CHINESE SENIOR MIGRANTS AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF RETIREMENT

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STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Stanford, California

colonial one, it nonetheless has produced significant social and economic ties that continue to fuel seniors' migrant trajectories between the two countries. These ties include long-standing economic interaction and unequal political and power relationships in the global arena. Balanced between the two powers was Hong Kong, an actual colony and the center through which the actors straddling these economic and political relationships helped to perpetuate the Pearl River Delta's pervasive social and cultural imagination of engagement with the world beyond mainland China.

The narratives I present in this chapter make clear that Chinese senior migrants' contemporary trajectories of movement continue to be influenced in important ways by the long-standing Cantonese regional culture of migration. This context fueled seniors' lifelong desires to migrate to the United States in two ways: through providing the familial networks abroad that made seniors' movement practically possible and also through the cultivation of a diasporic imagination fully integrating an awareness of the global into local village life. This awareness led to interaction with the world beyond China that influenced my senior migrant interviewees' aspirations throughout their childhood and younger adulthood. That they maintained this desire to see and experience the world beyond China over many decades of their lives, despite the specific political barriers that made migration to the United States an almost impossible dream during this same time period, sets the later-life migration of Cantonese seniors apart from the growing numbers of senior migrants who hail from other regions of China today and whose migration trajectories as older adults are also influenced with goals for family engagement and interaction.

In the following chapters, I build on this discussion by describing how the Cantonese senior migrants who hoped to fulfill long-standing dreams to reunite with their family members in the United States also hoped to establish a stronger sense of personal fulfillment and social and financial stability in their older age. That the United States paradoxically provides a seemingly ideal location for some Chinese seniors to achieve retired ways of life desired by many members of their generational cohort is the subject of the next two chapters.

3 GENERATIONAL BELONGING IN THE NATION-STATE

Certain moments from my research still stand out to me, even years later. One interview that takes center stage in my mind was with a Cantonese couple in their late sixties who had been in the United States for only a few years when I met them. A social worker had referred the husband to me to interview, but since he spoke more Taishanese than Cantonese, his wife ended up being the main interlocutor for our discussion, which took place in those languages over several hours in the common room of a low-income senior housing estate in Quincy.

Like many of my other Chinese senior migrant interviewees, the couple had a long history of family migration to the United States. Although they had been sponsored to come here by an adult daughter, they were also linked to the United States by previous generations of migrants. Similar to the stories I highlighted in the previous chapter, in which I chronicled the diasporic webs of family life that have tied Southeast China to other global locations over multiple generations, this older couple's migration history was both rooted in an earlier generation of migrants and tied to adult children now in the United States. The husband's father had migrated here before World War II, while the rest of the family stayed behind in China. When one of the couple's adult daughters married a Chinese emigrant husband already living in the United States in the late twentieth century, she sponsored her parents to come to join her. Later, the parents themselves sponsored a second daughter to migrate. At the time of our interview, the couple was just waiting for the third child, their only immediate

family left in China, to arrive. It was at this juncture, as the couple expressed their frustration at how long the approval process seemed to be taking to bring their youngest daughter here, that our conversation took an unexpected turn. Why, they asked, was the process taking so long? Wouldn't the U.S. government want their daughter to join them as soon as possible? Surprised, I answered that it was unlikely that "the U.S. government" would have any such desire. Much to my dismay, the woman immediately burst into tears.

It wasn't the first question about why the process to sponsor their daughter was taking so long that led to my inadvertent upset of my interviewee. Long wait periods also characterized the experiences of Chinese migrants I had studied in Hong Kong and are a routine roadblock for would-be immigrants around the globe. What had tripped me up was the second question, around what seemed to me as a naive personification of the U.S. government as a conscious and caring actor with an active role to play in this couple's personal life. The expression of positive feelings about the U.S. government, particularly in relationship to its social welfare resources for seniors, was a viewpoint I had frequently heard voiced by my interviewees. However, I was less familiar with the high expectations this couple held for humane treatment by the U.S. government. As a result, their question crystallized my interest around the origins of this view. It was my own turn to wonder, how they—relative newcomers to the United States who had lived the majority of their adult lives in China and who seemed to be socially and politically marginalized residents of this country—had come to think about the U.S. government in this way.

Over the many years that I conducted interviews and participant observation–based research with Chinese-born recent senior migrants in the greater Boston area, there were many moments when I was able to glimpse emotion central to migrants' experiences, past and present. I have already written about some of these times in other places, including when one of my interviewees began crying while describing her brother's attempts to escape from China to Hong Kong in the 1970s, when he was apprehended and tortured by local PRC authorities.[1] In another case, a widowed woman of eighty had to stop our interview and collect herself as she remembered the forced physical dispersion of her remaining family during the Cultural Revolution. Within days of her husband's death from cancer in the late 1960s, she, like many others of her generation, was sent away to work in the countryside, leaving her young son and mother behind in Guangzhou.[2] As with those cases, my interviewee's tears reflected the culmination of her frustration and worry after many years of family separation and hardship

experienced at the hands of the PRC government. Yet unlike those other cases, her emotion centered on a deeply held sense of affinity with the United States—and her expectations for justice through the recognition of her Chinese-born daughter's legal right to join her siblings and parents already living here.

