Feeling at Home in Chinatown—Voices and Narratives of Chinese Monolingual Seniors in Montreal

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Abstract This article demonstrates how monolingual Chinese seniors claimed Montreal's Chinatown as home through exercising agency and working out paradoxes concerning their living conditions, familial relations and subjectivities. Chinatown authenticity is primarily created as a tourist spot for ephemeral consumption and circulation, but residents contested it by their rootedness and belonging. Their narratives further challenged the stereotypes of Chinatown residents as sojourners and the stigma of monolingual seniors as monocultural fixtures. These ground a theoretical discussion and policy suggestions by emphasising the importance of subjective integration and by identifying concrete areas of improvement for a better living quality in Montreal's Chinatown.

Keywords Montreal Chinatown · Monolingual Chinese senior immigrants · Home and belonging · Interculturalism · Multiculturalism · Subjective integration

Introduction

Recent research on Chinatowns is more concerned with explaining questions surrounding how Chinatowns for tourism are constructed out of globalising cities, racial relations and a dominant white ideology rather than as a home for a small pocket of marginalised immigrants. This imbalance comes from urban policy seeking to maximise the economic potential, under the political banner of multicultural celebration. In addition, the rise of "new" Chinatowns garners more attention in recent research along with the changing demography of Chinese immigrants in multiethnic suburbs. As a result, we learn less about traditional Chinatown residents. The first goal of this article is therefore to address this imbalance by filling in the missing voices of recent Chinatown residents. Insight gained from their narratives further helps to break down current myths about monolingual senior immigrants and to ground Chinatown authenticity in their rootedness and

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belonging. Finally, this paper calls for the openness of integration policy by considering the importance of subjective integration.

Through a literature review in conjunction with theories of supermodernity and urban authenticity, this article starts with the critique of Chinatowns for tourism. The problems not only lie in racial ideology and neo-liberal drives to (re)make Chinatowns but also rest in an "imagineered" Chinatown authenticity that overshadows the experiences of those who claim their belonging to the place. This subjective claim can easily be missed if we only rely on objective integration measuring immigrants' socioeconomic performance. The discussion then focuses on Montreal's Chinatown by considering what has been empirically persistent and transformed in this contested terrain of authenticity since earlier research. The article turns to female Chinese monolingual seniors' narratives, structured by the inquiry into their subjective integration with the claim that Montreal's Chinatown is home. Claiming home requires these residents to negotiate paradoxes between dependence and autonomy, bridge gaps between Chinese familial ideals and modern familial structure and transform subjectivities through different orientations. The narratives help us recognise that being monolingual cannot be reduced to being monocultural and that subjective integration should be equally considered in policy making. The research results further ground policy suggestions specific to possible improvements in living conditions and aging quality in Montreal's Chinatown.

Rethinking Chinatown Authenticity

Recent research on Chinatowns in inner cities has focused on the transformation from ethnic ghetto to tourist attraction. We see a similar process in larger American and European cities where Chinatowns are made to facilitate an economic strategy for post-industrial, service-oriented urban developments. This strategy also creates an image of political multicultural diversity and urban cosmopolitanism constituted by pockets of "authentic" differences and by cool, vibrant urban imagery (Lin 1998, 2010; Rath 2007).

Transforming Chinatowns into tourist destinations depends on reifying cultural expressions by both local government and community leaders. Kay Anderson's work on Vancouver's Chinatown (1991) epitomises this critique through examining racial relations and discourses in and around Chinatown culture, signs, symbols and spectacles. Anderson argues that Chinatowns are Western geographical constructs of racial power where white cultural domination persists and where exotic Chinese otherness is distinguished from the European settler 'us'. Even Chinatown leaders collaborate with policy makers and self-reify Orientalism for economic interests (Umbach and Wishnoff 2008). As a result, what underlines Chinatown authenticity remains racially and culturally problematic. It is rather striking to see similarities among Chinatowns across cities from San Francisco, Bangkok, Havana to Shanghai. In this case, how can Chinatowns be bearers of cultural authenticity? Through the synthesis of Marc Augé's supermodernity and Susan Zukin's urban authenticity, I argue that Chinatowns are built to satisfy universal exoticism.

In order to characterise what he terms supermodernity, Marc Augé develops the concept of non-places as "an unprecedented development of transient and ephemeral spaces of circulation, consumption and communication" (Augé 2008, p. IIV). Such

spaces are empirical 'non-places' where history, differences and particularity are made into spectacles. Non-places are about making imaginary places, banal utopia or fantasy landscape by aesthetising images, by producing myth and then by creating traffic and consumption. The irony of non-places is that their individual existence is less significant than the network to which they belong. Therefore, "a foreigner lost in a country he does not know (a 'passing stranger') can feel at home there only in the anonymity of motorways, service stations, big stores or hotel chains" (Augé 2008, p. 86).

However, authenticity here becomes questionable. Zukin criticises that "when all cities pursue the same modern, creative image is not authenticity; it is an overbearing sameness, not too different—in a global view—from the 'great blight of dullness' …" (Zukin 2010, p. 231). Augé's 'expected exoticism' thus echoes Zukin's 'overbearing sameness' in the making of authenticity in tourist destination culture. Zukin continues to argue that authenticity is an aesthetic category in order to attract cultural consumers. To claim that a neighbourhood is authentic suggests that those who make the claim from the positions of economy and power know how best to represent the 'genuine' characters of the place. Overhauling the image of Chinatowns involves a reinvention of authenticity.

