streets (To 2008). However, given the rise in anti-Asian sentiments and state sanctioned exclusionary laws, Boston's Chinatown like other Chinatowns across the country remained predominantly a male bachelor and merchant society until the mid 1900s.

The Chinese immigrant population in Boston's Chinatown began to expand in the 1950s and after World War II. After the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed by the 1943 Magnuson Act and more women and children were able to enter the city through the War Brides Act and the Walter-McCarran Act and 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, Boston's Chinatown expanded its

boundaries even further (Lo 2008). There were 2,000 Chinese in Boston in 1950 but that number grew to nearly 8,000 in 1970 (To 2008). This influx of women, children, and young adults brought significant changes to the neighborhood and made Boston's Chinatown one of the highest population densities in the city. In the late 1950s, the housing shortage worsened when construction of an on-ramp for the Central Artery Freeway cut through the neighborhood in half and led to the displacement of two hundred families (Lowe and Brugge 2007). Then a decade later in the 1960s, the construction of the Massachusetts Turnpike, Southeast Expressway, and Tufts Medical Center placed even further land pressures on Boston's Chinatown as many homes, small businesses, and 1,200 residents were impacted by these urban renewal projects (O'Connor 1995; Dreier and Ehrlich 1991). In 1974, the Boston Redevelopment Authority pushed Scollay Square or what it was later designated by the city as the "combat zone" into Chinatown on Washington Street, it was known as Boston's official adult entertainment district filled with drugs, crime, and prostitution (Giorlandino 1986; Phan, Hui, Fefferman, and Brugge 2010). Despite the fact that the neighborhood has been squeezed on all sides, Boston's Chinese immigrant population has continued to grow (Watanabe, Liu and Lo 2004). Today the boundaries of Chinatown as determined by community stakeholders in the 2010 Chinatown Master Plan are Bedford Street to the north, East Berkeley to the south, Charles and Tremont Streets to the west, and Hudson Streets to the east. Although many families have moved to the satellite Chinatowns in Quincy, Brookline, and Malden, Boston's Chinatown remains the heart of Chinese American activity with supermarkets, restaurants, associations, and over seventy five organizations.

Due to its close proximity to the Financial District, Boston Crossing, and South Station, the residents of Boston's Chinatown have faced greater land pressures from developers and threats of displacement than in other parts of the city. Within the last two decades, Tufts University Medical School and New England Medical Center have taken over nearly one third of the land in Chinatown (Leong 1995; Lowe and Brugge 2007). Boston's Chinatown continues to be one of the most densely

populated residential neighborhoods in the city, with over 28,000 people per square mile (Brugge, Lai, Hill, and Rand 2002). It's residents also continue to be one of the poorest in the city, over 24 percent of Asian families fall below the poverty line and the median household income for the area is $14,289 per year, a stark contrast to the median household income for the city of Boston as a whole which is $102,757 (Li 2012). The residents in the neighborhood are predominately renters, 94 percent live in rented housing as compared to 6 percent of families who own their housing units. In the past two decades, Boston's Chinatown has seen rapid gentrification and significantly higher instances of displacement and high-rise development. Similar to San Francisco's Chinatown, the rise of Airbnb short-term rentals in Boston's Chinatown has also squeezed the housing market and led to an increase in the number of evictions. In a high profile case, Pei Ying Yu and Yan Nong Yu, also known as the Yu sisters, were displaced from their apartment at 103 Hudson Street by their landlord who evicted them under the guise of bringing their building up to code (Gershon 2016). The uptick in no cause evictions and landlord harassment has led to hundreds of longtime residents leaving the neighborhood and dramatic demographic shifts (Li, Leong, Vitello, and Acoca 2012; Acolin and Vitiello 2018). According to the 2010 census, Asians make up less than half of Chinatown's 12,800 residents. The Boston Public Health Commission reported that from 2000 to 2010, the population of white residents living in Boston's Chinatown has grown at a much faster rate than that of Asians in the neighborhood.[224] In 2000, 81 percent of the residents in Boston's Chinatown were Asian but that number has dropped to 46 percent in 2010. At the same time the percentage of white residents have increased from 19 percent in 1990 to over 40 percent in 2010. As lawyer and scholar Andrew Leong suggests, for the last fifty years Boston's Chinatown has been a shrinking community, it has been put up for grabs by the city and has been squeezed on all sides by new and old developments.