This moment of encounter, and the discussion that resulted from it, is the point of departure for this chapter, in which I focus on one aspect of senior migrants' contemporary engagement in transnational lifeways and global mobility processes. That is, I explore how some Chinese-born seniors have, perhaps unexpectedly, developed strong feelings of emotional affinity with the United States, which are in turn deeply intertwined with their generational experiences as Chinese citizens. As we continued to talk that afternoon and I learned more about this couple's family history, I began to better understand their high expectations for humane treatment by the U.S. government as rooted in the past as much as in the present. These expectations were intimately related to their lifelong experiences as part of a generational cohort of Chinese citizens who were born and came of age just prior to the Communist revolution in China that culminated in the foundation of the PRC in 1949. For this couple, a personal history of past and present hardship in China stood in stark contrast to their hope for positive social and political engagement as U.S. citizens. As a result, the United States was the country on which they pinned their hopes for their children and grandchildren's future lives: they valued the social stability and democratic governance in the United States more than the promise of China's continued economic growth and future prosperity. Starting from this realization, in this chapter, I chart the ways that these migrants' sense of affiliation with the nation—that is, how they felt a sense of national belonging—hinged on structures of feeling and ideological orientations rooted in both their past and current experiences of social membership in China and the United States.

Writing about various forms of membership in nation-states, scholars draw significant attention to what we can think of as disjunctures between formal categories of citizenship and substantive feelings of belonging. Formal categories of citizenship are the kinds of legal categories of membership that result in documentation like passports that provide political and social protections not available to noncitizens. Substantive forms of citizenship refer to deep-seated social and political engagements and familial ties that many individuals who are residents but not always legal citizens of particular states experience. Sociologist Saskia Sassen highlights these disjunctures through forms of citizenship that she calls "authorized" and "recognized."[3] In her view, "authorization" refers to legal

categories of membership, whereas "recognition" indexes substantive forms of belonging through which individuals exercise moral claims to membership, which may not be recognized as sufficient for legal authorization by the state.[4] Similarly, anthropologist Susan Coutin highlights how individuals can be both simultaneously "present" and "absent" in a given nation when their legal status does not coincide with their sense of belonging or location of actual residence.[5] As early as 1994, anthropologist Renato Rosaldo coined the term *cultural citizenship* to advocate for the recognition that ethnic minorities' distinctive cultural practices that differ from American mainstream norms are in fact integral to their citizenship claims and experiences. Viewed through the language of Sassen's categories, Rosaldo paints a vivid portrait of how authorized citizenship requires the recognition of ethnic difference.[6]

What these and other accounts of the complexity of membership practices highlight are the multiple forms of affiliation and alignment with state and social values that migrants can experience. Moreover, these forms of affinity may become most visible through the kinds of emotional outbursts like the one I unwittingly provoked that afternoon in Quincy. As geographer Lucy Jackson explains, "Allowing for emotions and feelings in citizenship narratives . . . accounts for more fluid constructs [and means] that social, cultural and political understandings of citizenship alter to become focused more on identity and practice."[7] Yet many scholars writing about citizenship rarely explicitly address these emotions and feelings, even though the roles that emotions play in processes of belonging and affinity with the nation nonetheless seem present just below the surface of their analyses. For example, Susan Coutin focuses on the literal unreality of personal experience that results when individuals are simultaneously present and absent in nation-states.[8] As she notes, citizens may be legally present in the nation-state while living elsewhere by participating in elections by absentee ballot, paying taxes on income earned abroad, or sending remittances that support families and ways of life left behind. Similarly, undocumented migrants who have spent the majority of their lives in one country but are then deported and repatriated to "homes" they have never known struggle to make sense of their removal from a place where they consider themselves to be citizens to new locations where they have no sense of belonging, family, or even legal documentation verifying their citizenship claims. Echoing the language of the fictional genre magical realism, Coutin describes the "incompatible realities that are true simultaneously" for individuals living through these experiences of everyday disjuncture.[9]

Yet the role of emotional attachment to nation-states is well acknowledged by scholars of migration, particularly with reference to displaced groups like diasporas with no recourse to return to longed-for homelands. Similarly, scholars of retirement migration highlight how older, first-generation migrants' emotional orientations may continue to focus on their home country through a strong sense of nostalgia for a past that may no longer exist except in their imaginative worlds. In these accounts, nostalgia serves as a potential obstacle to the formation of emotional ties to new places of residency or draws older migrants back to original homelands after living and working as younger adults in new locations.[10] Less commonly addressed is the role of emotional attachment in creating or constructing new senses of "home" for migrants.[11] One exception is Caroline Oliver's work. Writing about retirement migrants from Britain who settle in Spain, Oliver describes what she calls the "forward-looking" role that emotions like idealism and aspiration play in how older migrants construct new homes and a sense of rootedness in Spain.[12] In the rest of this chapter, I build on Oliver's forward-looking role of emotion building to highlight how nostalgia—that is, a preoccupation with the past—can also be forward-looking, leading to new forms of affinity and attachment to the nation. In this way, nostalgia can play a role in allowing for the development of a sense of belonging in new countries of residence, not just longed-for emigrant homelands. In particular, I explore the ideological ties and emotional affiliations that help to anchor my interviewees in and to the United States, rather than China, as older adults.

My analysis highlights how the PRC's ideological values for social and national advancement remain influential for this cohort of older adults. Yet these principles, including the creation of a stable and equitable society, for which this generation labored throughout their earlier adult lives in China, now seem to have been abandoned by the current Chinese government and are perceived to be more easily experienced in the United States than in China.

SENIOR MIGRANTS' VIEWS OF CHINA: IDEOLOGY AND HARDSHIP OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COHORT

The Chinese seniors I know have been quick to point out that life in contemporary China is a huge improvement over the recent past in terms of access to material goods and China's economic development. They talk with pride about how far the PRC has come over the past few decades and where they hope its current economic growth will lead the country in the future. They express particular satisfaction at China's increased global standing. This praise makes clear that Chinese seniors retain a strong sense of emotional connection

to China, even while living in the United States and even after becoming U.S. citizens. This pride is certainly not unique to this generation, yet it takes a distinctive form for them through contrasting China's newly found global ascendance with the economic hardship that characterized most of this cohort's experiences over the course of the twentieth century. At times, hardships were mitigated for those who received remittances from overseas relatives. However, as I explained in the previous chapter, having overseas relatives often created greater political risk and potential economic hardship for family left behind in China, resulting in the kinds of strongly emotional reactions to past experiences that I noted in the first paragraphs of this chapter.

