have been quite successful, it also includes many individuals who are extremely desperate financially and emotionally. These marginalized individuals are central to making the Chinatown ethnic enclave function, but they exist on the edge of survival. For behind the steamy garment-shop windows and bustling restaurants lies the stark reality of impoverishment and exploitation. These immigrants have come to America in search of economic stability for themselves and their families, but what many have found is grueling labor and an uncertain future. The remainder of this chapter will examine the differences among the Fuzhounese reflected in the life histories within a broader pattern of stratification found in Chinatown and among Chinese immigrants as a whole.

Just as Fuzhounese immigrants comprise a variety of waves, so too does the larger Chinatown community, with immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, south Asia, and many parts of mainland China. And Chinatown’s stratification exists not only within these waves but between them. Kwong (1996 [1987]) suggests the terms “Uptown Chinese” and “Downtown Chinese” to describe the Chinese community’s internal differentiation along class lines. Uptown Chinese immigrate to the United States with skills needed by the U.S. economy. They may be students, business owners, or professionals. With these skills they are better able to integrate into U.S. society and tend not to live in Chinatowns, though they may have businesses there. Downtown Chinese usually immigrate to the United States with limited financial and social capital. They comprise the working class, employed in restaurants and garment shops. They live in urban Chinese settlements, like Chinatown, speak limited English, and, in the case of many Fuzhounese, may not have legal status, leaving them isolated from the mainstream economy and society and highly vulnerable to economic exploitation.

Stratification is an issue for all immigrant groups in America, not only the Chinese. Legal immigrants to the United States include professionals, entrepreneurs, laborers, refugees, and asylum seekers. And in recent years large numbers of undocumented workers have arrived, not only from China, but also from Mexico, Russia, Central America, the Caribbean, eastern Europe, and even Ireland. Labor migrants, legal and undocumented, in search of menial and largely low paying jobs, have come to represent the majority of immigrants to the United States (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). The differences in legal status and in social and financial capital available to these immigrants mean that immigrant communities with common national origins are not monolithic but, like the Chinese, are often distinguished by significant internal stratification.

In recent years scholars have formulated a number of frameworks for understanding inequality among various immigrant groups and the implications of this inequality for the economic formations in major cities and contemporary processes of immigrant incorporation. Of particular theoretical importance to this study of Fuzhounese immigrants in New York’s Chinatown is the groundbreaking work done by Portes and Bach (1985) and later Portes and Stepick (1993) on the development of an ethnic enclave among Cubans in Miami, which they see as an emerging model for immigrant incorporation in today’s global cities.

In Latin Journey (1985) Portes and Bach record a case study of a new ethnic formation in the Cuban community in Miami, a formation they call an “ethnic enclave.” The history of Miami since the 1950s is a history of successive waves of immigration and the resulting impact on Miami politics, culture, and economics. The 1959 Cuban Revolution brought entire groups of privileged Cubans to Miami, fleeing the collectivization and nationalization underway in Castro’s Cuba. A later wave of poorer refugees arrived from Cuba in the 1980 Mariel boatlift (Portes and Stepick 1993; Card 1990).

Portes and Bach argue that the success of Miami’s Cuban immigrants derives from the establishment of an ethnic enclave in which they utilize networks of ethnic solidarity to mobilize needed cultural or social capital. According to their definition, the enclave consists of immigrant groups which concentrate in a distinct spatial location and organize a variety of enterprises serving their own ethnic market and/or the general population. Their basic characteristic is that a significant proportion of the immigrant work force works in enterprises owned by other immigrants. (1981: 291)

In further developing the concept in Latin Journey, Portes and Bach argue that the two most essential and influential characteristics of enclaves are

1. the presence of immigrants with sufficient capital, either brought from abroad or accumulated in the United States, to create new opportunities for economic growth, and
2. an extensive division of labor. (1985: 203)
Portes and Bach suggest that this formulation usually occurs through two successive waves of immigration of the same group. First, an entrepreneurial class is successfully transplanted from home to a receiving country. This class grows. Its economic activities expand and diversify. When the second wave of immigrants arrives, the entrepreneurial class can offer them opportunities virtually unavailable to immigrants entering other labor-market sectors. The enclave's economic structure, they argue, enables immigrants to achieve upward social mobility. Using culturally based social networks, language, common history, and traditions, immigrants are able to find better-paying jobs, more promotion opportunity, and greater ability to use education and skills in the ethnic enclave than they are in the "dead-end jobs" of the secondary labor market of the dominant economic structures.

Indeed, despite low wages in the enclave, workers stay in subordinate jobs in order to take advantage of "paths of mobility unavailable on the outside" (Portes and Bach 1985: 204). In Portes and Bach's scenario, as immigrant firms expand, so do openings for coethnics at the supervisory and managerial level as well as opportunities for ownership and self-employment. In this model, the prosperity of the community is built on close-knit family and kinship networks, where both enclave entrepreneurs and workers are bound by and benefit from ethnic solidarity—mutual obligations, trust, and loyalty—which constitutes a form of social capital absent beyond the enclave boundaries. Portes and Bach portray the Cuban enclave as a favorable alternative to the secondary labor market for new immigrants.

Applications of the Ethnic Enclave Model

The concept of the ethnic enclave is hard to generalize, as even Portes and Bach admit (1985: 38). In describing the Cuban ethnic enclave, they lay out several defining characteristics. The ethnic enclave is not an ethnic neighborhood. It is primarily focused on ethnic economic activity. The enclave has an entrepreneurial class possessing the capital necessary for the establishment of ethnic businesses. And the enclave has a diversity of employment arising from the growth of these businesses, which in turn offers opportunities for upward mobility both to supervisory and management positions and even to ownership and self-employment.

These are very unique conditions. First, immigrants with professional and entrepreneurial skills, especially those with individual capital, have some degree of mobility in the mainstream American economy. They are often not willing to be stranded in an immigrant enclave to work and perhaps live alongside the poor and unskilled. Second, to maintain the diversity of job opportunities that will allow participants in the ethnic enclave to achieve self-ownership and self-employment, firms cannot grow too large. In small communities, monopolies in any particular sector would severely inhibit options for self-ownership and self-employment. All told, the scenario—in which immigrants with capital and entrepreneurial skills start businesses large enough to hire workers but not too large to monopolize the enclave—seems extremely rare.

Perhaps there are very few immigrant communities that would satisfy the criteria. In Latin Journey, Portes and Bach detail only two other examples, the Japanese and Jewish immigrant communities arriving in the United States during the 1890–1914 period. Both are noted for their tightly knit communities that were not exclusively residential.
They were instead economic enclaves, areas where a substantial proportion of immigrants were engaged in business activities and where a still larger proportion worked in firms owned by other immigrants. ... For the entrepreneurially inclined, networks based on ethnic solidarity had clear economic potential. The community was (1) a source of labor, which could be made to work at lower wages; (2) a controlled market; and (3) a source of capital, through rotating credit associations and similar institutions. (1985: 38)

Using these parameters, can the ethnic enclave model detailed by Portes and Bach in the Cuban community in Miami be generalized to other immigrant communities?

Other studies have examined the possibility of applying the ethnic enclave model to the immigrant experience, for example Dominicans and Colombians in New York (Gilbertson 1993; Gilbertson and Gurak 1993), Chinese in California (Sanders and Nee 1987), and Chinese in New York (Zhao and Logan 1989; Zhou 1992). Each of these studies has raised further questions about the success of the ethnic enclave and failed to provide affirmation of Portes and Bach’s original claims (Guest and Kwong 2000).

