

“Spiritual Pursuits” in Singing

Identity Making of the Chinese Education Diaspora

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the days that have been spent and the days that are yet to come.

Abstract

Since the last century, a striking impact that globalization has had on education is the increasing exodus of students and scholars from the global south to the global north to study and stay, which is termed as “education diasporas” in this study. From the 1980s onward, the overstayed Chinese students and scholars overseas have grown into the largest and most fast-growing education diasporas globally. However, the facts and logics of their diasporic daily practices remain vague in the existing scholarship.

Compelled by an ethnographer’s curiosity about how the diasporic Chinese make sense of their daily practices, particularly in the public sphere, and how that indicates their sense of being and belonging, I selected a Chinese chorus (“CC” for acronym) in the United States as a case to exemplify the post-1980s Chinese education diaspora. Around three-years’ deep “hanging out” in the field, along with a number of interviews and documents collected from the informants, enabled me to reveal their identity making centering on “spiritual pursuits” that the education diaspora featured.

I went back and forth between the emic and the etic perspectives in presenting the study, in the form of a tapestry interweaving the insiders’ narratives: “something is missing”, “dragging”, “circles”, “*renqing*”, “stage”, “dilemmas”, “community”, “solidarity”, “re-charging”, “re-rooting”, “home”. The overarching theme of “spiritual pursuits” indicates the peculiarity of the education-motivated and well-educated diasporic population in the fast-changing transnational contexts. The logics of their diasporic self-making, as was discovered in the study, encompassed an identity loss due to uprootedness, and imperative needs for self-making by means of social interactions, collective endeavors, and “spiritual pursuits”. In CC’s case, people were brought together by the stage, the music, the interconnectedness, the memories of home, and the eagerness to “unite”, which were constantly and contestedly negotiated in-between the past and the present, “here” and “there”.

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Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| ACFROC | The All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese |
| APC | annual production concert of CC (and other artistic Chinese groups in this study) |
| CC | the Chinese chorus under study, pseudonym is used for confidentiality purposes |
| CCTV | Chinese Central Television |
| CGPRCC | the Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Chicago |
| GRE | Graduate Record Examinations |
| IRB | Institutional Review Board |
| MC | Master of Ceremonies |
| PRC | The People's Republic of China |
| WWII | The Second World War |

As humans, our lives are easily uprooted,

We drift like dust on field lanes.

Separated, and twisted in the winds,

We are no longer our original selves.

Re-settling in the ground, we develop brotherhood,

Does it matter that we are not related in blood?

.....

————— *Yuanming Tao's poem (Jin Dynasty, China)*

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the study

In 2008, I came to the United States to study at the College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota. Hence I became one of the millions of Chinese students who went abroad to study. As a woman at my thirties and a former university instructor, who worked on a Ph.D. degree while being tens of thousands of miles away from my family and friends, and living on a lean income, my life in the following years, was full of uncertainties and confusions. Specialized in the field of international and comparative education, I had been keenly intrigued by issues concerning Chinese students overseas. My personal experience above greatly strengthened this curiosity. But my research interest meandered from the “global mobility of Chinese students” to “Chinese transnational educational policies and programs”, and finally became targeted at the population who went abroad to study and stay, which I termed as the “Chinese education diaspora” in this research. I will provide more detailed illustration of this term in the following chapters.

The reason why my interest gradually shifted from what happened in school to what happened outside schools was, I found that the thinking, choices, and practices in one’s daily life, and how one makes meanings of his/her lived experience more interesting to explore than what made him/her a successful student. A course that I took at the university, *Education and Globalization: From Anthropological Perspectives*, triggered my thinking of the underlying local and global forces for such issues and the identities of the transnational subjects.

More importantly, compared to those well-known hubs of the Chinese diaspora in California and New York, the rarely studied Midwestern situation remains poorly understood yet intriguing. The state where I conducted my fieldwork, in particular, happens to be an emerging settlement favored by the new “education diaspora” due to its benevolent immigration policies and long-standing history of hosting Chinese students. It

seemed to me that placing my field of research in the Midwestern United States, a relatively emerging and marginal settlement for Chinese subjects, would very likely be more interesting than in the much better studied and better known California and New York. Selecting the Chinese chorus for penetration into the ethnography as a “prism” was a perfect coincidence.

In 2010, I learned about this chorus and joined it for potential research purpose, thanks to a friend’s information about the group. In the months that followed, CC struck me not only because it manifested a rich case study, but also because it constituted a highly representative sample to reflect the larger group of “education diaspora” from mainland. First, it was primarily made up of first-generation Chinese students or scholars who settled in the United States within the past three decades; therefore, it exemplified the new Chinese diaspora that I intended to study. Second, choruses have been proliferating in the Chinese diaspora in recent years, but have been rarely studied. I have not found any literature or official statistics addressing this phenomenon, but I have learned through personal visits, networking, interviews and the internet that it has been common for choruses to appear in cities with a considerable Chinese population. A sojourning parent, having lived in several cities across the United States with his/her son, noted in his/her web blog: “Wherever there are Chinese, most likely there exists a Chinese chorus”¹. The purpose of the study was to explore how CC’s participants form and reform their identities through their engagement in the chorus, and how does this indicate the larger issue of “Chinese education diaspora” that they stand for? My research questions included: Why do people engage in such activities? How do they build relationships? How do they make sense of their engagement? What are meaningful for them, how and why?

Harvard scholar Tambiah (2000) argues that diaspora studies are the most cutting edge social science research, as there has been huge growth in diasporas around the world

¹ <http://www.yyjs123.cn/Article/200705/2908.html>

resulting from forced or voluntary reasons. The theoretical significance of this study lies in the following aspects. 1) This is a study that specifically addresses the Chinese “education diaspora” and a “thick description” of the new Chinese diaspora in the not so thoroughly examined Midwestern area of the United States. 2) In linking leisure, voluntary association and cultural dynamics of the Chinese diaspora, it adds to the scholarship an important perspective to explore the Chinese diaspora. 3) By advocating the diaspora as subjects who are enacting agency in identity negotiation and community building, this study draws on resources from cultural studies and critical perspectives. Rather than ignoring conflicts or reducing conflicts to something merely negative, this study regards conflicts are inherent in the power relations, in which the subjects are being-made and self-making. The practical significance of this study lies in two aspects: 1) It demonstrates to the middle-class professionals in the new Chinese diaspora an updated picture of the power relations in the fields of their practice of identity negotiation, so that they can enact their agency more consciously. 2) For governments in the United States and China, both national and local, this study help them to understand the Chinese diaspora group’s consciousness, endeavors and possible impact of identity negotiation and community development, as well as the forces that underpin all these, so that they can come up with and implement policies in a more informed way.

1.2 Illustration of key concepts

Diaspora

As a consequence of globalization, the transnational movements of people around the globe have become increasingly diversified since the 1960s. Thus, the concept of “migration”, which depicts the permanent, unidirectional, and onetime movement of people from one country to another (Ma and Cartier, 2003), became inadequate in capturing the new trend. In response to this theoretical challenge, the notion of “diaspora” soon gained popularity among scholars.

Originally, “diaspora” referred to the exile of the Jews from their historic homeland and their dispersion throughout many lands. The concept evolved so enormously in the past decades that scholars have applied it any population that resides outside its home country. Fearing that the term has been extended too broadly, Safran (1991) proposes several criteria to conceptualize “diaspora”, including the dispersal from an original “center” to two or more “peripheral” regions; the feeling of alienation and insulation from the host societies; maintenance of a collective memory or myth about their homeland, commitment, and hope to return to it eventually.

In fact, many of the groups traditionally regarded as diasporas fulfill only a few of Safran’s criteria. Thus, Cohen (1996) presents a modified version of these criteria in order to be able to include all the groups he uses as exemplary cases. Likewise, Clifford (1994) argues that Safran’s normative definition is too strict, and does not take into account all those instances that can be called a diaspora. He argues, for example, that there does not necessarily have to be any center for the diaspora, nor do all members of a diaspora necessarily want to return “home”.

One can roughly distinguish four different ways of using the concept. Firstly, the concept has been regarded as useful in describing the geographical displacement and/or deterritorialisation of identities in the contemporary world. Secondly, as Vertovec (2009) argues, there is a discussion where the meaning of diaspora is largely considered to be a “mode of cultural production”. Thirdly, the concept of diaspora has also been used among scholars who emphasize the political dimension of contemporary diasporas. Within the tradition of diaspora studies, several authors have developed elaborate typologies of diasporas and have compared similarities and differences of various diaspora communities. Cohen’s book *Global Diasporas* (1997) has extended previous definitions of diaspora in order to include victim, trade, labor, imperial and cultural diasporas, and he provides detailed examples in order to illustrate his typology. Steve Vertovec (1997) distinguished three categories of meaning of diaspora as social form, type of consciousness, and mode of cultural production. Gonzalez (1989) distinguishes

diasporas from other patterns of migration in that diasporas include a full cross-section of community members who are dispersed to many diverse regions of the world, and who nevertheless retain a myth of their uniqueness and an interest in their homeland. Sokefeld (2006) emphasizes on the power relations regarding diaspora by pointing out that diaspora is not simply a “given” of migrants’ existence that is in itself permanent but has to be effected time and again by agents who employ a variety of mobilizing practices, though discourses that accompany such practices generally construct diaspora communities in essentialist terms.

Regardless of the disputes among diaspora researchers, my take on the definition includes: 1) they have scattered settlements in different parts of the world, which may demonstrate similarities or correlations in some ways transnationally; 2) not necessarily hoping to return to their homeland, they maintain connections with their homeland in economic, social, cultural or political perspectives anyway; 3) no matter why and how they leave their homeland to enter another country, particularly when many contemporary diasporas take place voluntarily, they are regarded as subjects of their diaspora journeys, rather than passive objects; 4) with rich dynamism within the diaspora and with the larger society, they are perceived by the host society with a collective image, and in return, they exert influence on the host society in some sense.

New Chinese Diaspora

The earliest Chinese diaspora in the world took place several centuries ago, when a large number of southern Chinese moved to various places in Southeast Asia and resettled there. The Chinese diaspora in the United States dates back to the Gold Rush in the 19th century, when a great many Chinese from the two southern provinces of Fujian and Guangdong were attracted to California and the American West either under the credit-ticket system or as contract laborers commonly known as “coolies”. Characterized by poor educational background, financial status, and language proficiency, the early diaspora were denied the right to citizenship and other rights such as landownership. The common experience of rejection, marginalization, discrimination and oppression by host

societies drove them to cluster in Chinatown enclaves for shelter and safety. With little or no contact with the mainstream society, as well as little connection with their families back home, they were stuck in an isolated island. Neither could they move up in the host society, nor could they move back to their homeland, even though a majority of them considered themselves as only sojourning in the American society.

However, history has witnessed fundamental changes in the Chinese diaspora in the United States since the 1960s, specifically after the 1965 Act was issued, which established a preference system favoring skilled workers. In a sense, the 1965 Act set up a foundation for the emergence of the “new” Chinese diaspora. Some scholars have noticed that the new Chinese diaspora is characterized by better education background and hence higher language proficiency, professional occupation and better financial well being, and more varied places of origin from all over China (Lu, 2001; Ma and Cartier, 2003; Min, 1995; Wong, 1982; Zhou, 2001). Many Chinese came first as students and then adjusted to permanent status upon receiving graduate degrees and finding employment in professional fields. A great majority of the new diaspora have bypassed the urban ghetto Chinatown and settled in ethnically mixed suburbs, known as “ethnoburbs” (Li, 1998, 1999; Zhou, 2008). The ethnoburbs have grown rapidly in the last two decades, and have surpassed Chinatown as the preeminent residential, economic, and cultural site in the new diaspora.

In contrast to their Chinatown predecessors who were despised and rejected by the mainstream society, the new Chinese diaspora is treated rather distinctly. Along with some other Asian diasporas, the new Chinese diaspora is regarded by part of the mainstream society as a “model minority” (Osajima, 1988). Researchers have also noticed the increasing transnationalism in the new diaspora, both with their homeland (Ong, 1993, 1999, 2008) and with Chinese diaspora in other parts of the world (Liu, 1998).