[224] For more information see the Health of Boston: A Neighborhood Focus report published in 2013 by the Boston Public Health Commission: http://www.bphc.org/healthdata/health-of-boston-report/Documents/HOB-2012-2013/HOB12-13_FullReport.pdf.

The land pressures in Boston's Chinatown have been embodied by the struggles over Parcel C and Parcel 24. Parcel C is a small plot of land bounded by Oak, Nassau, and Ash Streets. Parcel C was formed during the city's urban renewal plans in the 1960s when the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) seized and demolished the homes of several dozens of Chinese residents who lived on the block. After the parcel was acquired by the city, BRA entered into an agreement with Tufts University and the New England Medical Center (T-NEMC) in which they were given the exclusive rights to purchase the land for development (Lowe and Brugge 2007). Even though T-NEMC made plans for Parcel C, nothing ever happened and for over two decades the land remained vacant. In 1986, T-NEMC submitted a proposal to build a 850-car garage on Parcel C. The block had several brick row houses along with a children's playground and the Acorn Day Care. The parking garage construction would have demolished the daycare and altered the surrounding residential area. The parcel is located in the heart of Boston's Chinatown, less than a block away from the Josiah Quincy Elementary School and less than a hundred feet away from housing developments for seniors and low-income residents, a community health center, and social service providers. The concept for a large-scale garage was immediately rejected by local residents and various community stakeholders including the Chinese Progressive Association came out to protest. In 1993, when BRA had a new executive director and was in millions of dollars in debt, T-NEMC approached the city again with another proposal to purchase the parcel for two million dollars for an eight-story hospital parking garage with a 10,000 square foot community center attached (Leong 1997). For the second time, residents and community groups mobilized against the BRA and Mass DOT by speaking up at public hearings, organizing bilingual community education sessions, conducting environmental impact studies, establishing the resident-led Coalition to Protect Parcel C for Chinatown, and sponsoring a referendum over the proposed parking garage. On September 12, 1993, 1,700 Chinatown residents turned out to vote on the T-NEMC proposal referendum and 1692 voted in opposition and 42 voted

in favor (Lowe and Brugge 2007). After two nearly decades of struggle against institutional expansion into Chinatown, Parcel C was acquired by community-based development organization Asian Community Development Corporation and developed into low- and moderate-income housing for residents and office space for community organizations like the Chinese Progressive Association, Boston Asian Youth Essential Services, and Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center.

Parcel 24 was a residential street of Chinatown that was lost to eminent domain and urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s when local shops and homes were razed to make way for the Central Artery and Massachusetts Turnpike. Parcel 24 is bounded by Hudson Street to the west, Kneeland Street to the north, Albany Street to the east and Tai Tung Street to the south (Lowe and Brugge 2007). In 1962 a highway on-ramp planned for the Central Artery led to the displacement of two hundred Chinatown families, many had to move to the outskirts of Chinatown next to the "combat zone" or outside of the city altogether. When the city decided to move the Central Artery on-ramp underground as a tunnel, that move made the parcel of land above available again for real estate development. In 2005, the city put out a request for proposals for Parcel 24. Given the destruction that highway construction had on the neighborhood, Chinatown residents organized to pressure the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Mass DOT) to return Parcel 24 back the community. In order to have the parcel returned back to the community, local residents, social service agencies, and stakeholders including the Chinese Progressive Association, Chinatown Residents Association, and Asian Community Development Corporation came together over the course of three years to develop a community-led development vision and plan for the parcel (Lowe and Brugge 2007; Liu and Geron 2008). The plan put the struggle over Parcel 24 in historical context and outlined resident demands that came out of a series of bilingual workshop sessions. These demands included more low-income rental housing, affordable home ownership opportunities, transparent provisions for community control over land, and access to the development review process. Mass DOT agreed to

lease the land back to the community for $1 so that mixed use housing could be built on on it. The Asian Community Development Corporation partnered with New Boston Fund to build One Greenway, which is a mixed-use development that includes 324 residential units with forty percent listed as affordable (Stelle 2013). The development also includes park space and 11,000 square feet of community space for residents to use and a new cultural preservation center called the Pao Arts Center run by the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center.