Min Zhou and John Logan (1989, later expanded in Zhou 1992) attempt to apply the ethnic enclave concept to New York’s Chinatown, an area with many similarities to Miami’s Cuban enclave. Yet their findings produce mixed results. Zhou and Logan suggest that for Chinese immigrant men, labor market experience, education, and English-language ability, or human capital, have the same positive effects on wage earnings within the enclave as they would outside of it. However, they find that “human capital returns for men are not greater within the enclave than outside” (1989: 819).

Zhou and Logan’s analysis of women’s experiences reveals that despite the increased importance of women in the Chinatown enclave economy, both as consumers and workers (primarily in the garment industry), the key predictors of women’s earnings were hours logged and occupation, not human capital. They found a total absence of human capital effects and no measurable earnings returns on previous human capital. Why? Zhou and Logan identify certain status-based obstacles for women working within the enclave, including occupational segregation by gender, women forced to play triple roles as mother, wife, and worker, and jobs requiring higher education that are consistently reserved for men. They conclude that Chinese cultural notions of male supremacy reinforce gender discrimination in the ethnic enclave. The authors suggest that further research must be conducted to determine “to what degree the positive functions of the enclave for men are derived from the subordinate position of women” (1989: 818). While Portes and Bach’s criteria for an ethnic enclave seem to be met in New York’s Chinatown, their Miami findings appear to be difficult to replicate.

Though the quantitative findings for the success of the Chinese ethnic enclave are mixed in the 1989 study, in her book Chinatown: The Socioeconomic Potential of an Urban Enclave (1992), Zhou relies heavily on cultural explanations to make the case for the positive returns of participating in the enclave economy. Following Portes and Bach’s notion of ethnic solidarity, Zhou argues that in Chinatown the ‘economic behavior of enclave participants is not purely self interested, nor is it based on strict calculation in dollars.' The enclave benefits entrepreneurs who receive profits in large part from the low wages paid to labor, but in return also incur obligations to the workers. The enclave benefits the workers who, while “willingly exploited,” are given opportunities for training in occupational skills that may improve future employment (1992: 14). Chinese immigrant laborers are willing to work for substandard wages, a fact Zhou attributes directly to three factors: a Chinese cultural work ethic, a positive comparison to poorer wages in China, and a willingness to make sacrifices in the short term in order to derive benefits in the future. In the case of Chinese women in the enclave, Zhou argues “their behavior must be understood in the context of Chinese culture which gives priority not to individual achievement but to the welfare of the family and the community as a whole” (1992: 14). Despite the mixed results of her 1989 study, Zhou argues that whatever women may lose for themselves becomes a significant contribution to the family as a whole.

**Ethnic Stratification and the Manufacturing of Ethnic Solidarity**

In his work on the political economy of New York’s Chinatown, Peter Kwong challenges the suggestion of predominantly positive effects of ethnic solidarity in the ethnic enclave and questions the claims that it is a promising channel for moving recent Chinese immigrants into the mainstream economy and society as portrayed by Portes and Zhou:

Chinese are attracted to Chinatown because of employment opportunities. However, job availability should not be confused with easy upward mobility, nor should it be seen as the result of ethnic solidarity. Employment in
Chinatown and the Fuzhounese ethnic enclaves is the product of America's post-industrial economy in which American businesses have shifted their production to immigrant communities that provide cheap and unorganized labor. (1996 [1987]: 203)

Chinatown's enclave economy is not primarily a system of mutual support, but in essence, an unregulated free enterprise zone operating within a globalized world economic system based on flexible accumulation (Harvey 1990) and exploiting disadvantaged Chinese immigrants, particularly recent Fuzhounese arrivals. Garment shops and restaurants operate six days a week, ten to twelve hours a day, and pay as little as two dollars an hour, offering no benefits. And recent waves of illegal immigrants from Fuzhou have driven wages down farther still. While these wages are comparatively higher than in mainland China, the working conditions in China's free enterprise zones are so horrifying they should never be duplicated here. Furthermore, many illegal immigrants would not choose to work for these wages or under these conditions, but they have no options beyond the enclave. Many are under intense pressure and sometimes coercion to pay off their debts to smugglers who brought them into the United States or to family and friends who provided the bridge loans. Many are lured into a false sense of potential upward mobility by the Chinatown economic and political elite, which Kwong suggests manufacture ideas of "ethnic solidarity" in order to entice coethnics into exploitative labor relations and to retain their loyalty.

Kwong’s introduction of the terms uptown and downtown Chinese emphasizes the importance of a class analysis for understanding the intense stratification present in New York’s Chinese community, an ethnic group often referred to as a “model minority.” The more positive interpretations of the benefits of ethnic solidarity and the ethnic enclave risk ignoring the key internal dynamics of the ethnic community and economy in which Chinatown’s economic elite, who also double as an informal political structure, build and maintain an exploitative environment with the tacit approval of the outside governments at the city, state, and federal levels. Without seeing the differentiation of the elites and working class, as well as the differences among Chinese ethnic groups and within them, it is hard to understand the dynamics of Chinatown society. The introduction of issues of class and stratification is crucial for understanding the position of Fuzhounese immigrants within the Chinese community as well as the internal dynamics of

the Fuzhounese religious communities in this study (Kwong 1996 [1987], 1997a; Guest and Kwong 2000).

Conclusion

This study reveals the complex dynamics at work in the Chinatown ethnic enclave. Clearly, ethnic solidarity exists and recent immigrants use it to mobilize the financial and social capital necessary for entering the United States and surviving in a highly stratified environment. Fuzhounese immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants, are extremely creative actors working to manipulate a system stacked with disadvantages. In ingenious fashion, these newcomers to New York employ language and kinship affinities, hometown and family networks to find jobs, housing, health care, child care, and legal advice. As we will see, Fuzhounese religious communities are central as sites for constructing and reconstructing networks of ethnic solidarity and accessing available financial and social capital as immigrants make their way along an often precarious journey.

At the same time, this isolated ethnic enclave is a trap for many Fuzhounese who, marginalized by language, culture, and class from both the mainstream U.S. economy and the Chinatown elites, have no way to escape. As Chen Qiang so eloquently states:

*Someday I want to take my mind and really enter American society. This is an American place. There are not a lot of Chinese in America. But being in this Chinese environment in Chinatown is like being in jail. If you go out you can’t speak English. If you want to travel, you don’t know where to go. Life here is so much worse than in most of America. Being in Chinatown is just like being in China! So I would like to be able to get out into American society. I need to learn English. If only I had the opportunity! I'd like to go to school. But that's probably unrealistic considering how much money I have to pay back.*

The analysis of inequality and exploitation within the Fuzhounese community and the Chinatown enclave presented in this chapter provides an important piece of the framework for understanding the internal dynamics of the religious communities considered in later chapters. Fujianese religious communities play a significant role in the lives of their constituents.
Chinatown’s Religious Landscape

The Fuzhounese Presence

Chinatown’s religious landscape today reflects the complex immigrant history of this urban New York neighborhood. Walking around one discovers old Jewish synagogues, both active and empty; Catholic churches built by Irish and Italian Catholic immigrants and now home to Cantonese, Fuzhounese, and Hispanic congregations; Protestant churches ranging from old mainline denominations like the Methodists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians to Hong Kong and Taiwanese imports like Overseas Chinese Mission and Ling Liang Church. There are newly formed independent religious communities primarily comprised of undocumented workers from southeast China, operating in the local Fuzhou dialect; large Buddhist temples whose leaders are monks with advanced theological training and whose constituents are primarily older Cantonese immigrants or recent middle-class Hong Kong and Taiwanese immigrants; and numerous storefront Buddhist, Daoist, and Chinese popular religion temples oriented around home villages, whose festival celebrations, fortunetelling, and spirit possession reflect the vibrant and complex religious life of rural mainland Chinese from the areas around Fuzhou. The diversity of these religious communities reflects not only the neighborhood’s immigrant history, but also its contemporary stratification.