Identity

Within the functionalist framework, conventional Chinese diaspora research discusses the identity in terms of “Chinese-ness”, “American-ness” or the addition of the two (Yang, 1998, 1999, 2001). Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) argue that group identity is maintained through “ethno-linguistic vitality”. According to them, diaspora members maintain their cultural or ethnic identity by demonstrating loyalty to their language. People believe that this situation has perpetuated the stereotypes of Asians, for example, as “culturally inassimilable”, “forever foreigners”, and “strangers from a different shore” (Takaki, 1989; Tuan, 1998; Zinmeister, 1987).

Seeing from post-structural, post-colonial, cultural studies paradigms, the “Chinese-ness” or “American-ness” arguments unjustifiably reduce identity to some fixed, rigid, unchangeable product while ignoring its complexity and fluidity (Hall, 2003; Chow, 1998). Collier and Thomas (1988) define cultural identity as “identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has shared systems of symbols and meanings as well as norms or rules for conduct” (p. 113). They further argue that cultural identity is dynamic and created through communication and symbolic interaction. In their view, a person can have multiple identities; however, a particular cultural identity may become salient in a given encounter.

According to the social identity theory, an individual identifies with a certain group because of emotional ties and perceived value significance to his or her group membership. The salience of group identity is reinforced as an individual gains psychological comfort, self-enhancement, and a sense of pride through communal and communicative activities among members of the groups. Ting-Toomey (1993) posits that the salience of one’s identity is enacted and negotiated through the process of communication. In her words, “Effective identity negotiation refers to the smooth coordination between interactants concerning salient identity issues, and the process of engaging in responsive identity conformation and positive identity enhancement”(p.73).

In his ground-breaking work, Stuart Hall (2003) argues that cultural identity is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being”, which undergoes constant transformation. Far from

being eternally fixed in the past, it is subject to the interplay of history, culture and power. As Hall remarks, the fact that race is not a valid scientific category does not undermine its symbolic and social effectuality. The same could be said about Chinese-ness. What highlighting the constructed nature of categories and classificatory systems does, however, is shift “the focus of theoretical attention from the categories ‘in themselves’ as repositories of cultural meaning to the process of cultural classification itself.” (p. 302) Hall (1996) linked development of cultural identity with diaspora characterized by cultural diversity, fluidity, and transformation that many immigrant groups have experienced. This critical perspective on identity formation challenges the essential view of ethnic/cultural identity as solely based on membership, questions the discursive practice of otherness and dichotomized thinking, and sheds light on viewing identity as fluid, multiple, and ever-changing. Hall points out that the danger of such essentialism and internalization is the reduction of cultural identity to group membership and to a fixed concept. He argues, “Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves” (p. 4).

According to this critical framework, the development of one’s cultural identity is not through assimilation or absorption of the dominant culture, but by the articulation and celebration of one’s cultural values and practices either as an alternative to the dominant culture or as resistance to the influence of the dominant group. In modifying her own position on identity theories, Collier (1998) calls for researchers to engage in dialogues with the marginalized group members and report their real-life experiences through ethnographic and phenomenological approaches.

Community

“Community development” is based upon a philosophy which emphasizes competencies and helping people to become subjects instead of objects, acting upon their situation instead of reacting to it (Christenson, et al, 1989). According to them, the aim of

community development is to (a) stimulate local initiative by involving people in community participation, specifically the process of social and economic change, (b) build channels of communication that promote solidarity, and (c) improve the social, economic, and cultural well-being of community residents. While a variety of strategies and approaches exist under the umbrella of community development, citizen participation is perhaps the approach that is most familiar in fields such as leisure, health and planning. Though a study on non-diaspora, it sheds light on my study in the sense that it indicates that one of the most important benefit of community-based leisure activities is the development of community that evolved from people's involvement. The authors also highlighted the "social relationships developed" and people feel they are more connected to their community" through their leisure involvement.

Sokefeld (2006) thinks the conceptual shortcomings of diaspora derive in many aspects from unspoken and rather cozy connotations of the concept of "community". The notion of community has been regarded with considerable analytical distrust in social anthropology. It has been emphasized that, analytically speaking, a category of people must not be mistaken for a community and that one needs to question the social grounding of actors' invocations of community. Hence, network analysis, for instance, was developed as a method for ascertaining actual social relationships beneath and beyond the assumption of community. Sokefeld is very insightful to point out that community is not a social reality but a discursive construction, which, however, is meant to further the establishment of social unity.

Finally, my study draws on the approach Cohen (1997) uses to categorize diasporas. Transcending the conventional framework of identifying diasporas by places of origin and settlement, Cohen creatively, yet significantly, categorizes diasporas by how and why they are formed, for example, victim diasporas, trade diasporas, labor diasporas, imperial diasporas and cultural diasporas. Notwithstanding his vagueness in defining those diasporas and the lack of an in-depth investigation of the cultural identities, Cohen's categorization of diasporas is illuminating for the reason that different causes of diasporas

are likely to generate distinct social forms, types of consciousness, and modes of cultural production. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that a diaspora attracted by and equipped with diplomas perceive themselves, their lives and the host society in the same way as a diaspora driven by gold and labor, even though they both come from China and reside in the United States. Therefore, I create the term “education diaspora” in this study, not only to describe the surging phenomenon of Chinese students who “study and stay”, but more importantly, to underscore the imperativeness of distinguishing them in terms of how they account for their past and envision their lives and how they act and interact in diaspora, which are largely conditioned by why and how they were formed.

1.3 Summary of chapters

In chapter one, I call attention to a rising phenomenon, the “education diaspora”, influenced by China’s dramatic economic, political, social, and educational changes consequent to domestic policy changes, which has characterized the Chinese diaspora since the 1980s and is compelling to be addressed by thorough examination. In chapter two, I lay out the background of this study by discussing the historical, social, and institutional contexts related to the education diaspora in China and the United States. I review the literature that addresses overall diaspora identities and diasporic voluntary associations that shed light on my study. I propose to reconceptualize the Chinese diaspora with a theoretical framework composed of liminality, symbolism, and transnationalism. In chapter three, I explain how my study was guided by ethnography and symbolic interactionism, how the fieldwork was carried out, and how the theorization was done.

Beginning with chapter four, I present the research findings and implications. In chapter four, I trace the diasporic journey of the Chinese participants from China to a Midwestern state in the United States. I highlight the social and cultural disorientation, i.e., the identity “lost” of the diasporic Chinese resulting from their diasporic journey. I delineated how imperative it was for the Chinese subjects to create a group of their own. In chapter five, I document a CC member’s wedding, and I call attention to the social

interactions of the participants which were highly blended with their engagement in the chorus, including a ubiquitous “dragging” strategy to draw people into the groups, thereby building mutual obligatory indebtedness (*renqing*) and circles. Such social practice demonstrated the intersubjectivity in reconstructing diasporic social orders, which featured horizontal structures among individuals, circles, and associations in the Chinese community, and were found to condition the social interaction of the participants. Chapter six examines how the annual production concert (APC) of CC gained utmost priority in the group, and how it became a “trading place” for the reimbursement and conversion of symbolic capital. Interestingly enough, APC tickets, which signified and facilitated the exchange of symbolic capital, became a symbolic “voucher” that circulated in the community and knitted the social ties among individuals. In chapter seven, I examine CC’s music making in liminality. First of all, how CC created a ritualized space in public to exhibit, celebrate, and communicate meanings exemplified by the rich metaphors and symbols in the music. Secondly, how CC’s music making was gauged by four contested “rulers” and what dilemmas CC were encountered with. In particular, how “red music”, a thematic music style in socialist China, aroused people’s resonance as well as uneasiness. In chapter eight, I further the discussion with an in-depth investigation of the making and re-making of a diasporic “Chinese community” through examination of two critical incidents with wide community involvement: a disaster relief campaign and WWII commemoration, both with CC being an active advocate. Particularly, I call attention to the intrinsically paradoxical “solidarity” of the diasporic Chinese and the difficulty of achieving it. In chapter nine, I position the analysis of transnationality in an increasingly globalizing era and accentuate the association between “re-rooting” here and “recharging” there, and how a “foreign land turned into a home” in diaspora.

Chapter 2 Contextualization of the Research

2.1 The historical contexts

In 1979, the Chinese government launched a series of economic reforms and open door policies, aiming to reinvigorate an economy left stagnant by the ten-year Cultural Revolution. Emphasizing the development of education along with national economic development, the Chinese government sent a large number of students and scholars to study in the United States and in other industrialized countries (Tsang, 2000). Mirroring the outflow of intellectuals from the global south to the global north, about one million Chinese scholars went overseas between 1978 and 2006, but less than thirty percent returned, most of whom were government-sponsored visiting scholars who had little opportunity to find permanent employment abroad. However, a significant number of Chinese were able to shift their visa status as a result of President Bush's executive order concerning immigration issued in April 1990, which benefited Chinese students who were affected by the Tian'anmen Square incident. According to Zweig et al (2008), it is only in recent years that the "study and stay" phenomenon has become even more prominent.

In 1992, the Chinese government adopted an overseas education policy called "Supports going abroad, encourages coming back, free coming and going" (*zhi chi liu xue, gu li hui guo, lai qu zi you*), aimed at boosting the internationalization of Chinese intellectuals, but more importantly to maintain healthy connections with those remaining overseas. Additionally, the Chinese government has made an effort to strengthen cultural ties with the diasporic Chinese communities around the world. The All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC) has been placed in charge of maintaining and strengthening transnational connections between overseas Chinese and China by working with Chinese associations in global diasporas in order to organize transnational cultural events. "Affection Ties: A Cultural China" (*qin qing zhong hua*) that started in 2008, a series of regular delegations of Chinese artists sent to perform for or with overseas

Chinese in populated Chinese diasporic settlements around the world, has developed into a notable program of ACFROC. The Chinese diaspora located in the midwest state is under the supervision of the Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Chicago (CGPRCC), which coordinates with the diasporic Chinese as the representative of Chinese authority. Serving as a portal to boost Sino-US communication and collaboration in the midwestern United States, the CGPRCC has been actively involved in transnational, cultural, and economic activities in this regard. It has sent delegates to attend cultural events, such as APCs or Spring Festival celebrations organized by grassroots diasporic associations.

In addition, the “education diaspora” formed and developed in a critical historical era with fundamental changes locally in the home and host societies as well as globally. Regrettably, however, this population has mostly been studied for its significance to the national development of China as capital or human capital, in the “brain drain” and “brain gain” discourse (Zweig et al, 2008; Tsang, 2000; Liu, 1998). Despite the demographic features of this population, including being better educated, better employed, and better paid, little is known regarding their lived experience as social beings; for example, what they care about and feel unhappy about, how they engage in their everyday lives, how they perceive their lives outside their homeland and why they perceive their lives in this way, and so forth. However, their way of engaging in everyday practice and their perceptions of their identities are different from those of their earlier counterparts, due to their distinct educational background, as well as the remarkably changing historical and social context in which their life histories are situated.

2.2 The theoretical contexts: Chinese diasporas and diasporic associations

The rise of globalization in the second half of last century gave rise to increasingly massive, recurrent and diversified movements of people across national borders, which

instigated enormous interest from scholars, and consequently the unparalleled popularity of “diaspora studies” decades ago. As transnational human mobility gathered momentum from globalization and took on an unprecedented new look, the concept of “migration”, which depicts the permanent, unidirectional, and onetime movement of people from one country to another, became inadequate to capture the new trend (Ma & Cartier, 2003). The shift in public discourse from “migration” to “diaspora” not only demonstrates the rise of a global phenomenon, but also marks a watershed in scholarly and public thinking, despite the ambiguity and dissonance in defining “diaspora”. Originally, “diaspora” referred to the exile of the Jews from their historic homeland and their dispersion throughout many lands. The concept expanded so immensely in the past decades that it began to refer to almost any population outside its home country.

The second line of argument that sheds light on my study is the notion that diaspora is not simply as a population residing away from the home country, but is a social form, a type of consciousness, and a mode of cultural production (Vertovec, 2009). Thus I believe that diaspora studies should give centrality to the deterritorialization of identities, rather than the geographical displacement. Stuart Hall (1996) is insightful in maintaining that we should not think of identity as an accomplished fact, but an always ongoing process of production. More discerningly, Stuart Hall (2003) points out that cultural identity is a matter of “becoming” rather than “being”. For Hall, identity is not something eternally fixed in the past. On the contrary, it is subject to the interplay of history, culture and power. Disdaining race as a valid scientific category that weakens the symbolic and social effectuality of identity, Hall argues, “Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being” .