1.6 9-Man Volleyball and the Battle Over Reggie Wong Memorial Park

The battle over Parcel C and Parcel 24 lasted for nearly six decades, but the struggle against displacement in Boston's Chinatown is far from over as it is most recently manifested in the battle over Parcel 25 and Parcel 26, where the beloved Reggie Wong Memorial Park is located. Squeezed between the I-93 Expressway and Massachusetts Turnpike and next to the off-ramps on Kneeland Street, Reggie Wong Memorial Park is a modest concrete park that has a basketball court and three volleyball courts. In 1962, Chinatown resident Reggie Wong founded the Boston Knights Chinese Athletic Club, which is an intergenerational social and cultural sports organization that is centered around the game of 9-Man volleyball. The park is where the Boston Knights and other teams come together to practice for their 9-Man tournament each year. 9-man is an uniquely Chinese American sport that is similar to traditional volleyball but requires nine players on each side of the court (Liang 2014). The rules mandate that two thirds of the players on each team must be Chinese and the rest of the players be of Asian descent (National American Chinese Invitational Volleyball Tournament 2013). Throughout the 1800s and until the mid-1900, Boston Chinatown like the other Chinatowns was primarily a bachelor society consisting of laborers. These Chinese men worked long hours in hand laundries, sometimes twelve to eighteen hours a day for six days a week without much leisure time. If lucky there were a few hours of the week left for recreation but without the presence of their families, social life in Boston's Chinatown was often at a standstill. In order to break their isolation in society

and build relationships with each other, many of the early Chinese laundry workers went to the Chinatown YMCA on Tyler Street.[225] Even though the YMCA facility did not have much to offer, the men would play table tennis or volleyball in the backyard. Most of the early Chinese laborers already knew how to play volleyball because American missionaries had introduced the game to their home villages in Toisan in the early 1900s. After Chinese immigrants were brought to the United States, they brought the game with them to Chinatowns. The sport was accessible to everyone since all it required was a piece of string, sticks, rocks, and a ball made out of cloth, and it importantly created a space for residents in Boston's Chinatown to come together.

There were no 9-Man volleyball tournaments in the beginning, in fact when the game first started in Boston's Chinatown there were not even enough players to fill each side. As the game became more popular in Boston, word spread to other Chinese immigrant communities in Newark, New York, and Providence.[226] The first recorded 9-Man game between two cities was between Boston and Providence in 1935. Two year later in 1937, a team from New York joined the games which led to the three city circuit with teams traveling back and forth to compete with each other.[227] Later on additional teams from Newark, New Jersey joined the games creating a total of five 9-Man teams across the country — three teams were from New York's Chinatown, one from Newark, and one from Boston. In 1939, the first 9-Man tournament was held between these five teams in Boston at the YMCA and it lasted for an entire day and into the evenings where conversations were carried into local restaurants. Regardless of who won, the tournaments brought Chinese immigrants from different Chinatowns closer together and fostered lifelong relationships and connections.[228] During World War II, 9-Man played an important role in community organizing in support of the Chinese war effort

[225] Russell Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 19, 2017.
[226] Russell Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 19, 2017.
[227] Wesley Wong. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 19, 2017.
[228] For a more in depth coverage of 9-Man see Ursula Liang's documentary titled 9-Man produced in 2014.