When seniors talked about their premigration past, their narratives reflected the social, political, and economic turmoil through which they lived for the first fifty years of their lives. Although overall my interviewees spanned more than one generation, most of them were in their sixties and seventies during the first decade of the twenty-first century and were born in China in the 1930s and 1940s—years spanning the Japanese occupation of China during World War II and the Chinese civil war that ended with the establishment of the PRC on October 1, 1949. For these individuals, their lives have followed the course of the extreme political and social changes that have marked China's transition from two thousand years of imperial rule to a thoroughly modern nation-state. Although this transition began well before these senior migrants were born, some of the most acute ideological changes have taken place over the course of their lifetimes. The first was the transition from the Nationalist-led Republican government to that of the PRC—referred to as "liberation" by my interviewees. The second occurred in the late 1970s with China's "reform and opening up" (M. *gaigekaifang*) initiated by Deng Xiaoping.

Many of my interviewees were willing to talk about some of the hardships they had lived through, including the disastrous famine following Mao's Great Leap Forward campaign of 1958 to 1961 that resulted in 30 to 40 million deaths among China's rural residents. Initiated as an attempt to fast-forward China's modernization, the Great Leap Forward sought to boost agricultural production through intensive collectivization. Rural residents initially enjoyed the benefits of increased access to food in public canteens and freedom from everyday domestic tasks such as cooking that detracted from their ability to increase agricultural outputs. However, a series of now well-documented political missteps not only deprived rural residents of any of their own produce (which was instead shipped to urban areas) but also rendered those same rural residents powerless to alter the

campaign's inevitable outcome: starvation. One senior migrant, a nurse during the early years of the PRC, explained what happened:

> [Everyone] gave fake numbers: if on a farm only six stalks of rice were harvested, farmers would say they cut down ten, so that others would say that they had a good [production] year and praise them and compliment the leaders. But these were all lies, it wasn't the truth. The people who were in charge would do the calculations [for how much food to ship off to urban areas] thinking that there was more than enough to eat. [Everyone believed] that there was no need to worry about starvation, because we had plenty to eat; [officials thought] that there was a lot of food for the farmers to eat. So lots of rice would be cooked [in the public canteens] and when [people] couldn't finish it they would throw it away. [Finally], there was no more rice and the country didn't have enough food. So then cutbacks began [and] people were starving.

Nothing about this account is surprising in relation to the history on record, which documents a system gone awry.[13] Political factionalism resulted in competition among different groups to outdo each other in fulfilling production quotas. Under intense political pressure to demonstrate agricultural success, farmers reported more grain output than they actually produced. Government cadres, willing to believe these reports in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of production in the areas where they were in charge, further inflated production numbers, leading to disastrous outcomes for peasant farmers. Since available food was not initially rationed in a sustainable way, much was wasted—even as some individuals were already starving. Moreover, farmers' entire harvests were claimed by cadres to fulfill their manufactured production claims to send to urban areas, leaving entire rural communities without enough food to survive. For my interviewee, there is no contest between that time and today. As she summed up, "Compared to that time, there's such a big difference now. People's lives are better now: no matter how difficult, it's not that difficult. It's not like before."

Yet nostalgia for the Maoist past by members of these older generations who lived through the Great Leap famine and other periods of extreme hardship, often directly perpetrated by the state, is well documented.[14] Writing about the experiences of older women in rural China, historian Gail Hershatter talks about how women—despite many difficult periods in their lives—often talk positively about their experiences, highlighting how their lives "got better twice."[15] What they describe as the first time their lives "got better" are the

concrete improvements they experienced as a result of liberation, when the implementation of economic and social reforms following the establishment of the PRC provided new life opportunities for many women in this and other areas of rural China. These reforms included the redistribution of land away from wealthy land-holding families to all village inhabitants and expanded opportunities for health care, education, and marriage choice for women. Overall, the changes ushered in over the early years of CCP rule brought improvements to the previously impoverished and largely circumscribed roles for rural women, which Hershatter's interviewees still clearly remembered and most certainly influenced the ability of the interviewee I quoted previously to work as a nurse during the early PRC years.

The second time women's lives "got better" was several decades later during the post-Mao era known as "reform and opening up." Following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping's rise to power in 1978, this period marked a turning point in the strict political control that had been a hallmark of the Maoist era. The tight restrictions over everyday life situations—where one worked, what kind of work one did, what one was allowed to plant on one's farm, what one could eat, when one could visit one's family—that had been the norm during the Maoist period began to relax and allowed the first significant opportunities for rural families to generate individual income in decades. Hershatter explains, "People are not settling accounts with the collective period anymore. . . . Many women tell a story of how life got better twice, once in the 1950s and again in the 1980s. In this story, collectivization and decollectivization do not contradict each other; both count as progress."[16]

At the same time, these collective memories of how "life got better twice" coexist with individual memories of the violence and deprivation that accompanied these reforms—particularly collectivization and the implementation of other reforms, including those most intended to "liberate" women.[17] Many of my senior migrants' narratives of their premigration lives in China highlighted both the past hardships they experienced yet still voiced strong support for the PRC government and its laudable revolutionary goals—an ambivalence that pervades other accounts of the Chinese socialist past by members of this revolutionary generation as well.[18]

This duality is clear in the story that Mrs. Wong, eighty years old in 2010, told me about how the establishment of the PRC impoverished her family, which had been moderately prosperous prior to 1949 with residences on both sides of the Chinese–Hong Kong border.[19] Initially from Guangzhou, the family

moved to Hong Kong seeking safety from the Japanese in 1936, when Mrs. Wong was a small child. Mrs. Wong's father, who worked in advertising, promoted a friend's pharmaceutical company throughout World War II. Following the war, the director of the company decided to stay in Hong Kong. Mrs. Wong's father, however, elected to return to Guangzhou, where he served as the company's functioning director in his friend's absence. Not long afterward, Mrs. Wong's father was imprisoned for "reeducation," and ownership of the pharmaceutical company was transferred to the CCP. Mrs. Wong explained the devastating effects of her father's imprisonment on her family:

> Before liberation . . . , it was only if you did something wrong that you got locked up. [So, my father's imprisonment] scared my grandma so much that she died. She was really worried. She thought that her son-in-law had committed a crime. She couldn't walk and was blind, and she worried about [my father] so much that she died. At the time my mom was also very worried and didn't know how to deal with [my father's situation]. Then she got sick. We didn't know what was wrong with her at the time. . . . Then she died too. At the time of her death. she was still calling my father's name. She was afraid [for him] because he was in jail.