Migration has been one of the themes of modern and contemporary Chinese history, people being driven to seek survival and livelihood during times of war and poverty. The early history of the Chinese diaspora in the United States has proven to be an experience of suffering due to being poverty stricken and long-term exclusion from the host society (Lee & Mock, 1996; Lee, 2003). The situation began to change in late the 1960s with the

launching of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (commonly known as the 1965 Act). Also, there has been a major shift in the American society's attitude towards the Chinese diaspora, moving from exclusion to assimilation to multiculturalism. The shift corresponds to the evolution of the immigration policy of the United States, beginning with the notorious Chinese Exclusion Act issued in 1882 and the anti-Chinese laws that followed it; then the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943; and later, the 1965 Act that welcomed high-skilled professionals to citizenship. In response to these changes, the Chinese diaspora has moved from resistance and isolation to a proactive approach to integrate with the mainstream society. In recent years, the Chinese diaspora has even been labeled a "model minority" by American media, implying a greatly enhanced social status in American society.

First is the debate about the "homeland myth". Tanno and Gonzalez (1989) suggest that people in diaspora retain a myth of their uniqueness and an interest in their homeland. Safran (1991) further argues that the feeling of alienation and insulation from the host societies results in maintenance of a collective memory, and a myth about and a commitment to the homeland, as well as a hope to return to it eventually. Their arguments are questioned by Clifford (1994) who maintains that there does not necessarily have to be a center for the diasporas, nor do all members of a diaspora necessarily want to return "home". The alteration in this discourse, I assume, implies historical changes as are echoed by the early Chinese diaspora holding the dream of "fallen leaves returning to the root" (*luo ye gui gen*), but the more recent Chinese diaspora strives to "settle and re-root in a new land" (*luo di sheng gen*) (Wang, 1991). According to the participants in my study, they maintained an emotional connection with China (as they phrased it, "the land and the people"), but they denied the obligation to be loyal to the Chinese regime. As a matter of fact, "China is where I came from, my cultural roots grew there, but here (the United States) is my home", in an interview said Ling, a long-term CC member who came to the United States in the 1990s and received a Ph.D. degree in linguistics.

Compared to overall diaspora studies and the more thoroughly investigated African diasporas, the scholarship on the Chinese diaspora has not yet fully developed. A paradigm dominant in Chinese diaspora scholarship is characterized by the “Chinese-ness” or “American-ness” dichotomy (Yang, 1998). The main arguments following this line of thinking include the delineation of “Chinese-ness” as negative, inferior and to be rejected while “American-ness” is positive and desirable. The dichotomy is also signified by either an expectation of the diasporic subjects’ loyalty to China or by their adaptability in assimilating to the American “mainstream society” (Painter et al, 2004). To discuss the hybridity of diasporic identity, some scholars even describe it as a combination of “Chinese-ness” and “American-ness” (Ang, 1993). Their dichotomized thinking has received wide criticism, mainly in that it wrongly reduces cultural identities to some fixed, rigid, unchangeable product while ignoring its complexity and fluidity (Chow, 1998; Hall, 2003). Also, as noted by Alba and Nee (1997), even what the “American mainstream” stands for is very questionable, for it is not fixed but constantly changing and expanding to include more non-mainstream groups as time goes by. A more insightful criticism of the “Chinese-ness” postulation is from Chow (1993), who argues, “the submission to consanguinity means the surrender of agency”(230). The fiction of racial belonging would imply a reductionist interpretation that constructs the subjects as passively and lineally pre-determined by blood, not as an active historical agents whose subjectivity is continuously shaped through their engagement within multiple, complex, and contradictory social relations.

An approach that addresses the more recent high-skilled Chinese diaspora is the “brain drain” or “brain gain” argument. Underpinned by the “center-periphery” world system theories and the “push-pull” model, a number of public discourses equate the diaspora with the loss of the human capital of China as a developing country (Zweig et al, 2008). Noticing the Chinese administration’s changing policies towards overseas intellectuals and their increasing connection with China through frequent short-term visits, research collaborations or business investments, some scholars (Zweig et al, 2008; Welch, 1997;

Welch and Zhang, 1995) suggest that the overseas Chinese intellectuals are actually a stock of overseas human capital, due to their contribution to the national development of China. Similar to the dichotomy postulation, the “brain drain or brain gain” perspective is also problematic, because the underlying conventional “nation-state” configuration prevents the scholars from recognizing the subjectivity of diasporic subjects, who are in fact objectified as mobile capital rather than being regarded as social beings. Worse yet, both of these two approaches unjustifiably address the diasporic subjects with a monolithic assumption, or, attributing to them a collective character, while neglecting the individualities.

A third stream of Chinese diaspora literature examines the impact of settlements or institutions on identities. Ma and Cartier (2003) depict Chinatowns as enclaves where the early diaspora clustered for shelter and safety in times of rejection and oppression, which nurtured traditional lifestyles even as it functioned as a defensive response to the larger society. In contrast, a great number of more recent members of the Chinese diaspora in California have settled in ethnically mixed suburbs, or “ethnoburbs”, which have grown rapidly in the last two decades (Li, 1998; 1999). Besides settlements, voluntary associations of the Chinese diaspora began to gain scholarly attention, possibly inspired by Safran’s (1991) summary of diasporic institutions and their roles in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage. Somewhat aligned with Safran’s summary, church, language school, and media were identified as “three pillars” in the Chinese diaspora with their roles largely expanded (Li, 1999; Yang, 1999; Lu, 2001; Zhou & Cai, 2002; Zhou & Kim, 2006). For instance, besides transmitting the Chinese language and culture to the second-generation, Chinese schools are found to be social opportunities for parents to relax and seek affinity (Lu, 2001; Zhou et al, 2008).

In addition to the “three pillars”, voluntary associations have also been examined to discover what role they play in facilitating the diaspora. The prototype of voluntary associations in the Chinese diaspora is “*huiguan*” prominent in Chinatown, which provides housing, credit, information and companionship (Ng, 1992). *Huiguan* has been

found to bind members together into a “moral community”, in which members share a sense of duty and obligation (Liu, 2000; Zhou & Kim, 2006). However, it remains unclear how such a sense of duty and obligation is formed. Since the dawn of the new century, newer forms of voluntary organizations, known as *shetuan*, began to blossom. Alumni associations of prestigious Chinese universities and regional fellowship associations (*tong xiang hui*) are such examples. Conclusions regarding the effects of diasporic voluntary associations seem to be similar: to affect public policies and to promote integration into the host society (Kuo, 1977; Hu-DeHart, 2006). Some researchers summarize the effect of the associations as paradoxical, on the one hand, they empower identity negotiation; on the other hand, they strengthen ethnic stereotypes (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Li (1999) describes them as a “wall” that accentuates the we-group feeling and differentiates their members from outsiders, as well as a “bridge” to the wider society. By the same token, researchers find performance art or venues of performance such as theater (Fan, 2010) and dance (Wilcox, 2011) effective in consolidating ethnic identities. Insightful in various ways, however, the diasporic settlement or institution studies are conceptually disturbing. Their stress on how associations affect diasporic individuals’ identity negotiation in “negative” or “positive” ways, implies that they are still confined to the “Chinese-ness versus American-ness” or integration versus alienation dichotomy, though somewhat more implicitly. There is a danger in linking identities to primordial understandings of ethnicity by ancestry, and neglecting the agency of diasporic subjects. By emphasizing the role of associations, scholars have perhaps asked the wrong question in the first place by focusing on how structure works upon the agency of individuals. After all, little is known about how and why associations are founded. I believe that, without examining how individuals engage in the groups, or without listening to the insiders about how they make sense of their engagement, drawing such hasty judgemental conclusions about how groups affect individuals seems a bit abrupt and unconvincing.

Ong (1999) captures the latest trend of wealthy entrepreneurs, following the global mobility of capital and striving to obtain multiple passports for the convenience of frequent transnational movements. Borrowing Appadurai's (1996) articulation of "cultural globalization", Ong makes an in-depth analysis of the identity-making of the Chinese diaspora under the interplay of the neo-liberal market and a series of governmentalities in the changing global context. Ong insightfully conceptualizes "transnationality" as a paradigm of self-making, which certainly provides a valuable corrective to the rigid thinking of nation-state and the negligence of human subjectivity. Some fifteen years ago when her work was done, however, her arguments might make good sense, as the Chinese were unprecedentedly stimulated to seek economic prosperity with the economic reformation in China. For the "education diaspora" in my study, however, the story appears different, because in the first place, the motivation for their going abroad appear to be different. Additionally, their employment in corporations or institutions as professionals obviously renders a very distinct vision of life and way of living. Moreover, Ong's definition of transnationality as transnational physical movements appears a bit narrow. The imaginary and multiple "scapes" that Appadurai (1996) articulates actually infer that transnationality is not confined to physical movements, but can possibly be rooted in everyday practice under global influences.

The large number of post-1980s Chinese students who settle down after their study in the host countries are termed the "new diaspora" in Chinese public discourses and diaspora scholarship (Zhao, 2000; Zhang, 2001; Liu & Wu, 2014), together with emigrated business investors, high-skilled professionals, and reunited families, to distinguish from the earlier gold miners and illegal immigrants (Liu, 1998). However, the "education diaspora" as an independent group received little scholarly attention.

Statistics provided by the US 2010 Census showed that over half of the foreign-born Chinese resided in California and New York. California had the largest number of Chinese immigrants (498,815 or 31.8 percent of the Chinese-born population) in 2008, followed by New York (349,133, or 22.2 percent), Texas (69,402, or 4.4 percent),

Massachusetts (68,626, or 4.4 percent), New Jersey (60,431, or 3.8 percent), and Illinois (53,502, or 3.4 percent). The education Chinese diaspora, as a consequence of the “study and stay” tide, stood out with their remarkable educational backgrounds. A report released by the Migration Policy Institute shows that nearly half of Chinese foreign-born adults had a bachelor's degree or higher. In terms of their academic achievement, Chinese immigrants were better educated than other immigrants and native-born Americans. In 2008, 45.7 percent of Chinese-born adults aged 25 and older had a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 27.1 percent of all 31.9 million foreign-born adults and 27.8 percent of all 168.1 million native-born adults. An additional 12.6 percent had some college education or an associate's degree compared to 16.4 percent of all immigrant adults and 30.8 percent of all native-born adults.²

2.3 The conceptual framework

To overcome the prominent methodological and theoretical limitations in existent Chinese diaspora studies, characterized by a reductionistic, fixed and monolithic thinking, this study takes on the challenge of addressing the heterogeneity and complexity of their identity negotiation. An essential problem with this approach is that it ignores the diasporic subjectivity and “debilitates” the subjects in their meaning making and identity construction. Hall (2003) disdains these conceptions and asserts diasporic identities as “becoming” rather than “being”, which fortifies the centrality of subjectivity in diaspora studies. Transgressing the entrenched paradigm of Chinese diaspora studies, Ong (1992; 1999) is probably one of the earliest and few scholars who gives attention to subjectivity in examining the Chinese diaspora. Ong captures the flexibility of wealthy Chinese entrepreneurs in being unleashed from nation-state confinement, equipped by capital and driven to seek more capital, thereby forming a “global community” that is characterized by identities which she defined as “transnationality”. Ong’s conceptualization is insightful and illuminating, however, it does not correspond to the “education diaspora” in my study, whose background, motivation and diasporic approach

²<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/chinese-immigrants-united-states-0#2>

is rather distinct from the “business diaspora” that Ong studied some fifteen years ago. Ong’s interpretation of transnationality as transnational physical and capital movements is flawed, as illuminated by Appadurai’ (1996) articulation concerning the imaginary and multiple “scapes”, inferring that transnationality should not be confined to physical movements, but can be rooted in everyday practice under global influences. Ong also fails to explicitly elaborate how the diasporic identities, or, “cultural politics” as what Ong calls them, are constructed in relation to how the diasporic subjects perceive themselves, how they are perceived by others, and how they construct a community by building relationships with one another, as well as with the two countries. Without all these, her postulation of the transnational community appears vague and ungrounded.