against Japanese imperialism. When the Japanese imperial army invaded China in 1937, the 9-Man tournament which was held in New York's Chinatown that year raised one thousand dollars in proceeds to support the Chinese government.[229] The tournaments became intergenerational in the 1960s when discriminatory immigration quotas were lifted and Chinese women and children could enter the United States (Liang 2014). A new generation of young Chinese Americans playing 9-Man meant that there were more teams at the annual tournaments. In 1961, a youth team was formed in Boston Chinatown called the Knights Athletic Club which was followed by several others including the Washington Chinese Youth Club and the New York Freemasons. Over the years, the number of 9-Man teams, players, and followers have grown tremendously, and the tournament has been held across the country in San Francisco, Chicago, Toronto, and Montreal. The largest tournament called the North American Chinese Invitational Volleyball Tournament (NACIVT) is held each Labor Day weekend, and the tournament brings together both men's and women's 9-Man volleyball teams from Chinatowns across the country.

Reggie Wong founded the Boston Knights Chinese Athletic Club as one of the first younger generation 9-Man teams in Boston's Chinatown.[230] The Boston Knights spans five generations and currently has a membership of over three hundred Chinese American youth and elders. In order to practice for the annual 9-Man tournament, coaches and youth members of Boston Knights would practice on the courts at Reggie Wong Park. The park is located on state-owned land Parcel 25 and Parcel 26 and is walking distance from the Financial District, Seaport, and major transportation hubs like the South Station bus terminal (Simon, Newman, Lowe, Brugge, Durant 2017). It is situated on the same parcel of land as the Mass DOT District 6 office building and the historic Veolia steam plant. In February 2016, Governor Charlie Baker's administration announced that they would seek proposals

[229] Russell Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 19, 2017.
[230] Russell Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 19, 2017.

to redevelop Parcel 25 and Parcel 26, the 5.5 acre land as a part of Boston's "Open for Business" initiative. The initiative was created to place underutilized state-owned sites into the hands of private developers in order to spur the economic development of downtown Boston. In March of 2016, Mass DOT, which is the city agency that has ownership of the two parcels on Kneeland Street where Reggie Wong Memorial Park is located, announced a series of public design meetings to gather input for the request for proposals which would be used to select a private developer for the site.[231] Longtime residents and 9-Man players from the Boston Knights, Boston Hurricanes, and Chinese Freemasons were outraged that the city would continue to take land away from Chinatown and that it would threaten the existence of the only recreational spaces in the neighborhood.

Russell Eng is one of the head coaches for the Boston Knights 9-Man team. Eng grew up in Boston's Chinatown until his family was displaced in the 1960s by the expressway so they moved to Jackson Heights in Queens, New York City. Eng moved back to Boston to be closer to his roots and to coach the 9-Man volleyball team that his uncle Reggie Wong founded. For Eng, 9-Man is more than a competitive sport, it provides a way for the younger generation to build interpersonal relationships in a community that is constantly being threatened by displacement and uprootedness. For Eng, there is significance in that the park was renamed after his uncle because it indicates that the parcel is an integral part of Chinatown life and activities. Eng and the other 9-Man players have made an intentional effort to use the park as frequently as they can so that it is not taken away by the city. Reggie Wong Park is one of the only recreational spaces in the neighborhood and it provides an space for residents to stay active outdoors. Boston's Chinatown has one of the highest rates of air pollution as compared to other parts of the city (Brugge, Leong, Averbach, and Cheung 2005; Brugge, Leong, and Law 2003). According to the Community Assessment of Freeway Exposure and Health Study led

[231] The Mass DOT Redevelopment Potential Presentation that was shown at the first public meeting is available online: http://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/3858c8da-3e85-4c75-9f97-bce1a4d808b5.

by medical researchers at Tufts University, a two week air monitoring campaign revealed abnormally high levels of ultrafine particles, which can lead to chronic inflammation, asthma, heart disease, and stroke.[232] Reggie Wong Memorial Park not only provides a space for residents to exercise on a daily basis but also to build meaningful intergenerational relationships with each other. Eng often coaches games where fifteen year old Chinatown youth play older generation 9-Man players, and through that process they are able to build common ground and a sense of connection to place, he explained: "There's some players that can endure in their 50s and 60s and play. There's one guy that's a grandfather, one of our players, he plays with us, and it's even more unique because you're closing multiple generation gaps, In football, you don't play 70-year-old people against fifteen-year-olds. It happens with 9-Man, the game builds a common bond, and it's really amazing to see."[233] To learn that Mass DOT would sell the parcel of land that Reggie Wong Memorial Park is located on has brought tremendous tension to not only the Boston 9-Man players but the entire local community.