Following these family tragedies, Mrs. Wong and her younger sisters lived for years in extreme poverty, sometimes subsisting on only a drop or two of soy sauce to flavor their rice at meals and no other food at all.

In our conversations, Mrs. Wong clearly recounted the hardships that she experienced at the hands of the PRC state. Yet despite the virtual destruction of her childhood family following her father's imprisonment, her narrative did not vilify the PRC government. Instead, she emphasized the positive ideals involved in the redistribution of wealth that had motivated the newly established Communist government's action against her father. Although she acknowledged having been scared at the time, she rationalized that fear as stemming from her own ignorance as a young child. She further explained:

> [Now I know that my father's imprisonment was] really not that scary. Why did [he and other businessmen] have to be reeducated? It was so that the Communist Party [could] transfer privately owned, capitalist companies to public [ownership]. Some people didn't know my father was just a representative [of the company and not its real director], but there [were others imprisoned] who actually owned their companies. Once my father understood this policy he accepted it.

Through her rationalization of these harrowing experiences, Mrs. Wong's tale reinforces the pattern of positive views of the past also voiced by Hershatter's interviewees who remember their lives as being significantly improved through the implementation of the same kinds of violent reforms that led to the imprisonment of Mrs. Wong's father. In these cases, seniors did not critique the governmental policies that led to personal hardship, including extreme poverty, malnourishment, and the death of friends and family. Instead, narratives emphasized support for the revolutionary CCP agenda aimed at eliminating class differences and spurring economic development for the country as a whole, since these policies did enable life to get better for many in this generation under Maoist rule. In this way, seniors' accounts of the past highlighted the continuing importance of the ideological values—and, in particular, the state-articulated ideal of egalitarianism—that undergirded their sacrifices and contributions to the Chinese national cause.

My interviewees' stories also emphasized that life improved during the 1970s and focused on how rural families were finally able to make their own decisions about how best to achieve economic success. One of my interviewees, a Taishanese man in his seventies, who had been in the United States for a decade when we talked in 2010, explained the limitations with Maoist era policies preventing innovation and the opportunity to improve his family's agricultural production:

> When I worked on the farm, there were some policies that I came up with [to improve] the farm but [the government wouldn't let me implement these changes]. If you wanted your income to be higher, they wouldn't let you. They said that farmers had to plant rice and wheat; you couldn't think of other ways to make more money. They really restricted us. It was like that even after liberation. If we had been able to plant other crops then we could [have made more money], but they wouldn't let us. I also thought about how [we could make more money if] we could raise fish and sell them.

As a result, he was grateful for the new opportunities for economic development once the Maoist era ended. However, like many of my other interviewees, he also expressed a sense of betrayal by the PRC's current government. After having worked for decades to provide a strong foundation for the Communist state whose ideals they supported, seniors told me they felt abandoned by that same government, which promotes economic growth benefiting many younger Chinese but rarely the members of this older generational cohort. This

interviewee continued, "When I was in China, I went through the Communist period, and I've experienced many things. Some people in China work for the government and can depend on it. However, people like us who are farmers—they [the government] don't think about us. If we work, it's as if we worked for nothing. There aren't any benefits for us." For this migrant, contemporary life in China clearly represents a marked improvement on the past. At the same time, his sense of sacrifice and the resultant hardships he endured in support for past CCP policies were acute. His words, "After everything we've been through, the government has never thought about how to treat us better," also encapsulated the concerns of the other senior migrants I interviewed.

SEARCHING FOR A "HUMANE SOCIAL ATMOSPHERE" IN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES

The sense of abandonment by the current government for this generation of seniors who lived through and largely facilitated China's revolutionary past is particularly strong among migrants from Guangdong's rural areas, who have had fewer benefits than urban dwellers throughout their lives, including, until quite recently, any state-provided pension or old-age support system.[20] Rural residents have never qualified for the social welfare benefits known as the "iron rice bowl" that were available to urban dwellers during the Maoist period and continue to make many urban residents' lives more comfortable and secure than that of rural residents in postreform China. Moreover, as health and welfare benefits that were available to these same rural dwellers through collectivization were dismantled, they suffered disproportionately during the reform period.[21] Yet it's not just through the inability to fully benefit from China's contemporary economic growth that seniors feel upset. My migrant interviewees also complained about other aspects of contemporary Chinese society that compromise seniors' sense of security and quality of life in both rural and urban China, such as perceived widespread corruption, crime in urban areas, pollution, unfair wages, and lack of job security. For members of this generation, who remembered hardships experienced before liberation and worked throughout their lives to contribute to China's growth and development, their critiques focused on the failure of the contemporary state to make good on its promises and, in so doing, highlighted the disjuncture between current CCP practices and the ideological values of Maoist China that shaped these seniors' experiences as younger adults. This sense of betrayal by the PRC state opened up the potential for seniors to recognize the ideological values they prized as

younger adults elsewhere. For my interviewees, that recognition took place in the United States.