Another problem inherent in the troubled reductionist thinking about the Chinese diaspora is the decontextualization of diasporic subjects and failure to consider the conditioning factors of structures. With such an awareness, I draw on Bourdieu’s (1967) concept of “habitus”, i.e., social structures are internalized in the social actors as enduring (though mutable) dispositions, which generate and organize their social practices and representations oriented towards practical functions. “Habitus” is powerful in that it captures diasporic identity construction as an ongoing process by the diasporic subjects consciously and constantly interacting with social structures. Ong’s theoretical limitation partly lies in her approach to subjectivity, or “self-making” by analyzing the diasporic identities, however, I find that identities are not only subjectively constructed, but also intersubjectively constructed. The centrality of intersubjectivity in identity construction mainly lies in construction of meanings through interactions, communication and the constitution of communities (Schutz, 1967). In other words, subjectivity concerns individual agency interplaying with structure, while intersubjectivity is “fundamentally social and collective, and must be negotiated” (Sawyer, 2003: 9). Inspired by the “liminality” that Bhabha (1994) argues concerning diaspora as “in-betweenness” of “here-there”, “past- present”, and drawing on this conceptualization, I base my study on three interplaying analytical dimensions: past – present, here – there,

and individual – collective, which are manifested and entwined in the daily practice and meaning making discovered in my fieldwork. Within this framework, my examination of diasporic identity construction centers on an investigation of the multi-layered interactions between diasporic individuals, groups, communities, and societies, and how meanings are perceptually and conceptually negotiated through these interactions.

Creatively borrowing the term “liminality” from anthropology, a post-colonialist diaspora scholar Homi Bhabha (1994) succeeds in capturing the “in-betweenness” feature of diaspora, and discerns the tension of diaspora identity negotiated in-between history and present everyday life, between homeland and host culture, or in his words, “past and present”, “here and there”. For Bhabha, the diaspora is defined as a liminal space: “the interstitial space where fixed identification boundaries and binarisms are blurred, to negotiate ethnic subjectivities which are ‘neither the One... nor the Other’... but something else besides” (28). The insight of Bhabha’s theoretical approach not only illuminates studies of the colonized and deprived diasporas, but also provides valuable insight into diaspora studies in general. More and more diaspora scholars began to follow Bhabha’s path to explore the “in-betweenness” of diaspora (Dayal, 1996; Mitchell, 1997; Meerwald, 2002; Chan, 2012).

To further my discussion and position it in the globalizing context, I draw on the notion of transnationalism, mainly because CC’s music making is in essence a “localized” transnational practice, including, for example, seeking orthodox and inspiration and utilizing resources from China. Above all, the practice of making music here (in diaspora) about life there (in China) and sometimes inferring life here (in the Midwestern United States), is by itself a manifestation of transnationality. Among others, Appadurai (2000) has pointed to the tensions in globalization, comprising both flows (of capital, labor, information and imagery) and disjunctures, including between the local and the global. Seductive media images from abroad may conjure up aspirations for lifestyles, or forms of modernity, which cannot be satisfied locally. It is necessary for me to clarify that my use of “transnationality” is not so much about physical transnational movements

chasing the flow of capital, as Ong (1999) has asserted, but more about mental or emotional transnational connections that have cultural significance to the diasporic subjects. In an era characterized by well-developed telecommunication and global media, in particular, this transnationality is epitomized in the case of CC. As a localized association in diaspora, its practice is no less transnational than that of the “flexible citizens” (wealthy entrepreneurs who hold multiple passports and travel frequently back and forth across national borders) in Ong’s configuration, in that it constructs meanings by pulsating with transformations that span across national borders. In this sense, the practice of singing in diaspora is a means of re-rooting. Based on the above critical review of the literature and on my own reconfiguration, I propose to analyze CC’s practice from social, symbolic, and transnational perspectives by stressing the interplay of individual and collective, past and present, here and there, as manifested in the following figure.

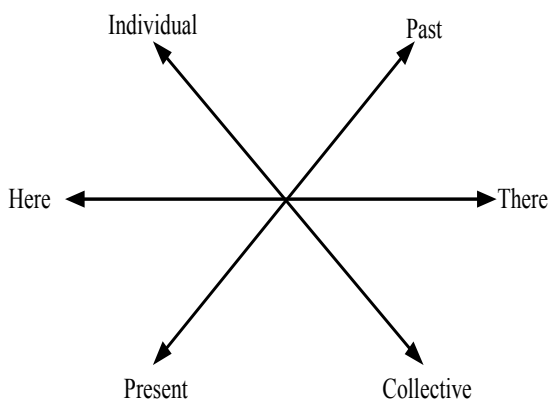


Figure 1 Three analytical dimensions: Human, time, and space

2.4 An overview of CC and the field

CC was founded in the early 1990s as a student association attached to a local public university. It became a non-profit organization four years after it was founded, and was

then able to apply for grants from foundations that promote multicultural diversity and to receive private and institutional donations.

Except for the artistic directors and conductors who were hired by CC, all the CC members were amateur singers who participated in the singing and served the group as volunteers. Most of CC members fell into the category of the education diaspora and they came from all over mainland. Over one-third of CC members were couples. Twenty percent of them had been in the chorus for over twenty years; about forty percent of the members had been in CC for ten to twenty years. A vast majority of the CC members share very similar backgrounds, in terms of age, education, occupation, immigration experience, and so forth. Most of the members are proficiently bilingual in Mandarin Chinese and English. A majority of CC participants had obtained US citizenship, while a small number of them either debated about the necessity of having citizenship or simply maintaining permanent residency, or were in the process of applying for citizenship.

CC is a mixed chorus with about 70 percent of its members female. When it was first started, it was more inclined to unison rather than choral singing. Several CC participants who had been in the group for a long time said that, “The quality of our music was not good (in early years), mostly unison singing, we didn’t do much choral singing...but now we can sing much better”. Over 80 percent of its repertoire over the years was adapted from Chinese solo songs; but with its current conductor, who had been a well-accomplished composer in China, CC began to develop its own repertoire, created by the conductor. “We should have our own repertoire, original Chinese songs that nobody else has sung. CC won’t eat food that others have bitten...”, repeated by the conductor in motivating speeches directed to the group.

CC’s budget had varied over the years. Generally speaking, half was from grants they had applied for from local artistic boards that aimed at promoting multiculturalism in the local community, and half was from ticket income of APCs and donations from local Chinese individuals and businesses. Its expenditures had been divided into three parts: renting locations for regular singing rehearsals and APC performances; paying for the

conductor and the artistic director, as well as outside musicians who were invited to perform at its APCs; and purchasing food and updating equipment.

In 2002, it began to produce APCs annually, which has developed into significant cultural events in the local Chinese community. CC has also been involved in other cultural events in the Chinese community, such as the annual Chinese New Year celebration. In 2008, after the devastating “5.12” earthquake took place in China, CC organized a charity donation program and a disaster relief concert in collaboration with about forty other Chinese organizations. APC, the annual choral and dance mixed concert of CC, consists of a mixed chorus including all the chorus members as well as some small group or individual performances divided about half and half. For the purpose of attracting a larger audience, CC had invited outside musicians for more variety and some “new faces”. However, this had incurred heated debates and conflict within the group, because it was deemed selling valuable stage resources to outsiders. Having introduced ticket-selling for the APCs in 2002, CC had reached an increasing audience consisting of a majority of Chinese (about 80 to 90 percent) and an increasing Americans contingent. Its APCs in the years 2006 to 2008 were reportedly attracted more than 6,000 audience members (more than 1,500 each).³



Figure 2 CC’s debut at the Spring Festival celebration in 1991

³According to CC’s grant proposal in 2010



Figure 3 CC's own first APC performance in 2002

As estimated by of CC leaders whom I interviewed, nearly 80 percent of APC tickets were sold (or given for free) by its members, mostly to their friends who came to support them. Around 10 percent of the tickets were VIP tickets given to donors (or distinguished guests, such as officials from the Chicago Consulate) as an acknowledgement of their support. Less than 10 percent of the tickets were sold through public channels. For example, people learned about the APCs by seeing advertisements in newspapers or posters and bought tickets, without knowing or supporting anybody in the groups. A bi-weekly local Chinese newspaper with a circulation of over 10,000 across the Midwestern states, which had been actively involved in reporting and advertising local diasporic Chinese institutions, was a main channel for CC to promote itself. Advertisements of CC's APCs were also distributed through a listserv of other Chinese organizations that maintained friendly relationships with CC.

The ambassador from the Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Chicago, as the representative of Chinese authority in the Midwestern region of the United States, was invited and was present at several of CC's APCs. In his letters of congratulation to CC, the ambassador recognized CC as an important Chinese artistic organization in the Midwestern United States, and encouraged it to contribute further to Sino-US intercultural communication. Over the past years, CC had maintained consistent collaborative partnerships with other Chinese artistic groups in the local community, as

they invited each other to perform at their own APCs or to co-perform at various events in the local Chinese community. Meanwhile, CC had maintained communication and with artists and artistic groups in China for its music making. It had represented the local Chinese community by co-performing with several visiting artistic delegations sent by the Chinese government.

The Midwestern state where CC is located not only received a fast growing population of Chinese immigrants in past decades, but also became increasingly multicultural as a habitat of immigrants from Africa and other parts of Asia. The growth of the Chinese diaspora in the locale of my study was consistent with the tendency of the Chinese diaspora in the United States in general. The 2010 US Census showed that the total Chinese population in this Midwest state was more than 20,000. The demographics of this population were remarkable in several aspects: they had a higher proportion of higher education degrees than the national average (63.5 % vs. 48 %), and their median family income was also higher than the national median income (\$63,897 vs. \$60,058). The majority of them (59.6%) were professionals, most commonly employed in computer science, education, life/physical/social sciences, healthcare, and technical fields.

With the dramatic rise of the Chinese population, voluntary associations also burgeoned in the past years in the Midwest state where this research was done. When my fieldwork was conducted, there were more than forty associations organized by the Chinese, including various language schools, leisure groups, professional associations, regional fellowships, alumni associations, online communities, and so forth. These associations have maintained close interactions with each other. They have co-organized a variety of notable events in the community. The most well-known included the Chinese New Year's celebrations, and a disaster relief charity concert held in response to the severely devastating "5.12" earthquake that took place in Sichuan Province in China. Despite the amicable collaboration, there always were some big or small conflicts during the communal efforts, as was found during my fieldwork.

Before the mainlanders came, the locale had been inhabited by Taiwanese groups. CC series started the growth of mainlander associations in the 1990s. With the growing population from mainland China, institutions of mainlanders burgeoned and diversified, ranging from regional fellowship associations to alumni associations of prestigious universities in China, from professional associations (such as medical practitioners, Internet Technology practitioners, and so forth) to senior centers, local Chinese newspapers and weekend Chinese schools. The blossoming mainlanders group began to coexist with the Taiwanese groups. As a matter of fact, mainlander institutions seemed to be more prosperous with a faster growing population than those of the Taiwanese, and they gradually formed their own community that was independent of the Taiwanese. Some participants thought that mainlanders were becoming more dominant than the Taiwanese, but I did not know how true that was. J. Chou, once in an informal interview, mentioned that, “Decades ago, CEEE⁴ was like the administration of the Western Zhou Dynasty (with dominating supremacy); the Chinese community today resembles the Spring and Autumn Period (featured by enduring chaos)”⁵.

One thing the associations had in common was that they were all multi-functional, with “to socialize” as a primary purpose, no matter what the main goal of an association was. All the participants in my study admitted that to know people and to make friends was one of their main motivations for involvement in the groups. Admittedly, engagement in associations was not the only way to enlarge one’s social network, but surely a very important one for the diasporic subjects. For those committed participants, such engagement was built into their lives. L. Chang, for example, a founding member of CC and the longest president of CC (for over eight years) had a strong commitment to it, “I’ve been in CC for over 20 years; half of my friends here are made through CC... It’s a part of my life, it’s my baby...” After a few years’ break from CC when his job and

⁴This is a pseudonym of a biggest and oldest Taiwanese group in the field of my study.

⁵The Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 to 771 BC), was a period in ancient China when the royal families had dominating supremacy; While the Spring and Autumn Period (approximately from 771 to 476 BC), was a period when the patriarchal clan system begins to falter and political order falls into disarray.

family obligations became demanding, he went back to CC when it was in crisis. In 2000, CC had fewer than five members due to the high mobility of members and the difficulty in recruiting new ones, making it impossible for four-part chorus singing. L. Chang found H. Yao, the founding president who had also been inactive in the group, and told her about the situation, “How could you bear this? A Taiwanese guy is taking charge of it, and there’re fewer than five people in it!” Then he went back to rescue the group by bringing in many friends.