1.7 Mass DOT Design Public Meeting Testimonies and Walk Out

Mass DOT has tried to sell Parcel 25 and Parcel 26 twice before, once in 2004 and another time in 2012 but nothing happened due to a lack of responses from developers. For the third time in February 2016, Mass DOT announced that they were soliciting plans for a development that would contribute to the downtown Boston landscape. Upon learning that Governor Charlie Baker wanted to turn the 5.5 acres into a gateway project that connected Chinatown to the new South Station developments, Eng and other residents became more active in the public hearing process to save the park from development. Eng, the entire Boston Knights team, along with other Chinatown residents showed up to all of the Mass DOT public meetings which were held at the State Transportation building. The first two meetings were held in March of 2016 and the majority of the time was spent

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232 The full report is published online: https://sites.tufts.edu/cafeh/files/2011/10/Reggie-Wong-Park-report-2.pdf.
233 Russell Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 19, 2017.

introducing the request for proposals and providing historical context about the two parcels of land. Chinatown residents lined up to ask Mass DOT questions about the community process, affordable housing, design selection criteria, air pollution, and construction mitigation. Eng and a dozen 9-Man players inquired what would happen to Reggie Wong Memorial Park during reconstruction.[234] The third public meeting was held in mid-April and again involved a series of question and answer sessions between Chinatown residents and Mass DOT employees. It was after the third meeting that Eng and others decided that it was necessary to draft a letter that specified community needs if the request for proposal (RFP) were to move forward. Before the fourth Mass DOT meeting in June, Chinatown residents and organizers presented a unified letter with the signatures of over twenty neighborhood groups demanding affordable housing and expansion of Reggie Wong Memorial Park. At the fourth meeting, Mass DOT distributed copies of their RFP guidelines and a draft of the Invitation to Bid (ITB) for the parcels. The RFP failed to take into account the community needs as specified in the letter and Chinatown residents were left outraged. Angie Liou, who is the Executive Director of the Asian Community Development Corporation expressed her concerns about the ITB's affordable housing requirements which was set at only twenty percent. Liou urged Mass DOT to increase the affordable housing requirement to at least thirty percent with half designated to very low income families at thirty percent of the area median income, she expressed in her oral testimony: "The site proposal for affordable housing is at 60 percent or 120 percent average median income, for households earning $69,000 to $88,000 a year. Chinatown households working in restaurants or tourism, earning an average of $20,000 a year, won't qualify for any of the so-called affordable housing that you are going to build on this site. We are already fighting everyday with displacement and gentrification. We are asking for affordable housing that people in Chinatown can afford."[235] Lydia

234 MassDOT Parcel 25 meeting public transcript. March 24, 2016.
235 Angie Liou oral testimony. Mass DOT Parcel 25 Public Design Meeting. June 7, 2016.

Lowe, who is the Director of the Chinatown Progressive Association expressed her desire to see a public library since the old library was demolished in 1956 by highway construction. Chris Betke, the person who spearheaded the effort to rename Pagoda Park to Reggie Wong Memorial Park, spoke up about the "connectivity" that Reggie Wong brought to Boston and how it was critical to not only preserve the park space but to expand it. At the end of the fourth meeting, an elderly Chinatown resident expressed concerns about trustworthiness and a lack of transparency. He quoted a Chinese idiom to urge the city to make decisions from the heart and not from the wallet. After these testimonies, the city decided to hold a fifth public meeting to allow more time for the community to review the draft of the ITB and send responses.