Writing about labor activism among older industrial workers in North China's rust belt, sociologist Ching Kwan Lee describes how her interviewees' critiques of China's present are deeply intertwined with their experiences of China's socialist past. Laborers talk in largely positive terms about that past—in contrast to the economic and social injustices they experience in China today. Lee identifies three main ways in which workers' remembrances of the socialist past influence their expectations for the present. First, workers are nostalgic for the job security and egalitarianism that characterized their earlier adult years in the Maoist period, noting that they had better "psychological well-being" despite having a lower "material standard of living." Second, they talk positively about their factory work—demonstrating both a sense of pride in having developed particular occupational skills and also a sense of power relative to government cadres. Third, they draw attention to "their contribution and dedication to national development [and] the collective purpose realized in production work." Lee further notes that "in many narratives, these themes are interwoven pieces mentioned in one single breath, as workers depicted in broad strokes the gestalt of an era."[22]

For these workers, similar in age to many Chinese senior migrants now in Boston, factory work was not just hard labor. Instead, they experienced this work, like the work done by my revolutionary generation interviewees who were farmers or nurses or teachers during the early years of Chinese socialism, as part of an important project of national purpose, in which individual contributions were valued as all Chinese citizens worked toward strengthening and modernizing China together. Ideologically, every contribution mattered, and every individual had an equal opportunity to contribute to national development. The ideological quest for egalitarianism that undergirded this generation's sacrifices has now been abandoned. Over the past two decades, as China's gross domestic product has risen exponentially, income inequality has skyrocketed, and the financial security that the older generation so fondly remembers has become increasingly elusive for large numbers of Chinese citizens today, particularly seniors. One of Lee's interviewees explained, "For honest, ordinary, and mediocre people like us, Mao's egalitarianism was much better. My family ate steamed buns, your family also ate steamed buns. The next day was the same steamed buns. My heart felt balanced and relaxed."[23]

Like these workers, my senior migrant interviewees offered an alternative

view of China's progress focused on a critique of contemporary excess. One man in his seventies told me, "We didn't used to be very proud of money. Back in the old days, they gave you a place to live, unlike now where you have to buy a place to live. Incomes were small; there was no desire for a luxurious lifestyle. . . . Now, everyone wants this more luxurious lifestyle. . . . We never talked about money; it was all about love." Another migrant, in his sixties, emphasized, "The old China was not okay. It has become much more open [which is better than before]. But they say that China's a country that pays attention to social concerns. It's not actually. . . . After the economic reform, after the '90s, it became a capitalist society. They say that China's a country for the people, but it's not." These concerns echo the nostalgia for a simpler society, oriented around expectations for production rather than consumption. That is, seniors expressed nostalgia for a life in which the ideological values they worked for in the early years of the PRC—collective cooperation, state support of workers, equality, and financial security—are still the hallmarks of daily life rather than the flashy, consumption-oriented lifestyles that characterize Chinese society today.

Lee points out that the power in this "alternative social order" is that it "is not an abstract ideological construct but a lived, historical reality."[24] Moreover, it is part of a historical reality that was groundbreaking for the revolutionary generation whose lives were benefited in concrete material and psychological ways, even as that historical reality was also constructed through the substantial sacrifices they made. Lee also points out that the ideological value placed on work—as part of a production-oriented society in which each individual's role contributed to national development—created a strong sense of direct connection between workers and the state: "When they talked about equality, and security or violence and abuse of power, they referred to the state policy of wages and benefits, rather than the camaraderie of workers with each other."[25] During the Maoist period, households, work, and social activity were all organized around state goals for success; moreover, access to employment, housing, schooling, health care, food, social pastimes, and travel was allocated and controlled through state-based institutions known as work units. As a result, it's not surprising that despite the relative withdrawal from the PRC state from everyday life in China today relative to the past, Chinese seniors today continue to place "the state" at the center of their local worlds.

One of the most frequently expressed ways that my senior migrant interviewees placed "the state" at the center of daily life was through their talk about the rise of social problems in contemporary China. These articulations

served as powerful critiques through the stark contrast they provided between today's social ills and what seniors remembered as the more egalitarian and trustworthy nature of Chinese society during the Maoist era. The critiques voiced by my interviewees most frequently centered on a particular Cantonese word, *funghei* (M. *fengqi*), which I loosely translate here as "social atmosphere." Funghei draws attention to a way of conceptualizing society as a concrete entity with a collective morality rather than viewing society as a collection of disparate individuals with competing moral claims. It is also tied to the state through the emphasis placed on how government policies and practices affect the social atmosphere by laying the groundwork for and enforcing collective moral norms. Thus, tied to state governance in ways not necessarily obvious to a non-Chinese observer, "social atmosphere" acts as a force that shapes the collective social interactions among citizens. So when seniors critiqued the social atmosphere in contemporary China, complaining about the wide variety of social ills that detract from their psychological well-being, they were viewing the state as a primary actor in contributing to those ills.[26]

The list of social ills that Chinese seniors identified in contemporary China was substantial, including rising rates of marital infidelity, divorce, mental illness, and corruption. For my interviewees, the prevalence of social ills in China made it a less desirable place to live than the United States where, they said, the "social environment" (C. *sehwui waahnging*; M. *shehui huanjing*) is better. The positive aspects of America's social environment that Chinese-born seniors praised were also substantial. They contrasted America's blue skies with the pollution-clogged air across China to highlight the environmental and health benefits of living in the United States. They cited story after story of the goodwill of strangers who helped them navigate Boston's largely unfamiliar urban environment as evidence of the better relationships of trust among people in the United States. They felt safer overall in Boston, where they perceived the crime rate to be lower than in Guangzhou and other Chinese urban areas. They also praised the well-mannered behavior of Americans, who, in contrast to most Chinese, generally wait in line in an orderly fashion, don't spit on the ground, and greet others, even strangers, by saying "good morning."[27]