Notwithstanding dedicated members, the mobility of members was high for reasons of: work relocation, increased workload or family obligations. As the years went by, some people developed new hobbies or interests and also became inactive in the group. But to a great extent, the maintenance of membership was related to interpersonal relationships. People came to join the group with friends or to make friends; they might quit if they did not succeed in making friends; they might also quit when their friends quit. In many cases that I learned about from my fieldwork, people left when they were not happy about some decisions that the group made, or they simply did not get along with some people in the group.

Over the years, reflecting the diversification of the general population of the mainlander Chinese, the members of CC came to diversify in many ways, such as by age, diasporic journey (a small portion of them came to the United States for international marriage), duration in the diaspora, and occupational background (a small number of them started their own businesses). However, as the population remained predominantly composed of the education diaspora, so were the demographics of CC. Despite a remarkable sharedness and unity in the early years, heterogeneity due to age differences and differing backgrounds led to increasingly diversified concerns of the members and to controversial group dynamics. The group identity of CC was largely defined by the core members, while constantly negotiated under various circumstances. Nevertheless, when the group dynamics were strengthened, they definitely conditioned group practice. Even though CC had a policy that it should be open to anyone who was interested, it inadvertently caused

exclusion for certain participants, especially after its shift to APC. In light of this, the “communitas” of equal rights, equal status and strong unity no longer existed, even though some old members reminisced about it:

Gradually, when the old members left and new members joined, the personal bond among members began to loosen, we no longer had the closeness, affinity, or unity as before...

All in all, the evolution of CC’s group dynamics demonstrated how collective forces were intersubjectively constructed through the everyday practice of individuals, and how those collective forces had further interplay with the individuals. In other words, during early stages in the diaspora, the “we-ness” was compatible with the “I-ness”, because of the intrinsic need for individuals to form a group for seeking commonality and sharedness; however, as time went by, the “we-ness” inevitably clashed with the “I-ness” at times. How the group dynamics were formed can only be illustrated through a more in-depth examination of the interactions of its members, in order to explore how interpersonal relationships were built and normalized, and how they became cohesive as well as disruptive forces that conditioned the practice of CC and its members.

Chapter 3 Methodologies and the Fieldwork

3.1 Research methodologies

This study is guided by ethnography and symbolic interactionism. Ethnography makes the study holistic and reflexive; symbolic interactionism sheds light on exploration of symbolic meanings of multilayered intersubjective interactions.

As advocated by diaspora scholars, ethnographic and phenomenological approaches are powerful by allowing engagement in dialogue with the research subjects and reporting their real-life experiences (Collier, 1998; Ong, 1999). Social behavior cannot be reduced to predictable “variables” along the lines of the natural sciences (Blumer, 1969). Ethnography concerns writing about people, regarding people as meaning-makers, emphasizing an understanding of how people interpret their worlds, and the need to understand the particular cultural worlds in which people live and which they both construct and utilize. With a “thick description”(Geertz, 1973) of the real-life experience of the “education diaspora”, I trace how the Chinese chorus CC was started in order to reduce solitude in the early years of diasporic life. I document how social relations are blended with their engagement in the voluntary associations such as CC, and thereby reconstruct social orders and power relations through such engagement. I also delineate how the APC gained priority for CC, and explore how meanings were created through participants’ dedicated preparation for the APC, and how those meanings in fact relate to their sense of being as diasporic Chinese. The ethnographic approach also allows me to investigate more deeply less tangible aspects of culture, what Geertz (1957) identifies “ethos”, such as values, worldviews and ideologies that affect their choices in everyday practice as well as their music making. Sometimes quite concerted, yet sometimes highly contested, the “ethos” significantly constructs their diasporic identities. By joining the members in their real-life practice and constantly dialoging with them about their perceptions, confusions, desires and emotions, I was by no means an objective authority present to make judgments. Instead, I respected their subjectivities, so that I could arrive

at this ethnography with understandings socially constructed between myself as a researcher and them as research subjects.

Symbolic interactionism stems from the teachings of Mead (1934), who emphasized the importance of interactions revolving around the process of individuals reaching a common understanding through language and other symbolic systems. Blumer (1969), who coined the term “symbolic interactionism”, developed it into a theoretical paradigm that has had far-reaching influence. Scholars have noticed the advantages of symbolic interactionism in investigating meanings and cultural identities (Blumer, 1969; Tanno & Gonzalez, 1998). According to Blumer, human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them; the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows; these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by one dealing with the things one encounters. These ideas provide powerful inspiration that has enabled me to go beyond the previous “wall or bridge” (Li, 1999) or “empowering but constraining” (Zhou & Kim, 2006) duality thinking about diasporic voluntary associations. On the contrary, my observation of the actors’ interactions from the micro level to the macro level lent insight into the meanings that they derived from their intricate and sometimes involuntary interactions. Such interactions were largely conditioned by the social orders that they had reconstructed. Following this paradigm CC as proved valuable in aiding me in theory building, because scrutinizing the interactions that happen in the field, obvious or subtle, explicit or implicit to the subjects, I always try to probe into the meanings and identity issues that are associated with them by asking “Why does this happen? What does it mean to them?” The questions are not only for my subjects, but also for myself as a researcher. Also enlightened by symbolic interactionism, I was able to discover that some local practices or norms, for instance, painstakingly “dragging” people to their groups, being exceptionally dedicated to “not profitable at all” things such as putting on APCs and painstakingly competing for stage opportunities, have unique yet un-ignorable meanings for the diasporic subjects, even though they might not make sense to outsiders

at all. In light of symbolic interactionism, CC is far more than just a voluntary association; nor is it merely a group of people. Instead, it is a space where abundant interactions take place and can be observed. Moreover, it is both an outcome and a “subject” of human agency to actively negotiate identities in the diasporic “here” and “present”, individually and collectively.

Description and interpretation go back and forth between individual and collective levels. The intertwined symbolic interactions are observed at four levels: individual – individual, for instance, how people develop reciprocity during the chorus engagement; individual – group, for instance, how people join, quit, devote themselves to, or support CC; group – group, for instance, how CC cooperates, competes, and interrelates with other groups; individual/ group – community and beyond, for instance, how the Chinese community is contrived and conceived through the engagement of diasporic individuals and groups.

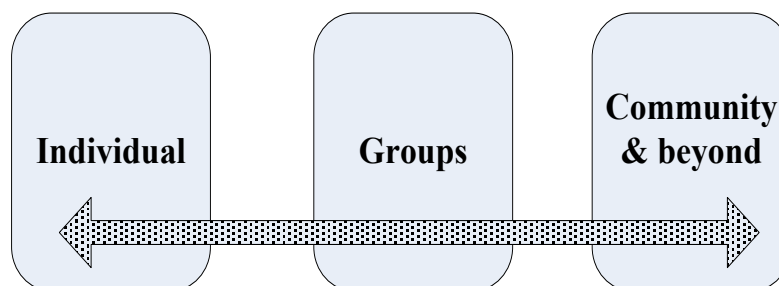


Figure 4 Layers of symbolic interactions to examine in the fieldwork

A potential danger in doing ethnography is to be entrapped by huge amounts of disconnected data (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001, Hammersley 1992) and thereby lose conceptual depth. Sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss’s (1967) articulated strategies and advocated developing theories from research grounded in data rather than deducting testable hypotheses from existing theories. Following Glaser and Strauss (1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987), I constructed my grounded theory by means of: simultaneous data collection and data analysis; analytic codes and categories drawn from data; theory development during each step of data collection and analysis; and memo-writing to elaborate categories. The notion of grounded theory encouraged me to collect data through a variety of methods, which blended to inform me of the interwoven

social relations and underlying meanings, because “all is data”. My research was not confined to interviews and participant observations, but I remained open to everything that came my way during the fieldwork. In retrospect, the data that I gleaned on unplanned occasions, such as lectures, group meetings, car-pooling conversations, and the wedding, turned out to be very informative and contributive to my theory building. My idea of building theory is in line with Glaser (1998), composed of an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses developed from empirical data. The process was like a spiral, which involved back and forth inductive and deductive thinking in formulating and verifying hypotheses. Validity “should be judged by fit, relevance, workability and modifiability” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser 1998).

Through the prolonged immersion in the field and reflection on what I have seen, heard, and participated in, the profile of the group and its setting are emerging. The fragments of the “puzzle” are being pieced together, though some remain unseen or scattered. Thereby, this design of research is tailored to the case. Having experienced for a period of time feeling that “everything is interesting” and “nothing is interesting”, now I have developed a good sense of what is important for my study. Throughout the pre-fieldwork, plenty of assumptions have been generated, tested, dismissed, or suspended. And those suspended will need to be made explicit and await further interrogation in the upcoming study.

----from memo, March 17, 2012

3.2 The Fieldwork and theorization

I began a preliminary study in late 2010, when CC was preparing for its APC that year. Thanks to the introduction of my friend, who was then the president of CC and became one of my key informants during my fieldwork, I paid my first visit to the field in October at the small Lutheran church they rented for weekly rehearsals. Since the show was less than a month away, the attendance at rehearsal was high (over forty people, almost eighty percent of the members), and so was the morale of the members. Besides plenty of laughter that I heard, I saw people very focused on choral practice. Asking me if I had been in a chorus before, X. Deng, the conductor, a nice, grey-haired typical musician-looking man at the age of around 70, assigned me to the soprano section and told me, “Soprano is easier (than alto) because you sing the melodies; alto is often too

hard for beginners.”⁶ The conductor seemed strict in the rehearsal, as he stopped a few times to correct mistakes that the singers made and patiently explained why he expected them to sing the way he asked. During the intermission, I was asked to introduce myself as a visitor. Then people welcomed me in a friendly way. They approached me and asked where I was from, where I was studying, with what major, and so on. And they earnestly encouraged me to join them in performing at their APC! When I declined, saying that I was not familiar enough with the songs, and it would be hard for me to sing well with only three rehearsals, they all insisted that it would not be a problem. “After all, it’s just for fun”. Knowing that I was a student, one of the board members asked me to bring my friends to the chorus and to watch their APC. “We’re in need of young people as new blood, just like you.” Anyway, even as an outsider, I could feel people’s animated enthusiasm and excitement about the upcoming APC. Then, before the rehearsal was ended, the conductor made a persuasive closing remark, urging people to practice more at home, and especially to memorize the lyrics:

We’ve prepared for a whole year, and now the APC is only three weeks away. Success is just around the corner. Let’s do our best to strive for it! Remember how you tackled the GRE (Graduate Record Examinations)⁷ vocabulary years ago? Do it for our APC! (some people began to laugh) Use every minute off work to memorize the lyrics, while doing the dishes, cooking, cleaning, walking, but of course don’t do it while driving (people all burst into laughter)...

I ended up joining CC and attending CC’s APC that year, as a result of their warm and steadfast encouragement, but also because I was curious to see how “fun” it could be. Once I paid my dues and agreed to sing onstage, they gave me three sets of uniforms for the stage performance, and the section leader of the sopranos immediately gave me ten APC tickets to sell. I was surprised and asked what that was for. She gave me a big smile

⁶This was interesting, because the number of people who were sopranos was more than double the number of altos. After talking with people sitting next to me, I learned that many people entered as sopranos and stayed, because this section sounded more mellifluous and was easier to follow. But later on during my fieldwork, I found out more important reasons why soprano was more popular with female members than alto: people were used to the “Chinese way of singing”, i.e., with a sharp high voice, and that it was easier for their voices to stand out from the group while singing soprano.

⁷GRE is a standardized test that is an admissions requirement for most graduate schools in the United States, which most of CC participants had taken for entering American graduate schools.

and assured me, “Take it easy, just sell as many as you can, but anyway, isn’t it nice to ask your friends to come and *pengchang* (watch your show and support you)?”

That was how I entered my field, starting more as a “participant” than an “observer”, which turned out to be valuable for me not only to familiarize myself with the group dynamics and its embeddedness in the community, but also to develop a good relationship with my informants. When I officially embarked on my dissertation project about a year later, with the approval of my dissertation committee and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of my university, I had almost become “one of them” (but not completely). I was nominated as a board member for that year, partly representing their trust in me, and partly because they hoped I could bring in more young people to the group, as what I was told by the president. Notwithstanding the belief that no researcher can be totally unbiased, I tried to maintain a necessary distance with my subjects and not to completely become one of them. So, acknowledging their generous trust, I declined the nomination to be a candidate, because I knew that I had to actively advocate for CC if I was elected. Even though I would have much easier access to data, especially some sensitive data, on the other hand, I would lose my valuable “outsider” perspective. Possibly even, such intimate engagement could act upon and alter the interactions that I intended to examine, and thereby divert my fieldwork in unwanted ways. After my research design was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I began to interview my informants, collecting documents from them, in addition to continuing the participant observation that I had been doing.