In the final Mass DOT public meeting held at the very end of June, fifty Chinatown residents walked out of the room in protest. They protested the final RFP because it disregarded most of the community feedback from the previous months of oral testimonies. Eng expressed that Chinatown residents had dedicated hours attending all five meetings and submitted oral and written comments over the span of six months. Wesley Wong, who is one of the coaches for the Boston Knights, stood up at the meeting to inquire about the uncertain future of Reggie Wong Memorial Park, he asked the Mass DOT board: "If you look at other communities, North End, South Boston, South End, they have several baseball fields, and so why doesn't, you know, Chinatown have one? Is it just because we're immigrants, we're poor, you think we don't have a voice? Does that not give us the right for green space? If this park is taken away, we have to walk to the Boston Commons to practice. It's the same as back then when we had to walk through the combat zone to play ball."[236] Russell Eng stood up and demanded Mass DOT clarify what the park will look like after redevelopment: "We have assurances from the Governor's office and the Mayor's office about the survival of the park, but in what form? How can we continue to use it the way we historically have for the last forty years? How

[236] Wesley Wong at Mass DOT Parcel 25 meeting public transcript. June 30 2016.

do we pass it onto the future generation if it is designated to be a part of South Boston and not Chinatown?"[237] Suzanne Lee, who is the founder of Chinese Progressive Association and an educator in the Boston public school system denounced Mass DOT for their disregard for resident needs and historical mistreatment of Chinatown, her anger rebrevated through the auditorium: "The residents have come to meetings, put their thoughts on paper and what we get on the final documents is not to our liking. Public land has to be reserved for public good. We the Chinese community in the last seventy years have lost more than fifty percent of our neighborhood to the Massachusetts Turnpike… we want future generations to have a place to live."[238] Karen Chen, who is the Executive Director of the Chinese Progressive Association, also jumped in to vent: "Chinatown is besieged as it attempts to fight back constant encroachment by the accelerating forces of gentrification and displacement. The redevelopment of Parcels 25 and 26 will have an enormous impact on our community for better or worse, with Chinatown's fate hanging in the balance. As one of the most vulnerable yet beloved communities in Boston, the Chinatown community was truly disappointed to learn that this process was futile in meaningfully addressing our concerns and only succeeded in wasting their time."[239] At this point fifty Chinatown residents at the public hearing stood up and left the room. Those who walked out included players from the Boston Knights Chinese Athletic Club, Chinese Freemasons, Hurricanes Athletic Club, and neighborhood organizers from the Asian Community Development Corporation, Chinese Progressive Association, Chinatown Community Land Trust, and relatives of Reggie Wong. While walking out of the room, Xin Xing Xu, who is a longtime resident and steering committee member of the Chinatown Residents Association declared: "Let the records show, I have been coming to every single one of these community meetings, expressed my view and listened to

[237] Russell Eng at Mass DOT Parcel 25 meeting public transcript. June 30, 2016.
[238] Suzanne Lee at Mass DOT Parcel 25 meeting public transcript. June 30, 2016.
[239] Karen Chen at Mass DOT Parcel 25 meeting public transcript. June 30, 2016.

you, but what the residents said was not heard."[240] A month later MassDOT put out their request for proposals, showing off the two parcels near South Station as prime for real estate development. To the surprise of Boston's Chinatown residents, the proposal was updated to increase the percentage of affordable housing on site and also explicitly prioritized the preservation and expansion of Reggie Wong Memorial Park.