For many senior migrants, the contemporary social ills they worried about indexed a concomitant worry about moral decline at the collective level in China.[28] Morality in the PRC today is a pressing topic among many sectors of the population, and citizens' concerns find active expression first and foremost around a basic lack of trust in everyday social relationships. This concern was

best expressed by one of my interviewees who set that lack of trust in China in contrast to that in the United States where, he told me, "people are very trustworthy. For example, if you tell someone something, if it's yes then it's yes, if it's no then it's no. If they tell you they'll do it, they will, they won't go against their word." Here, trust is articulated in terms of the social relationships that animate everyday interactions. However, the single largest concern around trust in China has to do with corruption, particularly at the government level and among elites. Unlike the Maoist and preliberation Chinese past, when the particularistic ties activated through social relationships were a means of strengthening "public-oriented morality [M. *gongong daode*]," today in China those particularistic ties are "increasingly oriented towards the accumulation of wealth, power, and status."[29]

Corruption was also a major concern of the factory workers Lee interviewed, particularly as they contrasted their nostalgia for power to counter social injustices during the Maoist period with their relative lack of power in countering social injustices in the PRC today. The same interviewee who explained how her "heart felt balanced and relaxed" in Maoist China when she only had the same steamed buns to eat each day also told Lee how "unbalanced" she feels as a result of corruption today:

> During the Cultural Revolution, my neighbor's family was jailed for ten years for stealing a thousand yuan. On the contrary, today, even if you lined up all officials in the work unit and shot all of them one by one, you would still miss others who are corrupt. . . . I feel unbalanced not because others make more money. If those people get rich by working hard and doing legitimate business, I can only be envious. *But now, workers are outraged because it's all about power.* Tens of thousands of yuan of bribes are all ordinary people's money [emphasis added].[30]

In other words, what these workers and other seniors wanted was the ability to address both real and perceived injustices that occur—either because of individual abuses of power or because of the government's inability to keep pace with and regulate the abuses that have been exacerbated by China's lightning-speed economic development. Controversies over food safety and regulation, chemical storage and pollution, and improperly supervised building sites have all captured public imagination in the PRC over the past decade.[31] Perceived through the lens of collective morality, these common disasters seem to demonstrate that the state has failed not just in its inability to keep up with economic development

in terms of institutional regulatory mechanisms but also in its inability to develop a stronger and more positive "social atmosphere" that would prevent individuals from engaging in the abuse of power or other ethically problematic enterprises in the first place.

As anthropologist Ellen Oxfeld explains, moral discourse in China "is frequently about expectations" and focuses on the "evaluation of whether people have met their obligations."[32] For Chinese seniors, many of their expectations remained grounded in their previous experiences. "Liberation did not mean the end of preexisting models of social relations and expectations, and the reform era did not end modes of thinking that had developed during the collective era. Rather, old and new ways of looking at the world and making moral judgments were combined."[33] As a result, seniors' commentaries on China's contemporary moral landscape, although rooted in nostalgic attention to Maoist-era ideologies, reflected the complex and shifting influences of the multiple ideological values that have shaped seniors over the course of their lives. Oxfeld's account also draws attention to the central role of personal and familial obligations (M. *renqing*) in evaluating conceptions of morality in different social and political realms. In this way, she highlights the simultaneous coexistence of multiple understandings of morality as expressed through social obligations, such that reciprocity and accountability continue to be powerful forces in shaping local community relationships even as such values appear to be lacking by the state.[34]

That there is a widely perceived moral vacuum at the state level in the PRC today was clear through seniors' talk that linked the rise of social ills in contemporary China to the breakdown of the government's ability to protect and provide for its citizens.[35] Access to this protection seemed particularly lacking for many Chinese seniors, including my interviewees, whose lives have been rendered financially precarious through uneven state policies around providing pensions for older workers and rural residents. Insecurity was exacerbated by abuses of power, such as when Chinese officials resort to bribery or deny access to necessary resources for seniors who, as Lee's workers attest, also remember the possibility of countering power imbalances like these in the Maoist past.

Situated at this intersection of seniors' nostalgia for Maoist egalitarianism and fairness were my interviewees' vocal concerns about contemporary hurdles of access to medical treatment in China. In particular, seniors expressed outrage at how Chinese doctors over the past couple of decades have routinely refused to treat sick patients who cannot pay (up front) the exorbitant fees reportedly in vogue for even basic services.[36] And while there are now reforms in place in China meant to address potential corruption in medical practices as well as the stark inequalities in health care provision between urban and rural residents, these reforms were implemented after many of my interviewees had settled in the Boston area and have had uneven success at local levels.[37] For example, in 2002, when many of my interviewees were either already in the United States or thinking about migrating, only 10 percent of China's rural residents had insurance coverage, compared to 95 percent in 2016.[38] These barriers to health care, particularly for rural seniors, stood in sharp contrast to the ease of access they experienced in the United States.

In particular, the U.S. system of Social Security and Medicare for senior citizens, lauded by my interviewees as evidence of the state's generosity and care for its citizens, epitomized the belief that in the United States, seniors can once again benefit from the core ideological values of egalitarianism and fairness that they remembered from their youth and that they felt are lacking for seniors in China today. One interviewee made this clear:

> When my mom was sick, we had to save up money to take care of her. We [barely] had enough money for us to eat, and we had to worry about our mother's health care. . . . In America, seniors don't have to worry about this money issue. . . . In China, seniors don't have to pay to go to parks or to go to the movies. But those aren't big concerns. . . . What's more important is that seniors not have to pay for health care.