First, Chinatowns are constructed through the exaggeration of cultural experiences or goods. For instance, shopping in numerous souvenir stores filled with Chinese merchandise of pandas, dragons or yin–yang motifs can be foreign to both Chinatown visitors and residents. Second, Chinatown authenticity is invented via the imagination of originality. *General Tao* chicken or peanut butter shrimp are more popular in North America than elsewhere; fortune cookies are a Chinese American invention that has become a fixture in Chinese restaurants. Third, Chinatown authenticity is made possible by the reification of historical goods or architecture. Copies of arches, pagodas, lanterns and recessed balconies are indispensable. However, these architectural elements are commonly nestled in historical tourist sites in China rather than the living environment of habitual practices and socialisation.

To redress this problem, we need to realise that what makes Chinatowns unique is not only the oriental spatial existence in the occidental urban environment but also the people who live and work there. From a historical perspective (Lai 1988; Li 1998; Lee 2001; Rouse 2009), Chinatowns have been paradoxical because both the non-place of exotic universalism and the lived space of everyday experiences have been mutually articulated: Chinatown tourist economies are fueled and driven by labour forces from within; Chinatown residents have relied on ethnic trades, functions and institutions to make do and to grow roots. We also learn from historical work about how Chinatown authenticity and uniqueness are derived from earlier immigrants living through and negotiating the paradoxes of diaspora and rootedness, exclusion and inclusion and racial/ethnic abjection and self-empowerment.

Struggles and conflicts in these paradoxes are far from obsolete: Documentation and discussion continue, especially about Manhattan garment workers' structural conditions and exercises of agency in racial, gender and labour relations (Zhou 2004; Chin 2005). From community organizations, we also learn about residential struggles, grievance and resistance against various means of gentrification, such as eviction harassment, housing deterioration, skyrocketing rent hikes, severed community services, overcrowded living conditions and even police harassment in New York

and Boston (The Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence 2012; The Chinese Progressive Association 2012).

Although we have a glimpse of work life, mainly from the recent documentation of Chinatown workers in New York, other narratives and voices about residential Chinatowns are scarce. As Scott Wong points out,

> …[T]he crucial element missing from the narrative that constructs the representations of Chinatown is the notion that Chinatown is home to a large and diverse population. Any Chinatown is so much more than its social structure and institutions, economic arrangements, sights and smells, and other facets of the community that so many people find compelling to write about. But the reality of Chinatown as home, where people are born, live, raise families, work or return to after work, and eventually die in, is something that rarely appears in most accounts of the community. Until Chinatown is viewed as a living vibrant part of the city at large, it will continue to be represented primarily through the imagery created by others for purposes unrelated to the lives of those who live there (Wong 1995, p. 10).

At the same time, the spotlight is shifted to the suburbanisation of Chinese immigrants since the majority of them move out of inner cities, are upwardly mobile, possess better formal education, command stronger linguistic skills, work beyond ethnic trades and develop transnational flexibility. Questions about Chinese immigrants' living conditions are simultaneously shifted to inquiries into new, satellite Chinatowns, ethnoburbs or suburban ethnic clusters of residential and business areas in large metropolitan areas such as Richmond in the Greater Vancouver area, Markham in the Greater Toronto area and Monterey Park in Los Angeles County (Li and Li 2011; Li 2009; Ong 1999).

Those who live in 'new' Chinatowns can be easily stereotyped into the so-called model immigrants if we follow the objective sense of integration. This is derived from measuring and comparing performance, such as socioeconomic mobility, language proficiency, residential segregation and degrees of intermarriage, between immigrants and descendants of earlier European settlers. However, more recent studies have shown that quantified indicators as such are insufficient to tell us the degree of successful integration. For instance, Rahsaan Maxwell claims that "first-generation migrants, who have gone through the disruptive process of changing countries, will have lower expectations and be more likely to have positive evaluations of the host society" (Maxwell 2010, p. 26). In other words, first-generation immigrants might not measure up to the objective standard of integration factors, but their subjective sense of belonging and political identification with the host countries can be stronger than that of their descendants.

Wu and his colleagues also emphasise the importance of self-perceived integration. This subjective factor is critical especially because "it embodies whether or not an immigrant feels welcome, secure and 'at home'…" (Wu et al. 2012, p. 383). Furthermore, based on their empirical research about integration and spatial ethnic concentration in Toronto, Robert Murdie and Sutama Ghosh (2010) equally offset functional integration standards widely applied by official policy and mainstream discourses. They also argue for the importance of subjective integration and a general sense of life satisfaction expressed by immigrants.

The model-immigrant stereotype and the focus on objective integration can thus be a source of isolation, alienation and stigmatisation for those who fail to meet objective, socioeconomic outcomes or for those who reside in traditional Chinatowns. I will further the discussion through the interviewees' voices and narratives after a brief introduction to Montreal's Chinatown.