The request for proposals was strategically marketed as a plan to make Parcel 25 and Parcel 26 an integrated part of the SouthGate Boston waterfront redevelopment project where a new forty story building with 1.1 million square feet of office space is in the process of being built. Mass DOT did not receive a single BID proposal for Parcel 25 and Parcel 26 before the deadline of April 28, 2017 (Logan 2017). Many developers claimed that the requirements were too challenging to justify financing $167 million for the project. The RFP required proposals include a new steam plant, a Reggie Wong Memorial Park on site, transportation improvements including a deck over I-93, and the removal of a toxic asbestos dump from previous highway construction. Mass DOT also had height limits and required that all the proposals adhere to zoning requirements of no taller than 125 feet. The city solicited proposals from developers who were experienced with complex projects but all of them declined due to the lack of a desire to build on contentious land that was sandwiched between two highways. The project is at a standstill but there is still pressure from Governor Charlie Baker to develop the land to make room for more downtown offices and market rate housing. The future of Reggie Wong Park remains uncertain, but regardless of what comes next the residents in Boston's Chinatown have decades of experience when it comes to anti-displacement organizing and holding city agencies accountable for their role in the gentrification of the neighborhood. As shown through the Mass DOT design public hearings, there are different mechanisms that can be used to shift the power from elites and real estate developers into the hands of residents such as vocalizing community

[240] Xin Xing Xu at Mass DOT Parcel 25 meeting public transcript. June 30, 2016.

needs every step of the way. The fight for Reggie Wong Memorial Park represents more than a physical fight, as Giles Li who is the Director of the new Pao Arts Center that residents fought for, expressed: "This is a place where people can understand each other, it's like a place that where they can be angry, be hopeful, be vulnerable, be all that. This is about people losing their place in the world, the place where immigrants are as comfortable — or as close to an approximation as close to comfortable as they can be. It's about being forced to be separated from that and everything that goes along with that."[241] The threat of separation and loss of home is what keeps community residents like Russell Eng politically active in the fight to save Chinatown, at the end of the day what happens to Reggie Wong Memorial Park is up to the residents as much as it is up to the city.

1.8 You Can't Evict A Movement: Conclusion and Strategies for Housing Justice

A focus on San Francisco and Boston Chinatowns reveal that across geographical contexts, resident responses to displacement are as persistent, creative, and intergenerational as in Manhattan's Chinatown. When Chinatown residents play an active part of local political processes from attending ballot simplification committee meetings, taking part in monthly neighborhood townhalls, and giving oral testimonies in design public hearings, the impact of these efforts can accrue over time to shape concrete political outcomes. From organizing intergenerational dialogues about displacement in the oldest continually run store in Manhattan's Chinatown to tenants taking their predatory landlords to court for harassment to women-led artist collectives using their cultural work as resistance to erasure, change often doesn't come from the top down but it begins with growing the grassroots. Everyday neighborhood residents turned into organizers like Mei Lum, Norman Fong, and Russell Eng, show how even with limited resources and access to formal political channels, marginal actors are able to engage in a kind of interstitial politics that exists alongside urban elites, broadening the scope of how we think about democratic politics and where it unfolds on the ground in daily life. As gentrification

[241] Russell Eng. Interview by Diane Wong. Personal Interview. January 18, 2017.

continues to change neighborhoods in cities across the country, it is important for more scholars to examine what the democratic implications of the process are for those who are most directly impacted. A more intentional focus on how gentrification shapes democratic politics is important because it illuminates how those most impacted make sense of their relationship to the political system and the ways in which people think, talk about, and act on the issues that shape their political lives.

These chapters read in succession provide a glimpse into the kind of politics that individuals are involved with in their own communities. Rather than portray those most impacted in the backdrop with limited agency of their own, my work provides a nuanced understanding of the conditions under which Chinese immigrants and youth are active in the making or urban space and politics, shifting away from the narrative that portrays them as disengaged from democratic processes. Read together, these chapters reveal several important strategies that urban immigrant communities have been using to fight gentrification. First is the continued importance of building intergenerational relationships and strengthening social ties between those in the neighborhood do not necessarily interact on a daily basis. In the second chapter, I demonstrate through The W.O.W. Project how important "shop talk" is when it comes to bringing neighborhood youth and elders into the same space for dialogue and sharing knowledge in ways that is accessible to all. Second is the working with grassroots organizations like CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities, Chinatown Tenants Union, and Chinese Community Development Center in order to collectively mobilize for tenant protections and equitable urban development. As covered in the third and final chapters, grassroots organizations are essential for immigrant communities that are facing gentrification because they create opportunities for those most impacted to develop civic knowledge, leadership skills, meaningful relationships, and neighborhood power. Whether it is to fight for a rent freeze and right to counsel or to mobilize for a community-led rezoning plan or bilingual tenant associations, the efforts of grassroots organizations are able to enact transformative social change, in ways that are deeper than immediate policy changes. A third strategy