Talking about the contrast between Chinese and U.S. health care provision, another migrant told me about her positive impressions of the U.S. system, which is "good to poor people" and "really humane":

> When I came to America, the first good thing [I learned] about America's government was about the health care. Even if you don't have money, you don't have to worry about . . . seeing a doctor. It was different in China. If you didn't have money, then you couldn't go to the doctor. Even if you were only missing one penny, they wouldn't be willing to see you. It was like that. . . . That's why after I came to America I was very thankful to the American government that they cared about us so much.

While many Americans struggle for access to reasonably priced health care and thus might find references to our system as "humane" to be puzzling, it's important to note here that the "humane" practice my interviewee was referring to is simple access to treatment. In other words, the American health system

allows for the treatment of illness first and payment later and does not generally turn sick individuals away from emergency services. This practice, what one senior migrant called a "save the dying, help the hurt" attitude, exemplifies for her and others the value on human life that the U.S. government places on its citizens. This claim, focused on the U.S. government's treatment of citizens as "human," echoes the claim made by one of Lee's factory worker interviewees who emphasized that "the [Maoist] regime's commitment to fulfill workers' welfare and livelihood needs" meant that "workers were treated as 'human beings.'"[39]

The praise for what my senior migrant interviewees called the "humane social atmosphere" in the United States goes beyond typical understandings of social membership that use that term to reference the social welfare services available to citizens and legal residents of a nation-state. Instead, this understanding of social membership was intimately related to an emotional sense of affinity to the nation-state rooted in seniors' overwhelming nostalgia for the rhetoric and practice of egalitarian ideology that infused their experiences as younger adults in Maoist China. It was also strongly tied to their disappointment about how the PRC government seems to lack a similar concern for bolstering China's moral and social landscape today. Instead, seniors such as my migrant interviewees saw a failing social safety net that does little to insulate citizens from growing income inequality, lax moral judgment by elites and corrupt officials, and insufficient regulation of China's rapid economic progress—all of which contribute to gross miscarriages of justice for the same citizens that the PRC state professes to protect. Thus, it's not terribly surprising that many Chinese seniors who have migrated to the United States hope to become U.S. citizens despite their continuing strong attachments to China and sense of pride in China's development and economic modernization over the past few decades. In so doing, they and their descendants would have greater opportunities to demonstrate their ideological alignment with core democratic values of freedom and equality and also be able to enjoy the full benefits of what they perceive as the U.S. government's greater commitment to justice for its citizens.

THE DESIRE FOR CITIZENSHIP AND THE PERSISTENT PROBLEM OF ENGLISH

Many seniors I knew had struggled for years to learn English. There was a practical reason they wanted to learn English: to help them deal with the routine obstacles they encountered in everyday life in the United States. Although most seniors I knew had adapted to living here quite well with even a very

rudimentary knowledge of English, the sheer number of everyday questions that came up without being able to read or speak in English was formidable. Seniors' ability to navigate a world in which they could not decipher addresses and common names from written information created a host of hurdles in completing seemingly routine tasks, such as confirming doctor appointments, filling prescriptions, managing insurance claims, switching to lower-cost telephone carriers, and registering to vote. Yet the most important reason that seniors struggled, often for years, to learn English was to be able to pass the U.S. citizenship exam.

Almost none of my interviewees had had the opportunity to study English when young. Those who were born in the 1930s and were able to attend university in the early years of the PRC learned Russian as a second language. Most migrants from rural areas had only had a few years of schooling and certainly never had the opportunity to formally study a language other than Chinese. Thus, the primary concern of most interviewees wasn't learning the content covered on the various sections of the citizenship exam—content that they could read about in Chinese and about which they were often enthusiastic to learn. Instead, their main concern was how they could learn enough English to pass the exam, which tested English-language knowledge in a variety of forms, including small talk as well as answering content-based questions in English about American history and politics through both multiple-choice questions and dictation.

For seniors literate in Chinese, just learning the English-language alphabet was a challenge. The extent of this challenge was made clear to me over and over again through my volunteer work teaching seniors ESL. It was also apparent through my interactions with seniors at their citizenship classes (where they struggled to gain basic mastery of common words and expressions) and in informal conversations with them in their residential buildings (when they would ask me for help reading their mail and paying their bills). In almost all cases, seniors blamed their poor memory, along with the natural process of aging, for the difficulties they had in learning English pronunciation and retaining vocabulary. Seniors repeatedly told me that English "went in one ear and out the other" and that learning English is "so hard" when you are old. Many seniors went to multiple English classes, seeking out free classes offered through nonprofit or religious organizations because they had little disposable income. Even when my interviewees did succeed in learning some English, they encountered unexpected difficulties in practicing their new skills. Mrs. Wong, who attended Bunker Hill Community College for several semesters, was almost arrested when a child with

whom she had been trying to practice English at a bus stop became alarmed at her persistent attempts at conversation and called the police. Understandably, Mrs. Wong was shocked and ashamed to learn that her innocent interest in trying to practice English was perceived as a tangible threat.

Summing up the difficulty of learning enough English to pass the citizenship exam, one of my interviewees explained:

> You have to answer 100 questions to pass the citizenship test, but it's really hard being able to do that. You have to listen and be able to answer them. . . . How would you know how to understand all those long questions? It's very hard. You say that if you are over sixty-five years old and have lived here for fifteen years then you can use Chinese, but when will it be fifteen years?

For individuals in their late sixties and seventies, fifteen years seemed an unreasonably long time to have to wait for anything.[40] Moreover, for seniors who were hoping to obtain citizenship for themselves because they wanted to sponsor other family members still in China to join them in the United States, waiting fifteen years, by which time they might be gravely ill, incapacitated, or dead, was not a viable option. One woman said, "I want to take classes to see if I can learn enough [English] to take the citizenship test. But my brain is not working well, and I can't remember anything. . . . I just want to become a citizen but it's so hard because I'm so old." When her friend chimed in to note that "it's hard to pass the citizenship test [when] you can't speak English," the first woman added, "That's the one hard thing. Working isn't hard, but learning English is." One couple, retired college-educated professionals, attended English classes in five or six different locations because they were so eager to become citizens. Nevertheless, they had learned very little English overall, pointedly commenting that "immigration officials just don't know how difficult it is to learn a new language, particularly when you're old." Implicit in their commentary was the expectation that immigration officials, as state actors, would be sympathetic to the struggles they were facing and their efforts trying to learn English. In other words, they seemed to believe that if the officials in charge of administering the citizenship test did in fact understand how difficult it is to learn English as an older adult, then they would be more lenient with that policy.