Montreal's Chinatown

Much historical work on Montreal's Chinatown has been done by Denise Helly in *Les Chinois à Montréal 1877–1951*. Despite isolation and discrimination, Chinese immigrants in the earlier days grew rapidly, and ethnic trades, including laundry and restaurants, thrived within decades. By 1931, 71 out of 524 restaurants in Montreal were Chinese. This is significant because there were only 1,705 ethnic Chinese in Montreal (Helly 1987, p. 99). Even after the *Chinese Immigration Act* was lifted in 1947, along with the 1953 *Canadian Fair Employment Practices Act* and the 1954 *Fair Wages and Hours of Labour Regulations*, Chinatown economy continued to be the main source of employment for Chinese immigrants. New immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan and refugees from South East Asia continued to invest in small businesses such as travel agencies, real estate companies and Chinese butcher's shops. This not only allowed the expansion of ethnic functions catering to Chinese immigrants but also formed the parallel economy in Chinatown. (Nicholls 2007, p. 349)

Chan Kwok Bun's work (1991) showed us how racial discrimination at institutional, structural and everyday levels continued to be a central problem in Chinatown. He analysed commercial and residential sections through the oral history of leaders and residents and gave vivid accounts of everyday life in the ethnic neighbourhood. In addition, while Chinatown occupied a strategic location in Montreal's tourist development, it went through territorial encouragement by Canadian and Quebec governments. Commercial and residential blocks were torn down in the 1980s in order to build government offices, public facilities and a convention centre. Gentrification was also evident when a large-scale luxury condominium–office complex replaced low-lying buildings. At the same time, these grandiose, contemporary buildings set the south, north and west boundaries of Chinatown along with the bylaw prohibiting commercial development on the east side of Boulevard St. Laurent.

What happened to this ethnic district after Chan's publication? Similar to Chinatowns elsewhere, gentrification went hand in hand with cleaning and aestheticising images for tourism in the late 1990s. New Chinese arches were erected less than 15 years after two smaller ones were built. The green space, at the busy intersection of La Gauchetière and Clark, was replaced by a cement floor and performance stage. Reimagineering Montreal's Chinatown served the political purpose of recognising intercultural diversity in Montreal. In addition, its tourist development was also calculated as an economic spin-off from urban twinning between Montreal and Shanghai. Chinatown construction thus was tied into the twinning programs to ensure the importation of Chinese cultural authenticity (Hsu 2008).

Considering residential life, Chan identified that the majority of dwellers were senior female Chinese widows who spoke neither French nor English. The living

conditions were poor: outdated electricity and plumbing, poor ventilation and heating systems, fire hazard, cramped rooms, a common kitchen and one or two bathrooms on one floor. Many of them used to live with their children and/or grandchildren. However, the generation gap and lifestyle difference drove them to seek independence from family. Isolation in suburbs was another factor pushing them to seek lodging and convenience in Chinatown. They gained financial independence from collecting old age or retirement pensions sufficient for their frugal life styles.

Chan argued that these women had their fantasy of family cohabitation shattered. Although they expressed satisfaction with their living conditions, staying alone in Chinatown indicated family failure somewhere. Chan concluded with a sense of pity because Chinatown residents suffered from triple jeopardy of being female, old and Chinese. "…[T]hese elderly women strive to live on, in a community of widows, *forgotten and often negelected*. History never seems to stop playing tricks on them" (Chan 1991, p. 247. My emphasis).

What are Chinatown's living conditions like three decades after? Do Chinatown residents share a sense of misery in Chan's work? There has been a demographic transformation of Chinatown residents who are not only Cantonese from the previous waves of immigration but also Mandarin-speaking retirees for family reunion. How do they perceive their lives alone in Chinatown? Finally, although these residents are monolingual, does it imply that they are also monocultural, dictated by Chinese cultural norms, clinging to the Chinese cultural ideal regarding intergenerational cohabitation and feeling bad about living alone? These questions are rather unanswered in Chan's work and deserve further examination.

Claiming Home in Chinatown

The following discussion is based on 25 qualitative interviews with Chinese female seniors residing in Montreal's Chinatown. The interviews were conducted by trained interviewees recruited by the *Chinese Family Services of Greater Montreal* in 2008. I participated in design, training and execution of interviews in accordance with Concordia University's ethic research codes. Interviews were conducted in either Cantonese or Mandarin, and the average length was 1 h. The shortest was 45 min, and the longest lasted 3 h. The transcription and translation from English to Chinese are mine.

Narratives here by no means give a full representation of the research subject. However, the respondents' voices were unique and significant enough to challenge stereotypes. All but one interviewee lived alone, and all but two lived in subsidised social housing managed by Chinese ethnic organisations. The majority of the interviewees moved to Chinatown after their spouses died. Most of the respondents spoke more than one Chinese and/or South East Asian language. This not only reflects the interviewees' diverse origins ranging from Shandong, Shanghai, Canton, Hunan, Cambodia to Vietnam but also suggests their monolingual status as defined by little or no capacity in French or English, the two Canadian official languages.

During the interview period between late 2008 and early 2009, their average age was 79 years. The eldest was born in 1926 and the youngest in 1945. Only female residents were considered because they are the majority of Chinese seniors living alone in Canada. In addition, a comparison with Chan's work in the 1980s can be

made. Interviewees in this study immigrated to Montreal for marriage or family reunion. The earliest came in 1960 at the age of 22 years and the latest in 1994 at the age of 61 years. Their average age was 50 years when they moved to Canada, and the average time spent here was 25.58 years.