As for participant observation, I observed the settings, scenes, participants, and dynamics of their interactions. Participant observation of this study was carried out in four sites: CC’s APCs, CC’s other performances in the community, CC’s weekly/biweekly singing practice, CC’s other gatherings (such as annual summer camping trips and parties organized at CC members’ homes), a CC member’s wedding, and spring festival celebrations. Some unusual occasions turned out well for participant observation too, for instance, the grand wedding of the CC’s president that was attended by over 80 percent of

CC members as well as leaders of a variety of other voluntary organizations in the Chinese community. Asked by the groom to help at the wedding catering team, as we had come from the same region in China (*lao xiang*), I had an excellent opportunity to collect some valuable data that I could not have otherwise collected, such as access to the gift registry, the new couples' dilemma in arranging seats at the reception banquet, and people's varied perceptions of the wedding. These data both increased my understanding of the symbolic interactions in the field, and enabled me to verify assumptions resulting from existent data in order to formulate new assumptions.

Another part of participant observation that I sought out and found contributive was attendance at closed meetings of CC's executive artistic board, an expedient device of CC to leverage continuous conflicts, which arose as a result of the members' severe competition for stage opportunities. Having received favorable permission from the gatekeepers, (the presidents – two consecutive presidents during my field research), I audited the meetings and gained insights into how severe the competitions were, how internal power relations were negotiated, and how music selection was contested among the participants. Participant observation of regular circumstances, such as weekly/biweekly rehearsals normally lasted about three to four hours each time; but length of other circumstances varied, for example, CC's APCs normally took a whole day, the wedding took half a day and a couple of evenings (for preparation), the Spring Festival celebrations normally took half a day for each year.

In addition to participant observation, I had open-ended and semi-structured interviews with about 30 respondents, including CC members, leaders, donors, collaborative partners, and audience members. Interviews took one to two hours each, some conducted at the respondents' places of residence, some at my apartment, some in public places such as coffee shops or libraries, and some over the telephone or on Skype, depending on the availability and preference of the interviewees. Some interviewees, especially the key informants, I interviewed more than once in order to follow up or to verify. I recorded about 70 percent of the interviews, for which I received permission to do so. For the

recorded interviews, I tried to transcribe immediately after I finished, when memories were still fresh. Some interviewees were concerned about confidentiality and were not willing to be recorded, so I had to take notes during interviews and write them up as soon as possible to ensure that I remembered the details. People's response to my interview requests were quite bifurcated: a majority were very willing to share their stories and opinions, while a few of them seemed to a bit over-guarded (especially about unavoidable sensitive topics such as conflicts) and turned me down. However, all interviewees were very cautious while talking about conflicts that they had heard of or they were involved in. Most often they would remind me: "You should focus your writing on more positive things, about what CC has done and what people have done. This (conflict) is not the point..." For a very long period of time, I struggled with including "conflicts" in the themes for data coding, but when it repeatedly happened that I was reproached by the subjects for bringing it up during conversations, I realized the un-ignorable significance of "conflicts" for my subjects in negotiating their identities.

An advantage of document analysis is that it provides retrospective information about past events. Since CC has been in existence for over 20 years, it is critical to have a historical review of this group, how it had involved its participants and how it had evolved in the community over the years in terms of social practice and music making. Documents were very helpful in this regard. Documents that I collected mainly included CC internal email correspondence, journal articles, the group website, and APC programs, and photos and videos the participants had collected of its APCs up to the present. The APC verbal and non-verbal documents have revealed much information directly or indirectly. For instance, the two symbols of "home" and "redness" were consistently displayed in the APC repertoire and program design, which turned out to be integral to their identity negotiation as a diasporic group.

Knowing that I was interested in learning about CC and the "cultural life of Chinese", some people offered me clues that they thought I would be interested in. For example, when they went to parties or small group rehearsals for APCs, they asked me if I would

like to go with them. I also asked them to inform me when there were such activities. This worked out well during the early stages of my fieldwork when the investigation was more preliminary. Assuming that I was there to report CC's "success", they seemed happy to have a student wandering around to observe their "dedication and achievement". Yet many informants gave me "canned" answers that sounded impersonal and like the speech of government officials.

As my fieldwork went deeper, some themes began to emerge and my relationship with the subjects also underwent subtle changes. A good example was concerning "conflicts". During my interviews, the word "conflicts" was repeatedly mentioned by different informants, and it began to cause my attention. "How do they perceive conflicts? How do they solve conflicts? And how does that make sense to them?" I had a sense that "conflicts" might be a valuable theme in my study. However, when I attempted to probe into more details about the conflicts that happened among them, most informants would shun away, either by saying "Well, in general we're a harmonious group and have great solidarity. You should focus on the positive things. Those (conflicts) are just minor..." or by stressing the inappropriateness of disclosing internal fights by quoting a Chinese saying: "Domestic ugliness should be kept from outsiders" (*jia chou bu ke wai yang*). My persistence in probing into the conflicts made the informants cautious, and they became careful in our conversations or interviews. Not only did people hesitate to introduce others to me, but more than once, informants reminded me during or after interviews about confidentiality, especially about the "sensitive" parts. I was very frustrated and had to navigate extremely carefully. One day, a CC member, who was a candid and outgoing man, said to me, "You know what, people are kind of feeling like, they gotta be careful about that girl (me) who's fishing around for spicy news..."

Due to the difficulty of accessing more data and the challenge of relating "conflicts" to other themes that emerged at that point, more than once I thought about letting go of the idea of pursuing the theme of "conflict". Although this sensitivity about conflicts appeared to be an individual concern, it gained special significance when it repeatedly

arose in conversations or interviews with a number of informants. However, luckily, more data emerged to be related to it later. After several rounds of reconfiguration of the categories and themes that I had drawn out from the fieldwork, I eventually realized that conflict was an inevitable and ongoing process for the diasporic Chinese, in that it is intrinsic to their construction of social orders and embodies the ambiguity and complexity of their identities. Conflicts might be aggravated in the Chinese diaspora, due to the interplay of collectivism that is ingrained in them and that had a strong impact on their behavior, and the inner drive for individuality/personal identification as diasporic individuals. In light of this, conflicts are not due to the Chinese national character, nor are they “domestic ugliness”. In fact, they embody the complicated dilemma of their identity negotiation incurred by displacement and deeply rooted in their liminality, i.e. a contentious and somewhat “troubled” process in between the past and the present, “here” and “there”. In addition, they are an outcome of enduring dispositions, or a “habitus” negotiating itself in a new social, cultural and historical context.

In this study, triangulation of data gathered from multiple approaches was employed to enrich and capture the interrelatedness of data. In qualitative research, using multiple methods of data collection has a long history. “Triangulation of data is crucially important in naturalistic studies.... No single item of information (unless coming from an elite and unimpeachable source) should ever be given serious consideration unless it can be triangulated” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 283). Qualitative researchers strive to design studies that will not only give a multidimensional perspective of the phenomenon (Foster, 1997) but will also provide rich, unbiased data that can be interpreted with a comfortable degree of assurance (Breitmayer et al, 1993; Jick, 1979). One way to increase the validity, strength, and interpretative potential of a study, decrease investigator biases, and provide multiple perspectives is to use methods involving triangulation (Denzin, 1970).

I joined CC as a member in 2011; and from 2011 through 2012, I carried out a preliminary study. Through participant observation, and casual conversations and intentional interaction with the participants, I gradually identified the boundary of my

field, familiarized myself with the local contexts and people in the field, and knew the demographics, structures, membership and basic dynamics of the group. The major part of my fieldwork was done from 2012 to 2014, including interviews, document collection and more in-depth participant observation. Due to an international conference trip and accidental illness, my fieldwork slowed down for about half a year from June 2012 to February 2013. During that time, I began initial data analysis and coding, and mainly relied on emails and occasional telephone conversations and gatherings to maintain connection with the participants. The data collection mostly finished in mid-2014, by the time I had been continuing data coding and theming. The dissertation draft was finished in late 2014, and I finished revising it in 2015.

3.3 Me being a reflexive researcher

As a student from mainland China pursuing graduate study, I was advantageous to do the study in several ways: 1) I knew both the Chinese and English languages, and I knew both the Chinese culture and American culture, thus I could easily figure out the verbal and non-verbal messages from what they said. 2) My bicultural background, more importantly, enabled me to understand the nuances of terms that might mean differently, and the significance of such nuances. For example, as my fieldwork went on, the term “solidarity” occurred over and over again, as a sign of an etic theme that could be possibly important. To my surprise, when I brought this up to my American friends, they did not understand: “Solidarity? Solidarity for what?” Because in the American context, assumedly solidarity occurred only when there was something needed to be advocated or achieved. In other words, “solidarity” should have certain purposes. However, for my Chinese informants, the concern for “solidarity” automatically arose just because they were all Chinese. People repeatedly told me that, “as Chinese, we have to consolidate...”, “we should strengthen the solidarity of the Chinese”. When disagreements or disputes occurred, showing that “solidarity” was not ideally achieved, people were disappointed, frustrated, and felt “shameful”.

I was first confused by this difference, but after deliberation over this and more close observation of the occasions when the discourse of “solidarity” took place, I suddenly understood that the common eagerness for “solidarity” was so intrinsically associated with their identities of otherness in the American culture. When I triangulated this interpretation with the subjects, they told me that, “if we do not unite, the others (meaning the white American society) would look down upon us...” Taking account of the Chinese culture, Chinese people were taught “solidarity is power” since the revolutionary time, when the nation was in crisis and all people were called on to fight with the invaders unitedly.

I had been a member of an American speech club for a few years and was elected the president of the club for the final year. The club is a voluntary group of the so-called “mainstream society”, a well-established non-profit organization with 90 years’ history, large membership and branches all over the places. My involvement in the speech club and its different group dynamics with CC constantly drove me to deliberate on how they were different, and why they were different. Such awareness helped to hold me back from my own “Chinese thinking” that was inevitable for me, and made me jumped out of my “Chinese box” from time to time, to reflect on my observations of my Chinese subjects, their interpretations, and my interpretation of their interpretations.

One can hardly expect to statistically generalize from a single case study to the whole population of the Chinese diaspora, and even to the new Chinese diaspora, as the Chinese diaspora is such a heterogeneous group, and every specific community in the diaspora requires to be contextualized. The external validity of the study is also low, but it can contribute to deeper insights and analytic generalization (Yin, 2012). Another limitation of this study is the possible insider’s bias, in that I use myself as a primary research tool. However, being an insider of the group, it helps me to build trust with the other group members, to identify and access the key informants for data collection. When carrying out the study, I will be cautious and reflective of the possible bias. I will also use triangulation with existent literature and member check in order to diminish the bias.

Examining the chorus as an institution that uses vocal music may shed light on the identity negotiation of the Chinese diaspora because of the inherent correlation between music and identity. Third, the extraordinary enthusiasm of the chorus members indicated that their engagement in this leisure group transcended mere entertainment, but was significant in their sense making. Fourth, with its recent annual production concerts (APCs), the chorus has involved nearly two thousand people in the local Chinese community annually and has become deeply embedded in the community. Furthermore, the chorus members maintained a close connection with China in preparation for its APCs and for other purposes. As is stated in its mission statement, the chorus aims “to maintain and enhance the cultural heritage and identity of the Chinese community, to promote cultural exchange and understanding between people of different ethnic backgrounds, and to foster the development of cultural pluralism in American society”. Examining a chorus that has existed for over 20 years has enabled me to present a larger picture showing how the education diaspora negotiate their identities.