By the end of 2002, fourteen congregations specifically served the Fuzhounese in Chinatown. Chapter 6 contains an analysis of the history of Fuzhounese Protestants in Chinatown by presenting a study of their two congregations, the Church of Grace and the New York House Church. After providing an overview of religion among the Chinese in Chinatown, the current chapter will focus on four additional groups representing the diversity of Fuzhounese traditions—the He Xian Jun Buddhist Temple, the Daoist Temple of Heavenly Thanksgiving, and Transfiguration and St. Joseph’s Catholic churches. The data collected during this study consistently show that these groups, which include large numbers of undocumented workers, play key roles in the migration and immigrant incorporation process. They serve as key locations for mobilizing the social capital necessary for survival in Chinatown’s highly exploitative ethnic enclave while at the same time reflecting much of the stratification in the surrounding community. They function as nodes for building and accessing transnational networks that influence events and institutions in New York and at home in China. And they contribute to the construction of alternative identities that serve as counterpoints to the dominant structures and discourses of the ethnic enclave and U.S. society.

Only a few studies document Chinese religious expressions in the United States, and these focus primarily on Chinese Christians. Even fewer resources describe the religious reality of New York’s Chinatown, with the exception of a limited number of church histories written for internal congregational purposes such as anniversary celebrations. Studies of Chinatown (i.e., Kuo 1977; Wong 1982, 1988; Kwong 1996 [1987]; Zhou 1992; Yu 1992; Lin 1998; Tchen 1999) mention religion only in passing or neglect it completely. No research had been conducted on Fuzhounese religious communities. Except where otherwise noted, I gathered the data for this study from firsthand ethnographic fieldwork including street-by-street mapping, participant observation, and personal interviews conducted between April 1997 and July 2002. I have reconstructed institutional histories from oral and primary sources.

I drew information about religious organizations in Chinatown initially from publicly available lists circulated in Christian and Buddhist networks, as well as the regular advertisement of religious services in the main Chinatown newspapers and Yellow Pages. A visual check of key streets quickly revealed inadequacies in the publicly available lists. Buddhist institutions in general were severely underrepresented. Most of the religious communities created by recent Fuzhounese immigrants—largely new and independent—simply were not on any of the maps, formal or informal, that had been drawn. Most of them had no legal organizational status in New York and were advertised by word of mouth through family, village, and faith networks.

A series of street-by-street observations I conducted in 1997, 1999, and again in 2002 captures more fully the historical and religious diversity of the approximately sixty-block area considered to be part of Chinatown today (see map in chapter 1). Beginning in the oldest section of Chinatown,
bounded by Canal Street, Bowery, Baxter Street, and Worth Street—what most people think of as "Chinatown"—the surveys extended outward to the edges of today's Chinatown: south to the East River, east through the formerly Jewish Lower East Side, and north through what is still known as Little Italy but whose Italian presence is maintained primarily now in two blocks of tourist-oriented Italian restaurants and shops along Mulberry Street.

Of the eighty-four religious institutions identified in the study, fifty-nine are exclusively Chinese. In addition, three Catholic churches have multiple congregations in one parish, combining Chinese and Italian or Chinese and Hispanic. The twenty-two non-Chinese institutions include a wide range of congregations: Protestant (Hispanic, African American, European American), 10; Jewish, 4; Roman Catholic, 4; Greek Orthodox, 1; Ukrainian Orthodox, 1; Jehovah's Witness, 1; Japanese Buddhist, 1. The sixty-two institutions with Chinese members include Buddhist, 26; Protestant Christian, 23; Chinese Popular Religion, 8; Catholic, 3; Daoist, 2.

Fourteen congregations specifically serve the Fuzhounese population in Chinatown. Five are popular religious temples venerating local deities from the home village or region in China from which their adherents have come. Four congregations specifically identify themselves as Buddhist temples, though these may incorporate elements of Daoism or popular religion as well. Two independent Protestant Christian congregations have been established. One temple, the Temple of Heavenly Thanksgiving, identifies itself as Daoist, but includes Buddhist and Daoist deities on its altar as well as the sage Confucius. The two Catholic churches with Fuzhounese constituents are multiethnic parishes including older groups of Italians along with Cantonese-speaking Chinese from south China and Hong Kong and more recent Fuzhounese arrivals. In addition, dozens of small Protestant and Catholic house-church groups meet in adherents' homes, intentionally outside the larger institutions examined in this study. Excluding the two Catholic parishes, the other twelve Fuzhounese religious groups are independently established with no formal institutional association beyond their own local organization. Mirroring the Fuzhounese migration, these institutions are all recently established and as such are fairly fragile. Only the He Xian Jun Buddhist Temple (1987) and the Protestant Church of Grace (1988) were founded before 1990. All of the others were established during the past decade.

Chinese Religious Diversity in Chinatown: An Overview

The Chinese religious community in New York City reflects the diversity of the Chinese diaspora. New York's Chinese churches and temples have been formed by ethnic Chinese immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam as well as mainland China. The mainlanders include the earliest immigrants from the Taishan area of southern Guangdong Province; scholars, businessmen, and professionals from China's major urban centers; post-1989 Tian An Men political asylum seekers; Fuzhounese from towns and villages of China's southeast coast; and a small recent wave of undocumented workers from Wenzhou, a coastal city twelve hours north of Fuzhou by bus.

Each group brings a different linguistic tradition, cultural background, economic resource, and religious experience. They speak Cantonese, Mandarin, Fuzhounese, the local Taiwanese minnan dialect, Wenzhounese, and English. They use these languages in different combinations, sometimes with separate religious services within the same institution, sometimes with simultaneous translation during the same services, and sometimes with a determined effort to stick to one over the others. The religious institutions also represent different historical waves of immigration out of China and into New York. Early Cantonese immigrants and their grown children now established as middle-class professionals and business owners congregate together in certain churches and temples. Hong Kong and Taiwanese who have come since the 1970s gather in others. Fuzhounese undocumented immigrant laborers form their own institutions. Second-generation Chinese may meet in the same building as their parents, but their English-language congregations are often distinct ritual and programmatic entities.

Chinese established their earliest religious altars in family and village association halls that began to emerge in the Five Points area of lower Manhattan, starting on Pell, Doyer, and lower Mott streets in the 1800s. The Methodist Five Points Mission, originally opened in 1848 to serve Irish immigrants, began its first work with Chinese in 1878, renting space at 14 Mott Street. Transfiguration Catholic Church, located at 29 Mott Street, began an outreach to Chinese in 1909. Two temples, referred to by non-Chinese as "joss houses," were constructed in the 1880s, the first an elaborate space on the third floor of 10 Chatham Square and later an even more magnificent hall at 16 Mott Street in the Consolidated Benevolent Association Building. The word "joss," meaning a Chinese idol or cult image, is not Chinese but
migrants arrive in New York. They continue in homes, stores, shops, restaurants, and temples. They may be modified to fit a new cultural environment, but they continue. Asking Chinese New Yorkers by telephone to place their religious beliefs within the framework of world religious systems such as Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, or Buddhism miscalculates the complexity and diversity of Chinese religious expression. In this regard it should come as no surprise that the majority of respondents claim no religious affiliation.

As we have already seen, since 1949 the Chinese government has also attempted to fit all public forms of religious expression into the world religion framework, drawing upon an imported European, heavily Marxist, intellectual tradition. All other popular religious expressions were declared to be feudal superstitions. The government's actions have not been an analytical project, however, but an organizational one. Temples and religious practitioners across China, despite the complexity of their religious expression, have been forced to register with one of the five major religious organizations in order to receive official sanction. So a temple combining Buddhist, Daoist, and popular religious elements, like Master Lu's, finds itself registered with the Buddhist Association in China and Master Lu himself as a Buddhist religious practitioner. This organizational framework is not effective in advancing understanding of much of China's rural religious expression. Nor is it an effective analytical framework for examining religious beliefs and practices among Chinese in New York.