When asked about where home is, all the interviewees without hesitation replied that home is here. This seems paradoxical and counterintuitive since most of them did immigrate with the hope of aging through intergenerational cohabitation. Without English or French, they were far from meeting the objective standard of integration. From the interviews, we learn that structural factors that made Chinatown home in Chan's research remain valid. However, contrary to Chan's expression of sympathy for his subjects, interviewees in this research did not pity themselves. They instead showed a strong sense of subjective integration and challenged myths about them as dependent, temporary residents. Therefore, narratives here are organised according to how their decisions played out in both structural constraints and opportunities.

The interviewees immigrated to join their family hoping for intergenerational cohabitation where children care for, provide, respect and reciprocate elder members of their families. This Chinese cultural ideal however gives rise to the myth that older newcomers are dependents, although it is hardly the case. They came as caretakers at home and/or as manual workers in ethnic trades, even though some already enjoyed retirement prior to immigration. Mrs. Lin's story gives us some insight into the discrepancy. She came from northern China in 1992 at the age of 54 years, and she recalled the reason for immigration:

> I came to take care of the grandchildren …I did housekeeping for my daughter's family for more than 10 years …I don't speak the language here, but it's ok. I stayed home anyway, so they could focus on their work. I didn't contribute much to the country [Canada], so I contributed myself to my daughter's family (Interview, 14 Jan 2009).

Mrs. Lin typified late-life immigrants and parents of naturalised Canadian citizens. As a caregiver at home, she encouraged her next generation to integrate and thrive in the host society. Mrs. Lin's invisibility was similar to Judith Treas's research subjects who remained mainly in the private sphere: "[e]lderly newcomers who follow their adult children to the United States are valuable members of many immigrant households. Little known outside their families and ethnic communities, they never win spelling bees. They do not join criminal gangs. Nobody worries about Americans losing jobs to Korean grandmothers" (Treas 2009, p. 40).

When the children had not established themselves, these older immigrants also played the role of bread earners. No matter what they did for work before immigration, they ended up in low-skill and labour-intensive ethnic trades of the garment industry, restaurant services and Chinese food production. As a result, many interviewees' immigration experience was linked to downward social mobility. For instance, Mrs. Liu moved to Montreal in 1992 at the age of 62 years. Prior to immigration, she had been retired for almost a decade from a bureaucrat position. In support of her two adult sons' study, she picked up piecework in the garment industry:

> We clean and cut thread residue from clothing at night. My husband wasn't even somebody who knew how to hold a pair of scissors. At night, we prepared

meals for our sons, and then we worked and accompanied their study. It was 8 cents per piece [of garment]. What else can we do when we don't speak English or French? We made about 10 dollars per night, and we could buy some food … We had to start all over…My siblings in China thought we had a great life here. We could only swallow all the bitterness in life. I directly told them that life was extremely hard here (Interview, 6 Jan 2009).

The lack of linguistic skills rendered professional training useless, and the simplest manual task could be challenging. More precisely, hardship came from the process of starting from scratch in their 60s. The inability to hold a pair of scissors was the metaphorical conduit through which Mrs. Liu placed two life courses in stark contrast: the expectation for a quality immigration life supported by the children versus the reality of a harsh life of supporting the children; a professional job of higher social class versus manual labour of less social value and income; a good retirement life in China versus hard work for survival in Canada.

If the position in care giving was the first thing to reverse, bridging the gap between the ideal and reality of intergenerational cohabitation in multiethnic suburbs was next. When older monolingual immigrants came to reunite with their families, they stayed in different neighbourhoods, and many of them lived in multiethnic suburbs like Brossard and Ville St. Laurent. Getting into and around the city posed a challenge and exacerbated the sense of isolation. For instance, Mrs. Tu moved to Montreal in 1981 at the age of 55 years. She expressed that she was frightened at the beginning because she "did not speak the language and could not read road signs." Even though Mrs. Tu stayed with her daughter's family, she repeated that "I wanted to leave [Montreal]. I didn't dare go out alone. I didn't know the roads. I knew nothing at all. It was very difficult at the beginning" (Interview, 2 Oct 2008).

Taking public transportation caused anxiety not only because of risking bus/metro routes or stops but also because of racial discrimination. Mrs. Yip was a business owner in Hong Kong but spoke little English or French. After immigration in 1968, she and her family ran a Chinese restaurant. She recounted that "I used to take the bus to work. However, my long hair smelt after a day in the kitchen. People on the bus wouldn't let me sit nearby. They told me off or even asked me to get off the bus." Decades after, Mrs. Yip refused to live with her daughter in an American suburb. "My daughter wants me to go to the U.S., but I don't want to. The house there is huge and is surrounded by gardens, but it's very inconvenient for me." (Interview, 13 Dec 2008).

Living in multiethnic neighbourhoods might indicate success in objective integration for Chinese immigrants but monolingual seniors found these areas difficult. Mrs. Tu retreated to the private sphere of the household because she felt scared and ignorant even facing road signs, the most mundane elements of public space. Mrs. Yip preferred to drive because the bus was a public space where bodily odor and practices from the Chinese kitchen were the target of face-to-face racism. Physical and cultural boundaries invariably became racial edges for discrimination exacerbated by oral non-communication. To quote Mrs. Hui, who immigrated in 1990 at the age of 60 years, to navigate a new place without the local language(s) felt like "being deaf and being mute" (Interview, 16 Nov 2008).