3.4 Key emic terms

- Chunwan* Spring Festival gala held and broadcast by Chinese Central Television (CCTV) started in the 1980s, which has developed into an icon for Spring Festival celebrations in China that has been copied nationwide and in Chinese diasporas
- Circle “*Quanzi*”, refers to a group of individuals who have shared values and interests and are tied together with relatively stable and constant reciprocity. Circles and *renqing* have long been linchpins in constructing social relations in Chinese society.
- Dragging to make a gentle request to others to do something
- Pengchang* variation of *renqing* in the case of APC, referring to people going to watch APC to show their support for certain performers

- Red flowers good solo singers, or those who repeatedly involved in *xiaojiemu* and had more stage exposure than ordinary CC members
- Red songs main genre of contemporary Chinese music, featuring sonorous timbre, strong melodies and rhythm, exuberant emotions, and grandiose themes extolling devoted love to “the people and the nation”
- Renqing* mutual obligatory indebtedness that can be borrowed, owed, deposited, and repaid between two individuals
- Spiritual pursuit This term has a different meaning from the definition of “spiritual” in the United States, which is associated with Christianity or religious faith. For the Chinese participants in my study, because most of them are atheists, it refers to a domain in their lives that transcends material and is independent of religious faith, which mainly includes civil or public engagement to fulfill self-value and be contributive others
- Xiaojiemu* a term for APC, referring to solos, duets, trios, quartets, and other small group singing that make the performers easily stand out from the large group

Chapter 4 The Uprootedness and Identity “Lost”

“You had multiple status and social position as well as huge networks in China. People knew who you were; but here, you know nobody. Also, nobody knows you, who you are, what you do, and they don’t care”.

4.1 “Something is missing”

In the globalizing era of 1980s, China’s “opening up” policies following decades of social upheaval and self-containment, enormously and even a bit dismayingly spurred a massive yearning for the outside world. The revival of the suspended national education system, consequent to the ten years’ Cultural Revolution, allowed for students and scholars to pursue anticipated dreams overseas. Remarkable transformations also took place in the economic domain, with the rise of market forces and decentralization of governmental control. In the 1980s two tides commenced in China: small business owners ventured fortunes in the market economy (*xia hai jing shang*), and intellectuals pursued degrees abroad (*chu guo liu xue*). The United States, among all the developed countries, attracted the most fervor and soon became the biggest of the receiving countries of Chinese students. At that time, opportunities for overseas study were highly competitive, and only those who were the most outstanding could obtain them. Some forerunners of the education diaspora had already become established in Chinese academia. S. Zuang, for example, was already a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the most distinguished research institute of the natural sciences in China; W. Bing was a leading scientist in a national laboratory affiliated with a renowned university. Regarded as the elite with promising futures such as decent jobs, good income, and advanced social status, those who succeeded in going abroad were greatly admired by their peers. For the diasporic subjects, in retrospect, their anticipation of the journey across the ocean was a mixture of hope and worry about an uncertain future. H. Yao, who enrolled in a graduate school in the Midwestern United States on a Chinese governmental grant in 1983, recalled her early diasporic experience:

I only had a little bit of a sense of pride when people congratulated me and showed their admiration prior to my departure; but I was mostly filled with heaviness and worries, worries about my husband and my newly-born daughter (left in China), and worries about life in the US that I knew nothing about...But during the ten years in exile in rural China (during the Cultural Revolution), I had been trained to be strong and down-to-earth...Before long, my husband succeeded in joining me to study for his degree...Accompanied with the uncertainties was fear, fear of losing another ten years. We've wasted way too much time; we always hoped to run faster and catch up...

For many early members of the education diaspora, becoming a stranger in a far away land was inadvertently related to “the exile” in their pre-diaspora lives (during the Cultural Revolution), due to feelings of similar alienation, disorientation, and anxiety. But “the exile” in diaspora was more voluntary and hopeful. Even though their “stay after study” was not necessarily planned but more or less prompted by the historical “Student Protection Act” consequent to the Tian’anmen Square Incident, an “American dream” was gradually formed.

Official statistics about the Chinese-born population in the early years were unclear, because most statistics combined mainlanders and Taiwanese. But according to multiple informants that have resided in the setting since the 1980s, there was only a tiny population of mainland Chinese and little social life for them when they, the earliest education diaspora, landed in the Midwestern state where my fieldwork was conducted. A woman who came for a post-doctoral position in biochemistry recalled in her interview that there were only one or two gatherings of mainlanders every year when she first arrived, such as camping and barbecue parties, with less than twenty participants. They were mostly recent alumni of a local university. “The circle (of mainlanders) was rather small...maybe there were more (people), but people were scattered around, and those were who I knew ...” As students, they were busy with schoolwork, and could participate in student activities and “hang out” with other Chinese students. However, when they began their jobs and move to the suburbs, the few Chinese friends that they had acquired were all scattered. In this Midwestern state, there were no visible Chinese settlements like Chinatowns or ethnoburbs, where the diasporic Chinese could make a public space and

socialize. Apparently, solitude and isolation became the primary features of their early lives in the diaspora, as was described by S. Wei, who relocated from another state with her husband after receiving her Ph.D. degree:

Our lives here were simple and lonely. We had no relatives to visit; all our relatives were in China. We didn't want to bother visiting friends, as we all lived far away, a 40-50 minutes' drive was just common. Actually, we didn't have any friend close enough for us to feel we had to drive so far to visit... it's like an isolated island...

Loneliness increased when their children grew up and left home for college, leaving the couples as the only company for each other. Therefore, making friends became an imperative need for the Chinese in diaspora, particularly as most of them worked in a white-dominant environment that did not allow them to make friends, despite their great effort in doing so. As indicated by a woman informant comparing her experience of interacting with Chinese and Americans, not being familiar with the cultural background or the topics of interest to them made it hard to participate in conversations with Americans, and to mingle with them. Thus feelings of alienation were prominent. It was a challenge for the Chinese to develop "real" friendships with Americans. According to W. Zhao, who reported having several American friends to "hang out with" and even was "buddy" with some of them, he still felt there was "an inexpressible distance":

They have their culture, we have ours. You're not clear about their social norms; sometimes you don't know how to respond or how to react...But as a Chinese, I know the Chinese pretty well: the way they talk, they behave and they interact, all the rules, explicit or implicit... I would never have a problem in dealing with Chinese.

After striving for a degree and doing strenuous part-time jobs to cover living costs, receiving a full-time permanent job offer marked a significant transition for them from Chinese students to diasporic Chinese, or, in their words, they "began to settle down". In general, transitioning from campus-area student apartments to homes in the suburbs took them approximately five to ten years. The processes of "settling down" were similar: securing a job and advancing in it, applying for residency and/or immigration status,

buying a house, rearing children and providing them with a good education. High expectations for their children's education appeared to be very common in the education diaspora, as they knew very well from their own experience the significance of education in bringing the possibilities for upward mobility (for them it was transnational mobility). As a matter of fact, quite a few of the second-generation went to Ivy League or other prestigious universities or colleges. This brought huge pride to their parents and became widely known throughout the community.

The "American dream" of the education diaspora, however, appeared to differ from that of "gold rushers" a century before despite the same stress to succeed and hard work. Just as the participants in my field work announced, "Besides a decent job, a good income and a big house, there should be something else". But what else had been there? The answer lies both in my scholarly quest and in their daily practice in the diaspora.

Although not outspoken, most diasporic Chinese in my fieldwork did imply a sense of "unfulfilled value" and a regrettable wish for greater achievement as foreigners in this country, even though they had accomplished a lot in their careers. Despite a comfortable life that most of them were leading, as an informant mentioned while we chatted:

After being here for a few years, we live a good life, we have a good job, a decent salary, well-behaved children, and a big house... But still, there's something missing...

Generally speaking, career advancement and material possessions did not seem to be the ultimate goal of the education diaspora, but were regarded as an indicator of "settling down". Understanding the difficulties of moving up to higher level in this multicultural yet "still white-dominant society", they seemed to have limited anticipation of upward social mobility, as indicated by J. Chou, who worked in a bank earning good salary. He had worked for a municipal government office in northern China prior to coming to the United States:

Had I stayed (in the office) for a couple more years, I would've got very good promotion, perhaps even have my own driver (a sign of high social status in China)... Now I'm having a bottleneck in my career... As non-native speakers, we are always very disadvantaged in language, communication and social

network... But we Chinese need a platform to show our talents. We need sense of achievement, by making contribution to the community, being recognized and needed...

4.2 To have “a group of our own”

A more fundamental challenge resulting from their diaspora journey worthy of notice was being severed from the social cultural systems that they had been familiar with and established in, along with the deprivation of the social orders to differentiate and interrelate them as social beings. As understood by S. Wei, a key informant of my study, who had been a professor (as well as had been her husband) at one of the most distinguished universities in China:

You had multiple status and social position as well as huge networks in China. People knew who you were; but here, you know nobody. Also, nobody knows you, who you are, what you do, and they don't care...

Indeed, the uprootedness from the Chinese society composed of a myriad of hierarchies and social ties resulted in their “liminality” (Turner, 1969), or, their loss of the “classifications that normally locate states and positions”. This disrupted their identities as social and cultural beings. In fact, anxiety about not being able to identify themselves and an eagerness to do so are prevalent with the diasporic subjects in my study, in latent or noticeable ways. They wanted to be “known” and to be “cared about”, through which they could identify themselves not only as “some Chinese”, but also “the Chinese so and so”. The ambiguity of “we-ness” and “I-ness” constantly arose and needed to be addressed in their daily practice.

Chinese society is characterized by a web of social relations (*guanxi*) intricately interwoven by obligatory indebtedness (*renqing*) and mutual favors (*mianzi*) (Hwang, 1997). In the Chinese system, social relationships are predestined by extended family ties such as kinship and affinity, as well as socially constructed through alumni connections, occupational connections, and so forth (Gold, et al, 2002). In light of this, the Chinese in the education diaspora, who mostly came with their nuclear family, were deprived of the preordained social relations and could only reconstruct social relations through

interpersonal interaction. Therefore, creation of a public space for such interactions became highly imperative.

Being in the diaspora also means the upheaval of ingrained cultural values and ideologies. With the tremendous influence of deep-rooted collectivism that was formed in revolutionary times and enormously strengthened through communist media and education system, the “Chinese nationality” embraced patriotism and loyalty to the nation, and a dedicated submission to the regime. But in the diaspora, China as a “nation” and the socialist regime no longer applied to them. What remained with them, as was disclosed by the participants, were complicated emotions about China, “we feel connected to the cultural roots, the land where we grew up, the people that we care about, and the memories; but not the Communist Party, the Chinese government or the Socialist regime”, according to Y. Tang. The nation-state framework that has dominated diaspora scholarship is inadequate in interpreting the diasporic identities, because the “nation” of China dissolves with their uprootedness. Likewise, the imbued collective identity of “Chinese nationality” (*zhong hua min zu*) on the basis of the same regime, social system, and cultural values becomes greatly disturbed and controversial. In this regard, China is not so much a geographic place or the corresponding nationality, but more of a cultural heritage and influence from which they draw resources for reconstructing their identities. Their nostalgia, arguably, stems not from an ingrained loyalty to the distant homeland, but from individual connections with their cultural roots and past memories, such as foods from their hometown, Chinese music, and the dynamics of interaction that they are accustomed to.

As prominent as the entrenched collectivism in Chinese society was an atheistic ideology, which had been imposed by the rulers in Chinese history and steadfastly ingrained by the Communist authorities. After coming to the United States with its prevailing Christian influence and practice, some Chinese converted to Christianity and found spiritual comfort and belongingness through religious practice and involvement in Christian communities.

But a majority of them remained atheists. In my fieldwork and pre-fieldwork, it appeared to me that the Chinese Christian communities were more prevalent in outer suburban areas, while the metropolitan areas seemed to be more populated with non-Christians, and the secular voluntary associations were more popular with city dwellers. Somehow, there seemed to be little interaction between the Christian Chinese community and the non-Christian Chinese community. Nonetheless, having a collective life and forming a community were evidently significant to the diasporic Chinese, and were repeatedly mentioned when they accounted for their everyday practice. The significance of church to Christians was mentioned by many respondents as analogous to the meaning of voluntary associations to them. As summarized by H. Yao, who was one of the founding members of CC:

It is very important for us to have a spiritual pursuit. We're not Christians and we don't go to church, so it (CC) is important for us. As Chinese, we need collectivism; we need a group that we feel we belong to.