An unpublished survey of New York's Chinese religious communities conducted as part of the Religion and Immigrant Incorporation in New York project at the New School University documents ninety-nine Christian churches and forty temples in the New York area. Among the Christian churches, 38 percent are in Manhattan, 41 percent are in Queens with a significant concentration in Flushing, and 11 percent are in Brooklyn. In-cluded in these numbers are eight predominantly Taiwanese congregations in Queens. Not included are the numerous Chinese churches in New Jersey, upstate New York, and Long Island that are primarily populated by middle-class, often highly educated immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese mainland. Among the temples, 20 percent of those surveyed are in Manhattan, 35 percent are in Queens, 8 percent are in Brooklyn, and 5 percent are in the Bronx. A number of the New York City Buddhist congregations have built temples, retreat centers, and monasteries in northern New Jersey and upstate New York where members go for dharma teaching, meditation retreats, and ritual ceremonies. Members may go individually, but
the temples also regularly organize buses and group excursions (Huang and Zhou 2000).

Chinese religious life and practice in New York is clearly much broader and deeper than reflected in the statistics of Huang and Zhou's fine yet preliminary study. For instance, certain segments of the Chinese religious population, including independent and particularly non-Christian institutions, are less likely to appear on publicly available lists. Huang and Zhou's survey identifies forty temples in the New York City metropolitan area. In comparison, my current study has identified thirty-six temples (Buddhist, Daoist, and popular) in Manhattan's Chinatown alone. Unaffiliated institutions, regardless of size, are difficult to detect without street-by-street observation. This appears to be true for the newly created Fuzhounese religious institutions as well. While making the documentation process much more time consuming and labor intensive, street-by-street observation may be a necessary tool in mapping contemporary religious communities, particularly those with significant numbers of recent immigrants.

Individual, family, and business-oriented religious expressions are also difficult to document in a survey of institutions. Drawing upon rural and urban Chinese popular religious practices, Chinese immigrants continue traditional activities. In many Chinese homes throughout the New York area, offerings are made to the kitchen god. In many Chinese restaurants, stores, and businesses, small altars may be found at which owners offer prayers. These religious practices, intimately intertwined with Chinese family and village culture, may not be as readily identifiable out of context in a U.S. environment.

Public processions and festivals also do not register on a map of religious institutions. Yet they play a distinct role in projecting an ethnic community's religious beliefs into the public domain. Chinatown's Chinese Protestants hold an annual evangelistic crusade in Sara Delano Roosevelt Park sponsored by the Christian umbrella organization Chinese Christian Herald Crusade. Fuzhounese Catholics at Transfiguration Church have initiated an annual August procession on the Lower East Side, honoring the Feast of the Assumption of Our Blessed Mother Mary. The celebration of the Buddha's birthday in late May/early June, which began circumambulating Manhattan's Chinatown, now travels east down Kissena Boulevard in Flushing, Queens. These events have not yet achieved the wide public recognition of their counterparts/predecessors like the St. Patrick's Day parade, the Puerto Rican Day parade, the Columbus Day parade, the India Day parade down Fifth Avenue, the Caribbean Day parade in Brooklyn, or even the annual Chinese New Year celebration. But through these nascent public displays and processions, Chinese religious communities are seeking to project their presence into the public discourse and accentuate their claim to a place in the most multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious of global cities.

The Fuzhounese Religious Communities

Over the past fifteen years, Fuzhounese immigrants have established their own religious communities in New York's Chinatown, adding their unique flavor to the area's variegated and textured religious fabric. The Fuzhounese migration, spurred by economic restructuring in both China and the United States and facilitated by a vast and highly organized international human smuggling syndicate, has uprooted whole communities of people, dislocating them economically, culturally, and legally, placing them in a receiving country for which they are unprepared and which is unprepared to incorporate them. Amid this dislocation, Fuzhounese immigrants are constructing and maintaining religious communities as one means of building supportive networks and activities, including religious networks and practices, and as a mode for negotiating their place in this complex and volatile global process. The stories of Fuzhounese immigrants associated with the He Xian Jun Buddhist Temple, the Daoist Temple of Heavenly Thanksgiving, and Transfiguration and St. Joseph's Catholic churches, reconstructed in this chapter, as well as those of the Church of Grace and the New York House Church in chapter 6, reveal the complex roles these congregations play in the Fuzhounese migration process, in immigrant incorporation in the United States, and in building networks that link religious communities in lower Manhattan and the lower Min River Valley of Southeast China.

He Xian Jun Buddhist Temple

On Eldridge Street, which runs through the heart of Chinatown's new Fuzhounese community, stands a storefront-turned-village-temple. This October day, the ninth day of the ninth month of the Chinese lunar calendar, is a major feast day honoring the Chinese Buddhist bodhisattva, Guan Yin, goddess of mercy, and so the temple is being transformed into a festival hall. Tables and chairs fill every inch of the main room as well as a small courtyard farther back. A buffet line near the altar is stacked with a dozen
different vegetarian courses. In the rear of the building, gas fires rage under commercial-sized woks in the crowded kitchen, where additional food is being prepared for the day’s visitors. Today the main hall will be packed with women, mostly, taking their lunch breaks from the nearby garment shops and paying their respects to Guan Yin and Master Lu. More than two hundred people will make the pilgrimage during the course of the noon hour.

Master Lu, a short gruff man in his early sixties, established the small temple on Eldridge Street shortly after arriving illegally in 1985 from Fuqi Village east of Fuzhou. Fuqi Village lies on a hillside on the southern bank of the Min River. Out of four thousand villagers, nearly two thousand are now estimated to have made their way to or through New York. Fuqi’s economy previously was built around farming and fishing. Today this emigrant community relies primarily on remittances from villagers working in the United States.

Master Lu is not uncharacteristic of local religious practitioners in both rural and urban China who incorporate a polytheistic blend of ritual and belief. For the ten years immediately preceding his migration to New York, Master Lu practiced his craft as a spirit medium in the towns and villages around his native Fuqi and on Langqi Island on the mouth of the Min River, home of his wife’s family. What is particularly unique about Master Lu is that he has transferred the central location of his practice from rural Fuqi to urban New York. At the same time, he has built a direct connection to his hometown and maintained the local flavor of his work. Fuqi villagers visit him for advice in New York, just as they did back home. The deity, He Xian Jun, speaks to him in New York just as he did in China. Contributions from members support the temple in New York as well as the construction of a major temple complex in Fuqi.

The New York temple serves as something of a community center for the people of Fuqi and surrounding areas. Festivities are held on the first and fifteenth of every month (Chinese lunar calendar) as well as three times a year in honor of Guan Yin. The largest gathering occurs at the Chinese New Year, when many Fuzhounese working in restaurants across the country return to New York. Over seven hundred immigrants made the New Year’s journey to Master Lu’s temple in 2002.

The temple is named after He Xian Jun, a prominent Daoist deity in northern Fujian Province and the predominant local deity of Fuqi Village and surrounding areas. The association of a Daoist deity with an officially Buddhist temple reflects not only the integration of Buddhism, Daoism, and Chinese popular religious beliefs at the local level, but also the difficulty in using institutional religious frameworks to categorize the dynamic religious expressions of rural Chinese communities.