The third discrepancy about the familial ideal and immigration reality the interviewees needed to work out was the generation gap. Mrs. Liu explained how she

went to Chinatown everyday in order to break the isolation once her role as caregiver was less in demand by the children and then by her sick husband who eventually passed away:

> I had a monthly metro pass before, but the commute was still one hour one way from Ville St. Laurent to Chinatown. When it snowed, my daughter asked me not to go. She couldn't stop me once she left home for work [laugh] …The application to *Yi Kang* [the semi private housing] needed a signature from the family. I begged her to endorse my application (Interview, 6 Jan 2009).

Mrs. Liu then emphasised the generation gap in her choice of living alone:

> I am doing well here. I cook whatever I want. If I don't cook, I get food from downstairs…I am very satisfied with my life here. I am happy after living alone. Why? Young people cannot live with the elderly. For example, every Saturday they get up at 11AM. I get up at 5 or 6AM! I already had two meals by the time they are awake. Should I prepare their meals? I don't need to cook for them here (Interview, 6 Jan 2009).

In modern Western society, the nuclear family is preferred to multigenerational households. Once Mrs. Liu ceded her caretaking role, the next generation's demands and interests were no longer her one and only concern. This does not mean that she was on bad terms with her (grand) children, but Mrs. Liu pinpointed the importance of autonomy for seniors in everyday life.

Mrs. Chen's story reinforced the idea that monolingual seniors had no fantasy about intergenerational cohabitation. She immigrated in 1987 to rejoin her parents who had been separated from the civil war since 1949. To ensure enough savings for her children's immigration in 1992, Mrs. Chen worked double shifts. Two years after her children's immigration, she was paralysed from the waist down in a car accident. By the time of interview, her children had already left for career development. Mrs. Chen stayed in an apartment accessible by wheelchairs, a nurse came every morning for routine check-up; a live-in aid helped her with daily activities, and volunteers were requested from time to time to accompany her for medical appointments.

When asked about living alone, she stated that "my daughter wants me to stay with her, but I prefer to stay here …I feel more grounded in Montreal. There is a security net here, and I can do lots of things alone …I don't want to bother them. Young people have their own lives. They don't want to abandon me, and I don't want to be their burden" (Interview, 15 Oct 2008). Mrs. Chen supported the individual pursuit of wellbeing for each generation: career opportunities for her children and an easy access to Medicare and everyday requirements. Most importantly, she chose to stay alone without an emotional sense of sourness, abandonment or self-pity.

Monolingual seniors found Chinatown attractive not only for convenience and autonomy but also for sociability and daily normalcy. This further required them to negotiate the space of everyday life in Chinatown. The grandiose Chinese arches might be important for tourist development or urban diplomacy with Shanghai, but they played a trivial role in Chinatown residents' life. In contrast, social and exercise space in Chinatown was important for them to cultivate a sense of belonging, social relations and individual wellbeing.

Despite the accelerated development for tourism, Montreal's Chinatown continues to provide a vibrant social life for seniors. A long waiting list of 4 years on average did not prevent monolingual seniors from applying for a subsidized one or two-bedroom apartment in one of the five Chinese-run housing complexes. Construction began during the 1980s to accommodate the rising amount of monolingual single senior dwellers. About 400 units reduced the number of seniors living in deplorable rooming conditions. Nonetheless, these seniors did not confine themselves to their apartments. It is common to see Chinese seniors using hallways or food courts in nearby public buildings and shopping malls for socialisation. They gather together to chat, to play Chinese chess or simply to sit alone reading community newspapers. It is equally common for them to spend a whole day in the YMCA in the Guy Favreau building. While some fitness classes are specifically designed and instructed in Chinese, Ping Pong and badminton courts are popular among older immigrants.

In addition to public or semi-public areas, the respondents in this research also took advantage of common areas in subsidised housing complexes and Chinese organisations. They socialised, took language or exercise classes and participated in leisure activities such as Mahjong, Tai chi, choirs and Chinese opera, among others. Mrs. Yip recounted her everyday life:

> I can walk to every corner in Chinatown. Friends or relatives take me out of town for BBQ or to the countryside on the weekends…I go to the YMCA every day. Tuesday and Thursday I study [French] at the elderly club. I also stay there for extra two hours or so just to chat…I volunteer in the Chinese hospital, as I can chat with those who have nobody to talk to in Teochewnese (Interview, 13 Dec 2008).

Chinatown was mapped out by Mrs. Yip according to sociability and peer support. Her narrative also singled out how comfort and a general sense of satisfaction were negotiated out of the paradox of autonomy and dependence. Even though she did not confine everyday life to the ethnic quarter, her autonomy from family and children nonetheless depended on ethnic functions in the small ethnic community, ranging from the convenience of grocery shopping, the ease of mobility, the availability of peer support, to meaningful habitual practices.

This paradox of dependence and autonomy was also evident in the reliance on institutional supports from the social welfare system. Healthcare, retirement funds, pension plans and subsidised social housing all provided a sense of security and independence. For instance, Mrs. Choi, who immigrated in 1977 at the age of 43 years, stated that "my life now is the most satisfying. Government gives me money. I have food to eat, and I don't need to borrow money. I have 1,200 dollars to myself" (Interview, 7 Nov 2008). In addition, many interviewees showed their appreciation for Canada. Mrs. Tran who came as a refugee in 1975 from Cambodia expressed strong patriotism by telling the story that "I often ask my son to write a letter of gratitude to the government …Education is free, Medicare is also free, and [we have] great social welfare. Whatever government says, we follow …" (Interview, 17 Dec 2008).