is to engage in local, citywide, and national coalitions that can build solidarity networks around housing justice. Since displacement does not happen in a vacuum, alliances are critical for building democratic and inclusive movements so that those most impacted have safe, secure and affordable places to live. At the neighborhood level, coalitions like the Chinatown Working Group, Chinatown Coalition for Housing Justice, and Boston Chinatown Coalition are critical to ensuring that neighborhood specific needs are met through direct advocacy campaigns, resource mobilization, and capacity development. At the citywide level, coalitions like Right to the City Alliance, Stabilizing NYC, San Francisco Anti-Displacement Coalition, Council of Community Housing Organizations, and Right to the City Boston are critical to ensuring that residents have the political knowledge, training, and opportunities to share organizing tactics across neighborhoods. At the national level, the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development does vital work to shift the conversation around equitable community development through federal policies, campaigns, and advocacy work. A fourth strategy is the use of cultural production to support and sustain anti-displacement efforts at the grassroots level. As illustrated in the fourth chapter through the cultural work of the Chinatown Art Brigade, creative projects offer another way for people to actively shape the future of their neighborhoods. The innovative work of artist collectives like CAB sheds light on is how existing residents themselves have been using cultural, aesthetic, and material modes of expression to combat cultural erasure and how artists can be complicit in displacement but also play a unique liberatory role in the current fight against gentrification. While these are several of the strategies in which residents in Chinatown have been using to respond to displacement that I discuss in the project, what I cover here is not exhaustive of all of the possibilities and different ways in which communities are fighting to stay put.

As forced movement becomes more commonplace and continues to shape the political lives of people across cities, the question of what it means to stay put has become more urgent than ever. The work that residents in Chinatown and other communities are doing to build neighborhood power

is very much in line with what revolutionary thinker Grace Lee Boggs calls visionary organizing — which is rooted in the understanding that another world is not only possible but ordinary people are already building that vision. As Grace Lee Boggs explained with her own choice to remain in post-industrial Detroit: "How can you understand change when you are always on the move? The most radical thing I ever did was to stay put." This quote underscores the intimacies of home in shaping the ways in which ordinary people come to understand their relationship to American politics and contextualize their political existence. As Chinatowns across the country continue to change due to gentrification, the fight against dispossession continues. In August of 2018, New York City Mayor de Blasio released a plan to build four new prisons under the guise of closing Rikers Island. The new prisons are proposed to be built in Downtown Brooklyn, South Bronx, Kew Garden Queens, and Manhattan's Chinatown. The proposed site for the detention complex in Manhattan's Chinatown is 80 Centre Street, which is steps away from the Manhattan Housing Court, a place that tenants interact with frequently because of increased evictions and landlord harassment due to gentrification.[242] The prison is advertised by Mayor de Blasio and his administration as a forty-story mixed use development with commercial retail and a community center on the ground floor, revealing the systemic linkages between gentrification, detention, and incarceration. The next challenge for those involved in the anti-displacement struggle in Manhattan's Chinatown and other communities will be to organize holistically around the issue of gentrification in a way that makes these critical connections visible and inspires real alternatives to displacement, incarceration, and all other forms of dispossession. The role of the grassroots is more critical than ever in promoting equitable and just cities where everyone has the right to stay put. The fate of these Chinatowns is yet to be determined but as lifelong resident Maria Tang told me when I last saw her: "You can evict me from this apartment, but you can't evict a movement."

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[242] More information about the prison draft proposal and rendering, visit the Mayor's Office of Environmental Coordination: https://a002ceqraccess.nyc.gov/ceqr/ProjectInformation/ProjectDetail/13546-18DOC001Y#b

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