Master Lu has had an extremely intimate and personal relationship with the deity for over twenty-five years, a relationship that has not been lessened by the geographical distance between Fuqi Village in southeast China and Eldridge Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. In between festivals, Master Lu receives visitors. They come to ask the god’s advice about everything from business ventures to children’s names to potential success of petitions for political asylum. They come to pray for the health of sick relatives. They come to give thanks for safe passage across the ocean with snakeheads from China. He Xian Jun, who characteristically provides his adherents with dreams in response to their queries, is revered as a god of healing and resolving intractable problems. There is a steady stream of petitioners throughout the average day. Old friends drop in to say hello and show off a new grandson. Couples planning to be married come by to check the auspiciousness of their match or the date for their wedding. Sundays are busiest because many working Chinese have the day off. Master Lu intercedes on their behalf to inquire of He Xian Jun. The deity gives him a message or a vision to relay and interpret to the petitioners. At rare times, He Xian Jun actually possesses Master Lu’s body in order to communicate, but mostly the responses come in the form of dreams or visual images.

I conducted the following interview with Master Lu in his New York temple one afternoon in September 1999. It traces the development of this poor rural villager from a childhood gathering firewood to support his family on the riverbanks of the Min River to his position as a ritual master of a religious community that spans the globe. In addition to providing the rich imagery of his life’s journey, the interview reveals Master Lu’s intimate relationship with the deity He Xian Jun and the religious framework he has constructed to give meaning to his life experience, particularly his immigrant experience.

It was 1985. I found a snakehead in Tingjiang, across the river from Fuqi by boat. The price was $17,000 but I didn’t give any money up front. Only after I got to America, if I didn’t get here then I didn’t have to pay. But when it was time to leave the country, I couldn’t get out. When I got to Shanghai I couldn’t get on the plane. I had a Chinese passport, but the smuggler hadn’t gotten the right visa. I went home to Fuqi and waited. When I finally did leave China I traveled from Shanghai to Japan. From Japan to Canada. From Canada to Ecuador. Ecuador to
Mexico. From Mexico to Los Angeles. Los Angeles to New York. All on the plane except from Mexico to Los Angeles. In Mexico I climbed a mountain for an hour, then there was a small vehicle waiting for us to take us across the border. We all sat on that bus praying to He Xian Jun, “Protect us! Protect us!” I know some people who have been stopped at that customs checkpoint. One of my friends. So I was praying. In front of us they were searching a car. I was praying. But when we pulled up they just said, go through. We were so happy. There were five of us. One from Tingjiang, one from Min’an, two from Houyu, and me. We were all praying. We just zoomed right through.

How did you arrange housing and work?

Friends and relatives. Since 1975 I had been doing this kind of work [with He Xian Jun]. In 1975 He Xian Jun had already come to inhabit my body. We didn’t dare to do this work at home. It was still during the Cultural Revolution and religion was being repressed very intensely. I went to other places to work. Neighboring villages. Langqi Island. In my relatives’ and friends’ homes. Then I would go away. Sometimes they could pay me. Sometimes they just gave me rice or oil. Or people would come secretly to my home, just as guests. People would ask me to come if someone was sick, or if there were problems in the family: fights, divorce, family problems. I would try to make peace. People would introduce me, one to one to another.

These people helped me come up with the money when I got to New York. We already had a lot of people from Fuqi in New York at the time. In 1981–1982 there were already some that were smuggled out through Macau or Shanghai. They would go to Macau to “visit relatives” and then just keep on going to New York. I worked in a restaurant for two years. Every month I paid $1,000 back to the people who had loaned it to me.

When did you first think about opening this temple?

Right when I got to America, He Xian Jun told me to open a temple. I told the god, since I borrowed other people’s money, I’m embarrassed to just start a temple. After I’ve returned the money then I will do it. If I don’t return the money people will say I’m lazy. But if I return the money I will be free to do anything. They can’t say anything about it, regardless how little money I make. He Xian Jun told me in a dream to open this temple. And we had a conversation. He told me if you work in a restaurant it’s too dirty. I can’t get close to your body. The meat smells. Other smells. I was worried, though. I was illegal. I didn’t get my green card until after the 1989 amnesty. If I worked in the back of a restaurant, the police probably would not catch me. But if I opened a temple... What should I do? I asked the god. He said, “Don’t worry. You won’t get caught. No one will bother you.” He told me where to open this temple, too. Originally it was a little farther up on Eldridge Street. He told me to move here to this building. I said no, because it wasn’t a very good neighborhood at the time. He said it was OK, nothing would happen to me. So I moved the temple here in 1993.

I told He Xian Jun that since my family was poor if I could get to America I promise to build a temple for him in Fuqi. I made that promise before I came. If he would send me to America and I could make some money the first thing I would do is build a temple in Fuqi for him. I do my work. He does his.

How did you know you had this skill?

I didn’t even know it myself. I just tried. If I got it right then I had the power. Like, is the baby going to be a boy or a girl? If I got it right, then I’ve got the power. Today you should go to such and such a place and do something. Did it work out? Yes? Then it works.

Does it really work?

Yes. If things didn’t change, why would people trust me? Why would they contribute to building the temple back home in China?

The He Xian Jun Temple in New York plays a key role in the lives of immigrants from Fuqi and neighboring villages as they seek to make sense of their new and often hostile environment and negotiate their difficult existence in New York City. The temple, with Master Lu as the centerpiece, serves as a site for the exchange of information among its adherents regarding jobs, housing, health care, and coping mechanisms for dealing with any of the struggles of daily life. Another important and overlooked function of village-oriented temples such as this is as a source of credit. He Xian Jun Temple operates an informal revolving loan fund. “If people need help
paying off their snakehead they often come here. I don’t have any money of my own to loan them. But if the temple has some money we loan it to them. They pay it back as they are able,” Master Lu explained.

The temple and Master Lu also serve as an important link between New York and Fuqi. To honor his reciprocal pledge with He Xian Jun, Master Lu has orchestrated the construction of a beautiful temple complex on the hillside above Fuqi Village overlooking the Min River as it flows into the sea. With contributions of over one million dollars from adherents in New York, Master Lu has built a multileveled temple that dwarfs anything in the surrounding villages. Architectural drawings are prominently displayed inside the temple on Eldridge Street. A seven-story pagoda is the most recent addition and opened to great fanfare in September 2002, complete with rituals, parades, and speeches by local and provincial government authorities.

Land in China is at a premium, and religious organizations often are denied permission to build new religious edifices. But Master Lu is well known to the government authorities in Fuqi because of the remittances his temple channels back into the local community. He is also influential in Fuqi’s overseas population in New York, where, in addition to his role in the temple, he serves as vice chairman of the Fuqi Village Association. As a result, the temple leadership in Fuqi has had remarkable success negotiating with village government authorities for what it needs. For instance, in return for being granted permission to build the temple on the steeply sloping hillside at the back of the village, Master Lu agreed to fund the construction of a new road through the village and connecting to the main thoroughfare that links Fuqi with neighboring villages and Changle to the south and Fuzhou to the west. The village would not have to take agricultural land out of production and would gain a significant new public road. The temple would get the land it needed for its new construction.

Master Lu returns to Fuqi Village at least once a year, usually in the spring. His brother has remained in Fuqi to manage the sprawling new temple complex. Master Lu’s son is also there, living in the family’s spacious new five-story home and waiting for his green card application to be processed. On his annual return visit to Fuqi, Master Lu conducts a month-long religious retreat for his followers. Hundreds of pilgrims from across the area visit Fuqi temple during this time. Monks from a large temple in Fuzhou City are hired to lead the rituals. The temple, like others throughout the region and across China, is playing a crucial role in revitalizing and reimagining Chinese religious life after a period of intense repression.

Master Lu also takes the occasions of his return visits to meet with local political and religious authorities. Despite living primarily in New York, he is recognized by the Changle Religious Affairs Bureau as a Buddhist monk and he retains membership on the Changle Buddhist Association Council. Back home in New York, Master Lu proudly displays videos of his visits, the many pilgrims who attend the festivals, and the beautiful new temple buildings. The videos regularly play on the temple’s VCR and are loaned out to adherents around the tri-state area, another span in the bridge between Fuqi and New York linking religious communities.