Not only did they show gratitude, but also a strong identification with Canada. Mrs. Chen explained this political sense of affinity:

I am physically disabled. I deeply feel that Canada is a real socialist country. For people like me, I cannot imagine how I can survive in other countries. It could be difficult to be alone, but I feel quite at ease here, not only because I can count on people [I know here], but also because Canada guarantees my life …Thus I can overcome problems in everyday life. I am content and I thank Canada (Interview, 15 Oct 2008).

When further asked where home is, Mrs. Chen without hesitation claimed that "China is where I grew up, my first country. Canada is my second homeland …I already visited China three times in a wheelchair, but it was inconvenient to live there because people had to move me in and out. In addition, there is no Medicare for me. I feel like a guest in China, but feel at home here" (Interview, 15 Oct 2008). As long as physical health permits, monolingual Chinese seniors strive for autonomy of varying degrees anchored by the social security net and infrastructure their previous 'homeland(s)' could not provide.

This sense of rootedness and home was not simply a pragmatic calculation of institutional and community resources. The interviewees also showed a genuine sense of commitment and appreciation of the greater living environment. Mrs. Hui explained that this commitment was made even when her children returned to China. When asked about where home is, Mrs. Hui, a Shanghai native, laughed and answered, "Why Shanghai? I long feel my home is here, no matter how difficult it is. I made this choice. We have no ancestral tomb here, so we simply bought a double plot in Côte-des-Neiges cemetery" (Interview, 16 Nov 2008). Lacking a burial place is typical to the diaspora, but choosing to be buried in the place of migration place symbolically expresses a sense of rootedness and continuity. Mrs. Hui also expressed her appreciation of people outside of the ethnic quarter with an anecdote: "Once I was lost, couldn't find the metro station, nor my way home. Strangers were really nice by showing the way around. People here are polite and friendly. If you have problems, you can always find help somewhere" (Interview, 16 Nov 2008).

Overall, what underlined the above narratives is the transformation of subjectivity. At the beginning of immigration, these older immigrants shaped subjectivity according to their children's demands and wellbeing, and they oriented the good life towards the future. Home for them was inseparable from family and (grand) children. Integration was not about whether they spoke the official language(s) or lived like the natives but more about whether their contribution in the private sphere supported their next generations' social and economic success. By the time they ceded their caregiver roles, they stressed the importance of individual autonomy, rejected the culturally monolithic ideal about aging and living conditions and reoriented themselves towards their own wellbeing in the *here and now*. Home in this sense gave personal comfort, ease and independence. Integration was subjective about how they felt rooted and supported with a general sense of satisfaction in the place where they chose to live, age and die.

Discussion

It is common to argue that Chinatowns are home because they shelter and anchor the marginalised from structural disadvantages in the mainstream society. As a result,

residential Chinatowns continue to exist as a response to racism and exclusion. The above personal accounts nonetheless shed light on Chinatowns from the angle of agency and everyday practices. It might seem banal to map them out through daily details such as grocery, physical exercises and chatting. The embedded sense of steadiness and habitual continuity deepens our understanding of Chinatown authenticity as "where individual itineraries can intersect and mingle, where a few words are exchanged and solitude momentarily forgotten …" (Augé 2008, p. 54).

Home is not only spatial but also rhetorical. It is where one can make oneself understood and follow others' reasoning without long explanations or extra efforts. There is less interruption or disturbance in communication within the place one calls home. The sense of belonging is emotional, and integration is subjective because home is where one feels safely anchored and from which one comfortably navigates. By contrast, multiethnic neighbourhoods, characterised by material affluences, spatial comfort and higher social class, lack understandable languages. Ethnoburbs are hardly a rhetoric home.

The pursuit for individual wellbeing and autonomy pushed these immigrants to leave ethnoburbs, and it contained an undertone of individualism unlikely derived from traditional Chinese cultural values and practices. From the interviewees' explanations, we gain a new vantage point in countering the static ideas of cultural subjects and integration. Culture in multicultural policy is closely intertwined with language. As a result, political membership and ethnic minorities' cultural integration are strongly determined by one's capacity to speak official language(s). Monolingual senior immigrants are more likely to be someone who adheres to certain fixed and intractable unity of cultural values. In the same light, they are the preservationists of cultural norms and values of difference. It is then easy to jump to the conclusion that being monolingual is monocultural. Or that monolingual immigrants who authentically represent an exotic culture are therefore trapped in some backward or inferior traditional, non-Western practice unfit for modern life.