The many obstacles involved with seniors' desire to learn enough English to pass the citizenship exam raise the specter of the indifference to human concerns that can accompany entrenched bureaucratic systems through the hurdles they create to achieving desired outcomes—hurdles that one might think would be

reminiscent of the same kind of Chinese bureaucratic apparatuses that facilitate corruption or serve as barriers to accessing health care criticized by seniors today. Yet even as seniors complained about bureaucratic difficulty and insensitivity as they recounted how challenging it could be to pass the U.S. citizenship exam, these concerns did not deter their goals to pass the test. Instead, those goals remained tied to their emotional affinity to their perceptions of the United States as "fair" and "just," along with their aspirations for achieving the benefits of full membership. Indeed, the view that officers administering the citizenship exam should be sympathetic to seniors' struggles and hard work in trying to learn English was compatible with the similar expectations for humane consideration expressed by the woman I quoted at the beginning of the chapter who believed the U.S. government would want her daughter to join her in the United States as soon as possible.

When I asked my interviewees, "Why do you want to become an American citizen?" most seniors told me, in English, "I want to vote." Sometimes they would say, also in English, "I like freedom." For a long time, I was skeptical about these responses, feeling that they were above all else responses of convenience, since "to vote" was the shortest (and therefore easiest to remember in English) among the possible responses to this question. Yet the more I talked with seniors with a variety of life experiences, the more I realized that "wanting to vote" and "liking freedom" reflected the actual feelings that many had in wanting to become U.S. citizens: they desired to be full participants in a social order in which they felt valued. For example, a woman in her seventies who had suffered a stroke in 1991, just after she moved to the United States, explained her feelings of happiness in formally achieving U.S. citizenship:

> I became a citizen in 2000. I was really happy when I became a citizen because I have more rights. I can vote now. So, last time I went and voted for our mayor. I couldn't walk [because of my stroke] so [a social worker] had some cars that drove us there and drove us back from voting. I participate every time there's an election. Because I'm a citizen, I can vote and can be elected. Of course I'm old so I wouldn't be elected. I'm very happy that I get to vote though.

Another senior told me, "I always vote whenever there is an election. Whether it is an election for governor, for senator, for the House of Representatives, or even for the U.S. president, I will always take part in it." My interviewees also explained that poor English-language skills were not an obstacle to being informed about local political concerns. For example, this migrant and his friends successfully

navigated the political landscape to make informed decisions by relying on the extensive reporting about political campaigns in the local Chinese-language media.[41] He said,

> Usually I focus on learning the English name of the candidate I think is suitable in advance, so that I can check off that candidate's name when I cast my vote. The candidates all have their own marketing campaigns, so I can identify each one and learn about their goals. It is based on these marketing campaigns that I make my final decision during an election. Besides that, I also have discussions with my friends about politics. . . . Usually our discussions end up with consensus [on a common candidate] we will vote for.

For my interviewees, who felt a strong sense of ideological alignment with what they perceived to be the more "humane social atmosphere" in the United States as compared to China, there were definite benefits to achieving American citizenship. As a result, seniors studied—often in vain—for years with the hope that they would gain strong enough English language skills to pass the citizenship exam and put down permanent roots to secure a better future in the United States for themselves and their adult children and grandchildren still in China.

THE AMERICAN SKY

When I began talking with seniors about their first impressions of the United States, over and again they told me that in the United States, "the sky is so blue!" For my interviewees, many of whom had desired to emigrate here as children or young adults but were able to achieve this lifelong goal only as retirees in postreform China, the blueness of the American sky recalled for them a similarly blue sky in China—one that they remembered from decades ago, when they could only dream of experiencing life abroad. Thus, seniors' talk about America's "blue sky" served as a powerful metaphor indexing relief at finally having arrived, after long and often difficult lives, in the "beautiful country" (M. *meiguo*; C. *meigok*) that fueled their diasporic imaginations harbored since childhood. At the same time, this reference also made clear some of the concrete advantages of living in the United States for these same seniors, who contrasted that clean air with heavily polluted air in China. The fumes that leave a grayish, brownish pall over much of China's urban and rural areas are of course an unfortunate by-product of China's rapid economic development.

Throughout my conversations with seniors, I heard a range of views about

what they liked best about being in the United States. To be sure, many of those views reflected the concrete advantages they experienced daily, like clean air. One woman said, "Stuff here is cheap, food is cheap. There are big sales. There's gas and it's warm. There's hot and cold water. In China if it's cold, then you're cold. If you have a job then you have money; if not then you don't." Yet it wasn't only the concrete advantages of living in the United States that Chinese senior migrants held dear. They also wanted to have the right to vote and to make their voices heard in the political realm without fear of repercussion. They wanted to trust in the social relationships they established with others and to trust that the government and the elites who control access to key resources would not abuse their power or act in ways that are morally corrupt. Most important, they wanted the state to make them feel valued as human beings—a value they remembered experiencing as younger adults in Maoist China yet they say has eluded them in today's China.

In the following chapter, I build on this discussion of the ideological and emotional affinity that Chinese seniors in the United States experience by focusing attention on the lifestyle aspirations they had for their "retirement." Although these aspirations remained out of reach for many of my interviewees in China, they found that the United States provided a context of reception that allowed them to achieve the culturally familiar "Chinese" retirement lifestyles they desired.