Though he is a man of great renown in Fuqi Village and its environs, in New York City Master Lu’s life is quite simple and circumscribed.

I spend my days here at the temple. When there are no visitors I fold paper devotional money and watch Chinese videos with my wife and family. I don’t go out. I wouldn’t know where to go. I don’t speak any English. So even though I’ve had a green card for eleven years I’ve never applied to become a U.S. citizen. I’d fail the English test. I live in the temple, work in the temple. I’ve never even seen the Statue of Liberty.
The Temple of Heavenly Thanksgiving

Not far from the He Xian Jun Temple, in another storefront on the eastern end of Canal Street, the bright red sign over the door with yellow-orange Chinese characters reads:

It is a sweltering June day in 1997. Inside, the small store-turned-temple is decorated in austere fashion. A few chairs line the walls. A list of temple contributors and leaders is mounted prominently just inside the door. On the far wall is a glass-encased altar holding twenty small statues arranged on five ascending levels. A dragon is painted on the back wall of the altar enclosure. Huang Di, the emperor, sits on the uppermost level. Confucius, Lao Zi (representing Daoism), and the Buddha sit side by side on the second level. A long table extends from the altar back toward the front door, its surfaces covered with offerings of fresh fruit, ritual candles, and a few pots of burned incense.

A group of seven men and two women occupy the chairs lining the side walls of the temple. Mr. Li, one of the temple leaders, introduces the temple. "The members of the temple have all immigrated from the village of Chang'an or next door Dongqi Village." These two villages are located about thirty miles east of Fuzhou City on the north bank of the Min River, just east of Tingjiang and almost directly across the river from Fuqi Village. Most all of them have been smuggled into the United States over the past few years. When asked if many more Chang'an villagers were in New York, Mr. Li laughed and said, "Most of them are already in New York but more are coming all the time! It's mostly just grandparents and small children in Chang'an now. The young people—men and women—have come to New York, most of them illegally, to find work."

Sitting in the temple that very day was a young man, nineteen years old, casually yet neatly dressed and carrying a medium-sized duffel bag. He indeed had just arrived from Chang'an days before, smuggled into New York and now waiting patiently in the temple for a van that would pick him up and drive him to a city in the Midwest, where others from Chang'an and Dongqi Village had opened a Chinese restaurant and he was promised work.

"I finally made it to America on my third try. I was arrested twice and sent back to China—once in Japan and once in Thailand. I finally came through the Middle East, eastern Europe, and then on a plane to New York with a fake visa. I just want to make money. There's nothing for me at home in Chang'an. So I came out. If I can make $200,000 then I'll go back to China."

According to Mr. Li, the Heavenly Thanksgiving sect had been founded about ten years earlier in Dongqi Village. Mr. Huang, now the master of the Dongqi temple, had left China in 1957 for Hong Kong, where he earned a living as a sailor, eventually working as an engineer. On a visit to New York
Chinatown's Religious Landscape

harbor in 1972 he jumped ship and remained in New York until 1986, when he was able to establish U.S. citizenship through the amnesty for undocumented immigrants. He returned to Dongqi in 1987. At that time a local village deity spoke to him and instructed him to form this new group. The group's key tenet was to build unity among religions and religious believers by integrating Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism into one ritual practice. Despite its fundamental belief in the unity of these religions, the first Heavenly Thanksgiving temple, built in Dongqi Village in 1987, was registered as a Daoist temple to fit Chinese government guidelines.

In 1993 a group of seven immigrants from Chang'an and Dongqi established a branch of the Dongqi temple in New York. Originally on Eldridge Street a short distance away, earlier that spring (1997) it moved to Canal Street. Since its founding, the temple has served as a gathering spot for immigrants from the two villages and as a place for worship and ritual on the key days of the Chinese lunar calendar. By 1997 most of the original group of seven owned restaurants in the New York area but rotated responsibility for the temple operations. And in each of their restaurants there was also a small altar for the gods of the temple.

In 1995, with funds raised from one hundred fellow villagers, several of the founders returned to Chang'an to build the third Temple of Heavenly Thanksgiving. With help from the original temple in Dongqi, construction began on a major temple complex hugging the hillside at the rear of Chang'an Village overlooking the Min River and the Pacific Ocean. Built on the site of an old Buddhist temple, this new structure rises steeply through five levels, each adorned with altars to the gods and configured in the same order as the miniaturized statues in the New York temple. From the highest landing the temple looks south over Chang'an Village, its newly constructed multistory homes built with remittances sent from the United States.

The religious community that is related to these three temples reflects many of the characteristics of other Fuzhounese religious groups. The Temple of Heavenly Thanksgiving in New York City clearly serves as a site in the immigrant journey for fellow believers. The leadership of the temple plays a role in the actual arrangements involved in the migration process. While serving as a ritual center, the temple is also equipped to assist immigrants in transit. On the main floor of the New York temple, behind the front room and altar, is a full kitchen. A set of stairs leads down to a basement level comprised of four smaller rooms filled with four to six beds each. These are used by fellow villagers passing through New York on their way to a network of restaurants spread from Virginia to Pennsylvania to Indiana and Michigan.

The temple serves as an important location for assisting the incorporation of new immigrants into the U.S. economy. Immigrants are connected to the network of restaurants and provided employment. This incorporation is limited, however, by the internal stratification of the temple network. Some members own the restaurants. Others work as undocumented laborers for well below minimum wage. Nevertheless, the social solidarity of the network provides off-the-books employment to the undocumented workers at wages far above what they could earn in China. At the same time, the workers' cheap labor enables the owners to reap a profit far above what they could earn if forced to employ U.S. citizens at the legal minimum wage or above. In this case, the Chinatown ethnic enclave and its effects are extended beyond New York by means of the village and temple network that encompasses work locations scattered throughout the United States.

The Temple of Heavenly Thanksgiving also demonstrates the ability of the emerging Fuzhounese religious networks to enable immigrants to contribute to and influence their home communities in China. While many immigrants interact with their sending community through remittances to

FIGURE 12 Sung Tak Buddhist Temple (1996), formerly Pike Street Synagogue (1904).
build homes and support family members, participation in the Temple of Heavenly Thanksgiving allows members to contribute collectively to the larger social projects of their home village. Not only has significant money been invested in the construction of the home temple complex, but in 1999 the New York temple established a charitable foundation to engage in development and relief operations in the Chang'an and Dongqi areas as well as elsewhere in China.

Through my several visits to the temples in New York, Dongqi, and Chang'an, the difficulties of maintaining religious networks that span towns, cities, and nations often half a world away, particularly given the intense mobility of the migrant community, became clear to me. At times, the temples have been empty, the leadership gone elsewhere to work; at times, internal conflicts have erupted with control over the temples being contested. As with the other religious communities considered in this study, the story of the Temple of Heavenly Thanksgiving reveals the inherent fragility of these nascent Fuzhounese institutions. Their leadership is constantly mobile and so regularly reconstituted. They are unfamiliar with the United States and therefore limited in their ability to establish networks of support. Their attempts to bring together disparate elements of the immigrant community under broad organizational umbrellas often crumble.