For Anne Philips, the above assumption is "the tendency to represent individuals from minority or non-Western groups as driven by their culture and compelled by cultural dictates to behave in particular ways" (Phillips 2008, p. 8–9). The above interviewees' voices not only demonstrate that they are far from faceless victims but also send a clear message that they continue to transform themselves according to both advantageous and limiting factors in their immigration history. Monolingual seniors in this research are not stuck with the traditional Chinese ideal of cohabitation. They do not pity themselves as the abandoned, nor do they consider their children non-filial. Rather, monolingual senior immigrants adapt to modern social life, live beyond traditional cultural norms and (re)define their subjectivities. Only when we hear these voices and recognise their cultural hybridity can we steer clear of exaggerating their differences. It is particularly crucial to recognise that "…if people do adapt their preferences to what they conceive as possible, then those with the least opportunities and facing the most constraints may sometimes be the ones to describe themselves as the most satisfied…[T]here is something both philosophically and politically odd in refusing to accept their self-description" (Phillips 2010, p.12).

Narratives in this study further challenge the inert understanding of mother tongue, national identity and the right to claiming home and political membership. We might find it odd when Mrs. Chen claimed that "I feel like a guest in China, but feel at home here." We might also be amused by Mrs. Tran's enthusiasm for Canada when she

asked her son to write a letter of gratitude to the government. Interviewees here demonstrated a strong sense of belonging to Canada than Quebec. This research result is closer to some qualitative analyses about how Quebec immigrants identify themselves as Canadians more than Quebecois(e)s (Helly 2002; Sallé and Labelle 2001). The interviewees' identification with Canada also corresponds to the following statistical analysis: "Being female increases the likelihood of saying that you belong completely to Canada by 3.6 per cent. Age has a stronger effect: In comparison with those aged under thirty-five, the likelihood of indicating a strong sense of belonging is …almost twenty-seven per cent greater for those aged fifty-five or older" (Banting and Soroka 2012, p. 167).

By claiming their Canadian identity, these monolingual immigrants dissociated mother tongue from motherland, and they subverted the idea that those who do not speak official languages cannot possibly have the new country as their motherlands. Their overt patriotism challenged the conventional ideas of origins and authenticity, and it echoed Zukin's argument that "[o]rigins suggest instead a moral right to the city that enables people to put down roots" (Zukin 2010, p.8). They equally refuted the idea that those who fail to speak official languages are temporary sojourners who leave their hearts behind. Dual affinity with China and Canada not only showed fluidity and boundary crossing in re-making political identity but also challenged the traditional conception of national citizenship based on the imagination about and expectation for exclusionary loyalty.

What Aihwa Ong calls 'flexible citizenship' thus is not the exclusive disposition and practice of recent affluent immigrants in ethnoburbs who span their networks of power and relationships transnationally. This is not to suggest that these two contrasting types of immigrants possess the same cultural, linguistic, political and economic capitals in and through different localities. They are comparable because monolingual senior immigrants also negotiate the sense of home and belonging in the given structure of norms and authenticity. The process of so-called 'naturalization' or claiming the right to national membership is neither 'natural' nor rosy because it requires working out the presence and absence of resources, capacities, relations and cultural norms. Being at home and being a sojourner are given new meaning in tension, compromise, subversion and incompleteness of (re)defining the sense of belonging and political subjectivities. Now the question is: What can be done to make it a better place through integration policy?

Charles Taylor (2012) argues that integration policy in Quebec and Canada share more similarities than rhetorical differences. Canadian multiculturalism, at an abstract level, disassociates identity from ethno-historical origins and emphasises the co-existence of all identities. With the hopes and fears for French language and culture, Quebec interculturalism, in contrast, explicitly "starts from the reigning historical identity but sees it evolving in a process in which all citizens, of whatever identity, have a voice, and no-one's input has a privileged status" (Taylor 2012, p. 418). What both have in common is not only the theoretical aspiration for democracy as the parameter of nation building beyond ethnic division but also the preference and prevalence of French or English as the standard of cultural and linguistic integration through which immigrants are welcome to be a part of nation-building. In other words, although the importance of English and its white European heritage are comparatively latent in Canadian multiculturalism, the Anglo identity, like the French

one in Quebec, still plays a dominant role in English Canada. At the same time, it plays out forcefully onto the meanings of integration.

Peter Li strongly criticises that this type of immigration policy is problematic because it endorses the conformity model through which immigrants are expected to fit in a monolithic cultural framework. On the surface, it encourages a mutual process of adoption through which mainstream society and public institutions support and answer immigrants' specific needs. Integration success is closely intertwined with "the degree to which immigrants converge to the average performance of native-born Canadians and their normative and behavioural standards" (Li 2003, p. 316). If we judge by the above objective standard, the interviewees typify the failure of integration, especially due to their long immigration history. However, it is precisely this set of standard that renders the subjective sense of home and belonging counterintuitive or trivial. If immigrants are equal partners in nation-building, and if integration policy is genuinely based on mutuality between immigrants and earlier settlers, "[a] more enlightened view of integration would take into account how Canadian [and Quebec] society and [their] institutions perform toward newcomers" (Li 2003, p. 330). We have seen how immigrants are open and willing to adapt to a new place. The successful evaluation of integration now lies in the openness of public institutions.

A Remark on Policy

Specific to this research, the openness of integration policy is crucial because immigrants of the Chinese origin and their sponsored elders will continue to be the leading source of immigration (Conrick and Donovan 2010). The openness first lies in the recognition that older immigrants share similar aging problems with seniors from other cultural-ethnic groups. Second, given the fact that monolingual seniors did not and will not master the official language(s), the openness here depends on the recognition and acceptance of their limit. What is at stake here is the demand for more linguistic assistance. Even though most of them made an effort, their linguistic inability persisted due to age, lack of practice and isolation. After moving to Chinatown, some interviewees followed French or English classes. Their goal was to perform rudimentary tasks such as signing their own names, filling in application forms, identifying street signs and carrying out a simple conversation.