Against the odds, however, like Master Lu’s He Xian Jun Temple, the Temple of Heavenly Thanksgiving reflects the ability of local religious traditions, indigenous to the towns and villages of rural Fuzhou, to extend their reach and influence far and wide. In 1998 the Dongqi Village temple’s spirit medium, long engaged in fortunetelling, prescribing healing herbal medications, and giving all manner of advice, immigrated with her husband to Indiana to open a take-out Chinese restaurant. Here she continued to serve as a spirit medium for the temple and its adherents. People with problems or questions, whether in China or in cities across the United States, would call her in Indiana. Petitioners with inadequate funds to call would leave their inquiries on slips of paper on the temple altars in China or the United States so that temple leaders could call in for them. On the first and the fifteenth day of the lunar month, the medium would go into a trance and be possessed by one of the gods of the temple. Confirming her efficacy, the temple master in Dongqi claimed he could feel the god leaving the village to go to America to inhabit her. In Indiana the spirit medium’s husband posed the questions to the inhabiting god who would respond. The husband kept careful notes of the responses and afterward would return people’s calls with the eagerly awaited answers.

By 1999 the handwritten notes were still being placed on the altar of the temple on Canal Street in New York. But the sign above the front door had been changed and the people in charge of the temple were different. After I made several inquiries, it became clear to me that one faction from the Chang’an Temple had replaced another. This new faction had a spirit medium as well, but a different person, located in Illinois, not Indiana.

Chinatown’s Fuzhounese Catholics: Transfiguration and St. Joseph’s Churches

The Fuzhounese Buddhist, Daoist, and popular religious temples and the two Protestant congregations in Chinatown have developed independently and without denominational precedent or institutional support. Manhattan Chinatown’s two Fuzhounese Catholic congregations have followed a distinctly different developmental trajectory. At both Transfiguration Church and St. Joseph’s Church, the new Fuzhounese Catholics have been incorporated into already existing parishes steeped in immigrant history.

Transfiguration Church

Transfiguration Church’s work with Chinese spans nearly one hundred years. The congregation itself was founded in 1827 in lower Manhattan. Throughout its history, Transfiguration has been a parish of immigrants. Beginning with the Irish, followed by the Italians, the Cantonese, and now the Fuzhounese, Transfiguration has been home to wave after wave of New York’s new residents. Its history mirrors their history on New York’s Lower East Side and continues to do so today.

Father Felix Verela, an outspoken Cuban exile, was the parish’s first priest (1827–1846) and guided the congregation through two great fires in New York, two cholera epidemics, and constant anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant social pressure. The great Irish Potato Famine of 1845–1847 set the tone for Transfiguration in the second half of the nineteenth century. By 1847 over one thousand Irish were arriving in New York every day. Transfiguration parish relocated in 1853 from Chambers Street to lower Mott Street, the heart of the new Irish community in the Five Points district and center of New York’s most notorious slum, noted for its murders, muggings, prostitution, bars, and dilapidated housing. But by the late 1800s, the Irish began to move out of the Five Points area, being replaced by three new
immigrant groups—the Italians, the Jews, and the Chinese (Dolan 1975; Transfiguration Church 1977).

Transfiguration began to reach out to Chinese in 1909 with the arrival of Father Hilarius Montanar of the Paris Mission Society. Father Montanar had been working in Guangzhou, the area from which most of Chinatown’s residents had come. During his tenure as priest he began English classes for the immigrants and served as an interpreter in public and private affairs. He returned to Paris in 1914, and Transfiguration’s Chinese Mission closed between 1920 and 1940 for lack of Chinese-speaking clergy and because of the violent inter-Chinese conflicts of the period. Father Umberto Dalmasso, a Chinese-speaking Salesian priest, reopened the Chinese Mission in 1940. In 1949 the Diocese assigned responsibility for parish administration to the Maryknoll Fathers. Maryknoll, founded as the Catholic Foreign Missionary Society of America, was known for its extensive mission work in China, although that work was coming to a close with the Communist defeat of the Nationalists and the expulsion of foreign missionaries from China. The change in parish administration marked a significant commitment by New York’s Catholic Diocese to focus on this new immigrant population.

Despite the presence of other Catholic parishes in the neighborhood, including St. James, St. Joseph’s, and St. Joachim’s, Transfiguration came to be known as the one serving the Chinese community, and its work expanded rapidly at a time when Chinatown’s population was also seeing significant growth. In 1975, with Transfiguration’s Chinese membership on the ascendency and its Italian congregation in decline, the Maryknoll Fathers returned the parish to direct diocesan control. In 1976 Father Mark Cheung, himself a refugee from southern China, was appointed parish administrator, the first Chinese priest in the history of New York to be appointed to such a position. Transfiguration was now the most prominent Chinese parish in New York City.

Throughout its history, Transfiguration’s Italian and Chinese congregations have maintained largely separate identities, separate masses, and separate programming. In the 1980s conflict heightened between the two groups and among the Chinese themselves. Succeeding Chinese priests were unable to resolve the conflicts, and by the early 1990s the parish and its school were racked by lawsuits and accusations of financial misconduct. In 1991 Cardinal O’Connor directly intervened and again appointed a Maryknoll priest with extensive administrative experience as parish administrator.

As the Fuzhounese population expanded in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Fuzhounese Catholics, many of them from the powerful underground Catholic church, found their way to Transfiguration. Most of Transfiguration’s new constituents were rural Catholics, veterans of the conflict between China’s underground Catholic church and the state-recognized Patriotic Church. They were and are still fiercely loyal to the pope and fiercely antagonistic toward the Patriotic Church movement. The religious practices of such people in China followed a pattern dedicated to maintaining the purity of Catholic tradition as it had been practiced prior to 1949, when the Chinese government severed its political connections to the Vatican and disallowed Chinese Catholic interaction with the Holy See. This meant, among other things, opposing Vatican II Catholicism along with any modernization tendencies suggested by the Patriotic Catholic Church. In addition, their experience of Catholicism was largely formed by clandestine organizational forms that emphasized rigid adherence to doctrine as well as personal piety and devotion over collective study, theological reflection, and community service.

Priests at Transfiguration regularly receive correspondence from the bishop of the Fuzhounese underground Catholic churches, written in Latin,
requesting assistance for certain parishioners on their way to America. The letters document the parishioners' home church, baptisms, and membership as well as instances of persecution, and ask Transfiguration's priests to help them apply for political asylum based on religious persecution. The U.S. State Department has allowed many Catholic asylum seekers to cite China's population-planning policies, especially the one-child-per-family policy, forced abortions, or sterilizations, as grounds for claiming religious persecution. In such instances, documentation from China authenticated by a U.S. Catholic parish can provide substantial support for an asylum application. Not all claims of religious persecution are legitimate, and Transfiguration is careful to avoid being drawn too far into these cases. But enough cases are accepted by the State Department that many Fuzhounese are encouraged to make this claim when arriving in the United States, or later if apprehended. Snakeheads in some cases advise their clients that if caught they should cite religious persecution based on the one-child-per-family policy as an abrogation of their Catholic faith.

The staff leadership of Transfiguration has made a number of attempts to accommodate the Fuzhounese and incorporate them into the larger parish. First, in 1992, they added a Mandarin-language mass on Sunday morning at nine o'clock to cater specifically to the Fuzhounese and to complement the English mass at 10:15 A.M. and the Cantonese mass at 11:30 A.M. Confronted with the rapidly expanding Fuzhounese population, and without a priest who could conduct masses in Fuzhou dialect, Transfiguration introduced a Mandarin mass as the best alternative. The Fuzhounese responded positively to the use of Mandarin, which has emerged as a lingua franca among Chinatown's Chinese population, as a sign that Transfiguration would make room for them alongside the Cantonese and English-speaking congregations already present in the parish.