Even though they were eager to speak the official language and to be autonomous, all the interviewees relied on family and/or community volunteer services for interpretation at social and health care services. However, interpretation, provided by either family or volunteers, is problematic because none is professionally trained. Nor can we imagine the psychological burden for the family while interpreting and mediating stressful matters including aging, sickness and death. The problem with community volunteers is not only the lack of a standard but also the user's fee for each service. For those who are unable to pay, their request for interpretation may be ignored.

This is not to say that professional interpretation services in the Quebec Medicare system are missing. According to *Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal* (2012), the *Inter-Regional Interpreters Bank* (the *IIB*) is established by following the *Act Respecting Health and Social Services* (R.S.Q., c S.4-2). Paid cultural interpreters respond to the need to prioritize the "distinctive geographical,

linguistic, sociocultural, ethnocultural and socioeconomic characteristics of the region" (Sect. 2.5). By taking account of both the user's demands and institutional resources, professional interpretation services are also provided as "adapted means of communication for persons with functional limitation …in their own languages for members of the various cultural communities of Quebec" (Sect. 2.6, Sect. 2.7).

Although Chinese immigrants have been the second largest group in using the *IIB* services and have averaged 4,500 to 5,000 requests per year since 2008, none of the interviewees was aware of these services. Therefore, it is recommended that a strong sensitisation program be implemented in Chinatown and in the social and health care facilities frequented by Chinese seniors. The absence of the *IIB* services might also be resulted from the demand for pre-approval from the local *Centre de Santé et de Services Sociaux* (CSSS) health and social service centre. The application for interpretation services thus requires interpretation first at CSSS. To minimise bureaucratic and financial waste and to maximise communication effectiveness, it would be best for CSSS, the *IIB* and community workers to work out a program that integrates available community resources and public professional interpretation.

It is equally crucial for policy makers to understand that Chinatown tourism should not be developed at the expense of residential functions. For instance, there is a demand for more outdoor social space when social life mostly takes place indoors in Chinatown. Despite the creation of a small park between Guy Favreau and Palais des Congrès, Montreal's Chinatown also lost the green area at the corner of de la Gauchatière and Clark to a concrete performance space where the homeless people hang out and where Falung followers practice and protest on a daily basis. In addition, Brady alley, nestled between St. Urbain, la Gauchetière, René Lévesque and Clark, was once a lively area but has turned into a dark corner. It thus becomes a task in urban policy to ensure that the revitalisation does not prioritise tourist development by sacrificing residential quality.

Seniors' life in Montreal's Chinatown can also be improved by providing healthier food options. Although restaurants are everywhere in Chinatown, seniors with diminishing physical strength cannot eat greasy spoon Chinese food on a daily basis. Although there is not-for-profit meals delivery in Montreal, Chinatown remains out of reach. In addition to a stronger sensitisation program and the recruitment of bilingual volunteers for food preparation and delivery, another possibility is to create a communal kitchen in Chinatown. Finally, more social housing is needed. According to the petition by the *Montreal Chinese Community United Centre* that runs two housing complexes in Chinatown, the demand for Chinese-specific residences is more than 1,000 per year. The average waiting list is increasingly longer than 4 years. In the foreseeable future, this situation would be worsened due to the growing Chinese immigrant population and the increasing norm for Chinese seniors living alone. Consequently, further research is needed to find out if more Chinese seniors stay in rooms above restaurants and stores and if rooming conditions are as deplorable as in the 1980s described by Chan.

Conclusion

This article started with questioning Chinatown authenticity for ephemeral consumption and circulation. Cultural differences are grafted onto artifacts, buildings and experiences

for economic and political gain. Chinatowns require a cultural package representing the places as "neatly wrapped up, sealed off, and identifiable by core values and practices that separate it from all others." (Phillips 2008, p. 27) Chinatown authenticity is easy-made, and it instantly transplants and conforms to cultural stereotypes. From one city to another, it is déjà vu to see how Chinatowns are paradoxically similar in their radical otherness. In other words, what matters is not the celebration for differences but universal exoticism or the predictable sameness across Chinatowns.

Chinatowns for tourism and Chinese immigrants' demographic shift overshadow the fact that these ethnic neighbourhoods continue to be residential. This article not only shed light on the marginalised Chinatown residents through monolingual Chinese seniors' narratives in Montreal but also challenged myths about them. These immigrants are not moving props for tourists to have an authentic, exotic experience. Nor are they victimised aliens trapped in an ethnic ghetto. They are far from sojourners or robots computed and dictated by fixed cultural norms or rules. Instead, these invisible immigrants transform agency and cultivate the sense of belonging through working out paradoxes of immigration ideals and living/aging conditions. Chinatown authenticity lies in the residents' right to the neighbourhood in continuous and interlaced processes of everyday life, social relations and historical bonds. We also learnt that subjective integration is crucial in reflecting upon the evaluation of integration policy and the openness of public institutions. Finally, ranging from linguistic assistance, outdoor social space and healthier food options to more social housing, policy recommendations specific to Montreal's Chinatown were made to ensure better living quality.

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