Also in 1992, Transfiguration launched the Ren Ai Society, a fellowship specifically for the Fuzhounese. Through this the church leadership has attempted to acculturate its Fuzhounese members to life in a modern Catholic parish. Bylaws were drawn up with a mission statement and organizational structure. Officers were elected. Members were encouraged to participate as liturgists, ushers, and choir members. Monthly meetings of the Ren Ai Society were held to mobilize members for retreats, spiritual formation, and service to the congregation. But attendance is sporadic and meetings chaotic. Only one officer has been willing to serve on the parish council (which is almost entirely Chinese of Cantonese descent). The newly formed Ren Ai Society youth group has no interaction with the church's other youth group made up of English-speaking Cantonese. Language is an admitted barrier. But so are class distinctions and Fuzhounese adherence to familiar patterns from home. Cantonese members see Fuzhounese congregants as largely uneducated and uncultured. Carrying the parish's financial burden and managing its organizational affairs, the Cantonese find it difficult to cross over class lines with these coarse immigrant laborers. Fuzhounese, for their part, feel marginalized and treated as second-class citizens within their own parish as the class divisions of the Chinese enclave are mirrored in Transfiguration's congregational structure and interpersonal relations.

Fuzhounese seem most comfortable replicating familiar customs and rituals brought from China. Each Sunday before the Mandarin mass, they gather in the sanctuary to pray and say the rosary. Annually before the Christmas midnight mass, more than one hundred come to pray together, using the Fuzhounese dialect. Each year after the special mass for Chinese New Year, Fuzhounese stay to make a special veneration to Mary, which they call bai shengmu, directly translated as "worship the Holy Mother."

The veneration of Mary is of great significance to the Fuzhounese Catholic immigrants and is the impetus for one of the major innovations at Transfiguration in recent years. At their request, Transfiguration has initiated an annual public procession in honor of the Feast of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven in mid-August. The procession, similar to clandestine processions in China, was proposed by parishioners from a village outside Changle where this had been practiced, albeit quietly in the evening or even just inside the walls of the church. Every year since 1996, Transfiguration members remove the large statue of Mary from the sanctuary and carry it through Chinatown, particularly in areas now inhabited by Fuzhounese.

Catholic tradition teaches that after her death, Mary was assumed into heaven, body and soul. This official church dogma was declared by Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950, at the urging of lay Catholics throughout the church. The feast day is celebrated on August 15 of each year. (In China this is in close proximity to one of the major Buddhist celebrations for the goddess of mercy, Guan Yin.) As one parishioner said, "If we could have these processions in China where there is such persecution, why can't we have them here in America where there is freedom?" Transfiguration leaders have attempted to expand the procession to include the parish's Cantonese members and even other congregations, but it is still primarily Fuzhounese who lend support. In fact, Fuzhounese Catholics
return to Chinatown from across the tri-state area to participate in this special act of devotion imported from their hometowns and villages around Fuzhou.

St. Joseph's Church

A second Fuzhounese Catholic congregation has formed at the nearby St. Joseph's Church as a result of a split within the Transfiguration Fuzhounese group. Tension between Fuzhounese immigrants related to the underground churches and those from the Patriotic Association in China had been present from the beginning of the Transfiguration Fuzhounese group. Conflict escalated in 1996. Maryknoll's national organization formally hosted approximately forty seminarians and young priests from the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association under the auspices of the Program for Formation of Chinese Seminary Professors and Students sponsored by the U.S. Catholic Council of Bishops. Maryknoll had been encouraged to help Catholic priests wherever possible to leave China for further Catholic education and training, but the only ones who could legally depart were those associated with the Patriotic Association. In the United States, Maryknoll arranged for their support in dioceses across the country while they engaged in theological training.

With the full backing of the New York Catholic hierarchy, including Cardinal O'Connor, nine of the seminarians and young pastors studied at the New York Diocese's St. Joseph's Seminary in the Dunwoodie section of Yonkers. Later they came to Transfiguration to intern. Some of the Fuzhounese were highly critical because they felt that these seminarians and young priests, as members of the Patriotic Church, were not in obedience to the Holy Father and so should not be trained in their diocese or their church. The priests, they believed, had not been legally ordained and so should not be serving communion or presiding over other rites of the church. Some also questioned why only seminarians from the Patriotic Church were being trained and none from the underground church. A number of the older Chinese priests were adamant in believing that taking communion from these illicit priests was a sin. A group of Fuzhounese Catholics most ardently supportive of the underground Chinese church, encouraged by several Chinese priests, broke off from Transfiguration and moved several blocks away to St. Joseph's Church.

St. Joseph's was founded in 1904 by the Missionaries of St. Charles, a community of priests and brothers formed in Italy in 1887 to care for the vast numbers of Italian immigrants then flooding to the United States. Today the parish is still primarily Italian although the surrounding neighborhood is becoming predominantly Chinese. A small Chinese congregation, mostly Cantonese, has been in existence for just over twenty years. St. Joseph's runs a parochial school serving over 250 students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade and has added a Sunday afternoon service at three o'clock to accommodate the new Fuzhounese congregants. A mainland Chinese priest from the underground Catholic church in Beijing has settled in St. Joseph's parish to work with the Fuzhounese after a term of nearly two years at Transfiguration.

In an interview in 1999, two key lay leaders of the breakaway group expressed fears for their safety even here in New York because of the presence of agents of the Chinese Communist government and its Religious Affairs Bureau. Nevertheless, they were continuing their work in support of China's persecuted but loyal underground Catholic church. At the time, a video of the destruction of unregistered Catholic churches in Changle (see chapter 4) was being circulated among St. Joseph's Fuzhounese members, and relief funds were solicited. Members also circulated a petition urging the Chinese government to cease the harassment and persecution of Catholics and the destruction of their institutions. Several members who had achieved status as U.S. citizens were considering returning to Changle and Fuzhou to present the petition to government and religious authorities in an attempt to bring pressure for religious freedom from overseas Chinese compatriots.

Conclusion

The stories of the four congregations considered here and the two congregations to be discussed in chapter 6 stand as testimonies to Fuzhounese immigrants' ingenuity and determination to create social forms for expressing religious and cultural beliefs in the face of oppressive economic conditions and largely undocumented immigration status. These religious communities are central networks for survival, both material and emotional. As religious sites they enable people to establish a boundary-crossing identity in a hostile environment where they have no local status—indeed, to articulate alternative identities that contest the hegemonic and oppressive U.S. economic, legal, and cultural environment. Immigrants thereby locate their experiences in larger structures of meaning in which their religious traditions
play an anchoring role. As we shall see again with the Fuzhounese Protestant churches, this research also shows, however, the fragility of these networks and the difficulty of sustaining newly emerging institutions in competition with and at times subject to the flows and vagaries of the international labor market, not to mention problems in China and conflicts in the United States.

"Come unto Me All Ye That Labor and Are Heavy Laden"

Building Fuzhounese Protestant Churches in New York’s Chinatown

“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!” says Rev. Chen as he plunges a young woman under the water. She arises gasping, startled, crying from the experience. She steps out of the pool drenched and, braced by church members, staggers back to the dressing room, the water cascading from her soaked robes and hair onto the marble floor of the old bathhouse-turned-church on Allen Street, cleansed spiritually as generations have been cleansed physically in that space.

The church is jam packed, even more than usual. It is Easter Sunday, and family, friends, and the congregation fill every inch of space with their curiosity. The sanctuary is standing-room-only. The foyer, the upstairs social hall, the downstairs classrooms are all full. Closed-circuit televisions beam the service into each room. The crowds spill out the front doors and into the street.

Fifty mostly young Fuzhounese fill the front rows of the sanctuary at the Church of Grace waiting their turn for immersion into the faith. One by one they file into specially constructed dressing rooms beside the altar where they shed their street clothes and don long white robes. Assisted by members of the Board of Deacons, they step into the pool, socks and all. As one young convert explained her experience:

*My parents are Buddhists, Deeply Buddhist. When I left for America they started burning incense for me and praying for me every morning. And not just to one god, but to many. When my brother made it successfully to Japan, my family gave several thousand yuan to the temple.*