To reduce solitude and isolation, the early members of the education diaspora sought to join some local Taiwanese voluntary associations such as singing and dance groups. Attracted to groups having the same language (mandarin) and a shared cultural heritage, however they underestimated the distinctions resulting from the different paths of the two societies in contemporary history and the long-lasting segregation policies of the two regimes. Also, a majority of the Taiwanese came to the diaspora many years earlier and were much older than they were. For many, participation in the Taiwanese groups did not bring the belongingness that they anticipated, but instead, they felt strongly excluded. In the interviews, L. Chang and H. Yao described their experience of being in the Taiwanese chorus:

In the Taiwanese group, I barely had empathy with them, because of the distinct cultural backgrounds and age gap... There was little common language between us. (L. Chang)

Their singing style was quite different from ours, and they were disgusted with my sharp high voice. Because I couldn't sing what I wanted to sing, I quit the group very unhappily. Then my husband suggested, "Why don't we just start a group of our own?" (H. Yao)

After they left the Taiwanese chorus, they started CC, “their own group”. Before long, a “CC” series of associations was started, including a children’s chorus, a Chinese school, a dance theater, a professional and engineering association, a book club, and a monthly newsletter, to meet the basic needs of their social lives. Literally, “CC” meant “Chinese residing in the Midwestern state”. As the earliest diasporic associations of mainlanders, the “CC” series of associations had cradled and witnessed the formation and growth of the mainlanders’ community. A review of CC rosters over the years shows that most “active players” in the Chinese community at the present time had been involved in CC for a longer or shorter period of time. Many of them started other associations after they left CC, some of them still maintained strong personal or institutional connections with CC. The intricate interrelatedness between CC and other associations caused it to be deeply embedded in the ever-growing Chinese community. This provided a valuable perspective for my fieldwork, but also made it more challenging. When I designed my study at the beginning, I intended to focus on CC only, as I was concerned about the “boundaries” of the study; but as my investigation went deeper, I found it impossible to do so. In some sense, the Chinese community without CC would be incomplete; a study of CC without the Chinese community would be like planting a plant without the soil.

For most CC participants, engaging in such a group seemed intrinsic to their diasporic experience, as they did not think themselves likely to be engaged had they not been in the diaspora, as was shared by S. Wei in an interview:

I remember before we came to the US, people asked if we were interested in joining a choir. But we were quite occupied then, had to take care of our kid, career, etc. And we thought all those (leisure activities) were a waste of time. We didn’t have that free time. In those days, people all focused on career and children. Children are a big hope, thus we ignored leisure and hobbies. But when we came abroad it became different, because we didn’t have many social activities, unlike in China, where you would have endless meetings to attend.

When CC was first started, it had only a few more than ten members. But as the only mainlander’s social and singing club, it gradually gained popularity and became well-known in the community. People gathered on weekends to sing Chinese songs and to

make friends with other mainlanders. It also served as a platform for people to exchange information and share concerns and experience about status, parenting, housing and so forth, as they strove to settle down. The buoyant atmosphere of CC gained it a nickname of “party group” from its members, indicating it was a casual, self-entertaining, fun-making social group, which was especially noticeable during its early years. As recalled by H. Yao, the founding president, in the interview:

At the beginning, our idea was simple, just to create a place for people to sing Chinese songs and to get together for fun, like a big “party”... We didn’t care much about music. We didn’t do much four-part chorus singing, but more unison. It (CC) was very self-entertaining, being happy was the point... people either came to sing, or came to “party”...

Positioning CC as a “party group” appeared to have been unanimous among its members. Even in later years, after CC shifted its focus to APC, whether and how to maintain it as a “party group” while emphasizing APC was a recurrent discussion among its members. When people talked about CC as a “party group”, they actually used the English word “party”. It was intriguing to see that they picked up that word as well as the value of “having fun” from American culture, and made it an integral part of their diasporic life and social practice. This is especially compelling when compared to the historical context of the conventional collectivist Chinese society, because “party” rarely appeared in the public discourse in China at that time, and only gained popularity in recent years under the impact of western consumerism and popular culture, which gradually replaced the pandemic solemnity formed during the Cultural Revolution.

In fact, quite a few CC members admitted that they were neither good at singing nor really fond of singing. W. Bing, for example, who called himself a “terrible singer and never in tune”, had been a very dedicated participant of CC for years. A few members joined CC because of their spouses, as they found it a good way to develop common hobbies and spend time with them. Several male members said that they began to be involved in the group as drivers for their wives, and “came to sing by chance”. Family, from a sociological perspective, is a semi-private and semi-public domain, and it plays a key role in bridging the diasporic Chinese individuals with the public. In most cases, a

friend of an individual diasporic Chinese person was most often a friend of that person's family, or in other words, the diasporic Chinese made more family friends than personal friends. This well illustrated the centrality of house parties for the subjects' further reciprocal interactions beyond the group settings, and showed how private domains (families) were linked to public domains (voluntary associations) through the intersubjective practices embedded in their daily lives.

In my interviews, multiple CC members recalled the early group dynamics as “a pure and joyful group”, people “all knew each other very well”; they were “very united”, and had “strong emotional ties and remarkable closeness”. In a word, it was a “highly cohesive group”. The unity and sharedness was well illustrated by F. Xiao, using a proverb: “Birds of a feather flock together”. Such closeness in the early years was treasured by a few old members, as was depicted in a poem written by S. Wei, which was published in local Chinese newspapers:

Deep in my heart, lies this sweet “home”.
Here assemble fellows all from China,
For singing, sisters and brothers convene.
Every weekend, we're eager to go
to the place full of joy and laughter...

4.3 Summary

In sum, being uprooted from China and situated in the rift between “here and there”, “past and present” stripped the diasporic Chinese from the set of linked social structures, social practices and social values attached to the Chinese system. Therefore, it generated an imperative need for the reconstruction of social orders and repositioning themselves. Obviously, such reconstruction cannot be fulfilled in the domain of work, which left little room for such negotiation due to the firmly established white culture, but could possibly operate in the leisure domain.

My understanding of liminality is a discourse that acknowledges the practices and values of the in-between spaces in the diasporic “local” as well as spans across national borders

of the homeland and the hostland. It stresses the heterogeneity, fluidity and flux within the Chinese diaspora. I also return to anthropologist Turner (1967; 1969) from whom Bhabha (1994) borrowed the idea of “liminality” for further inspiration. According to Turner, liminality stems from fundamental transformations such as rituals. In the case of diaspora, being uprooted from the original social cultural system generates fundamental transformations, which create both ruptures with the past and continuities into the present. The fundamental ruptures include a “dissolved social structure” that provides “classifications that normally locate states and positions”, so that the subjects are “reduced down to a uniform condition” (Turner, 1969, 24). Such “chaos” in diaspora makes it imperative to reconstruct new orders so that they are able to re-position themselves, which is most often a long-lasting and disruptive process.

Chapter 5 Rebuilding Social Orders: Dragging, *Renqing*, and Circles

“Every year before APC, he (referring to a devoted member of CC) invites a whole bunch of people for a dinner party at his house. They all know what that’s for and feel it is disgraceful not to donate. After all, they’re good friends, and they owe him *renqing*...”

5.1 J. Chou’s wedding: “a big thing in the Chinese community”

J. Chou was “dragged” into CC by a colleague, who was an active member, soon after he relocated to the Midwestern state and started working at a large financial institution. Having little passion for singing but being an active social actor, J. Chou became good friend to W. Xie, a board member of CC as well as having come from the same region of China as J. Chou did. As one of the earliest arrivers in the education diaspora, W. XIE had been in the community for about thirty years, and had developed a very wide social network by actively engaging in several associations, including CC, the dance theaters, and one of the oldest regional fellowship associations. “I was very positively impressed by J. Chou’s personality”, W. Xie reported, he helped J. Chou in many ways, including making an effort to have J. Chou elected as the president of CC, because as an active actor in the community, he knew very well the benefit of such engagement. J. Chou also acknowledged the significance of such engagement in his interview:

I’m a laid-back person, I never thought of taking such big responsibilities, so I declined (the nomination). But I changed my mind later after I consulted some friends who were active players in the community. They knew very well the challenges and rewards of doing this, and they all encouraged me (to take it). They told me it would be a good opportunity for me to serve the community, and to turn my competency and ideas into personal achievement, if I became the president (of CC)...Influence? No, I don’t think one needs influential power to be elected (president), just the opposite, being the president (of CC) will bring influence, because it is influential...

W. Xie also earnestly arranged a match for J. Chou and a teacher at one of the dance theaters, both of whom were divorced. The two quickly fell in love during rehearsals for CC's upcoming APC that year, and got married within a year. Knowing how they were introduced, people called them "CC-matched lovers". Their wedding turned out to be the biggest wedding in the history of the Chinese community as well as the most lavish one. Because of the active roles of the new couple, particularly with the groom as the president of "the oldest and the most influential Chinese group" and the bride as "the most beautiful dance teacher" in the community, the wedding was held at a five-star hotel and was attended by over 300 people, all splendidly dressed. Many "distinguished folks" (that was how people called them, referring to the leaders of a number of other Chinese associations and the three dance theaters, of course) showed up. Asked by the groom to help at the reception desk to greet guests and receive gifts, I heard a guest, excitedly remark while signing her name on the guest book, "this is absolutely a BIG THING in the Chinese community!" During the ceremony, the Master of Ceremonies introduced the couple as "two most sparkling stars in the artistic circle of the Chinese community". Then, with a jovial tone he persuaded people to buy tickets and support APCs of CC and the dance theater. These remarks immediately lightened the atmosphere and created thundering applause and laughter.

Also strikingly, all CC members, except those who were out of town, attended the wedding and brought gift money in red packages (*hongbao*) with thirty dollars as the minimum gift. At the reception of the wedding, I ran into X. Deng, CC's artistic director, who was obviously more stunned than I was to see that so many CC members had shown up and talked to me:

How could they all have time to attend the wedding but not the rehearsals?! I'm always concerned with attendance. With so many people absent, how can we practice effectively? Yesterday, for example, less than half went (to rehearsal). People keep saying they're too busy to come (to rehearsals), but look today, they all show up! The attendance is higher than at any rehearsal...

It was in early June, so no wonder the attendance rate was so low, as the APC was about four months away. Later I checked with J. Chou about such a large attendance at his wedding, he responded,

Some people were friends when I was ‘nobody’, but a majority were friends made through my ‘job’ (as CC’s president) working together for the community, you know. They all came generously to give me dignity (*mianzi*). I’ll have to repay their *renqing* later on.

What was more intriguing was when I heard the groom complaining about what a tedious task it was to arrange seats for guests at the reception banquet, which had taken him and the bride several weeks to work on. They became completely worn out in the end, as they had had to redo it over and over again. I had attended a number of weddings in China and the United States, but I had never heard of the seating arrangement being such a challenge; as a matter of fact, strictly assigning seats at wedding seemed very unusual to me. Sounding very helpless, the groom responded, “You know, we want to make people happy. They certainly want to sit with people whom they know and feel comfortable with”. After obtaining a copy of their seat assignment sheet from the wedding coordinator, I began to understand what the couple struggled with, as that sheet clearly showed a map of interplaying circles, friendly ones together and unfriendly ones separated. It also showed the negotiated grassroots hierarchies, for example, the priority of leaders over members, and of bigger associations over smaller associations. The artistic director, the conductor and the other board members of CC undoubtedly occupied the “best” seats with their families in the hemispheric hall, which was closest to the podium. Other CC members were spread out in a star-like shape with the older ones and the more “influential” ones closer to the center and younger ones or not so “influential ones” further from the center.

I was not sure if the guests were as happy about the arrangement as the couple expected them to be, but I thought they understood the significance and the logic of the arrangement. I was also very impressed by the couple’s endeavor to take care of the intricate interplaying forces of circles and their in-depth knowledge about how those

circles interacted with each other. This reminded me of what J. Chou said in his interviews, a couple months after he was elected CC's president:

Me being elected the president was an outcome of the discussion among the previous board, the two artists (CC's conductor and vocal director), and some other people... I think I'm chosen because I'm new (in CC and in the community) so I have a good record of interpersonal relations. I almost have no conflict with anybody... Of course, there're both pros and cons to this (being new). Good thing is I don't have historical burdens, the challenge is I may not be clear about the intricate relationships behind the scenes. For example, sometimes people seemingly talk about things, but actually they allude to somebody... But I try to avoid the intricateness. Personally I believe things are easier to handle than people...

Personal relations are always complicated in Chinese communities. Particularly, there're many "old" people in the chorus (Clarifying that not only old in terms of age, but also a long stay locally, he pointed out that there were a few people who had been in the state for over 20 years), and they have a big influence in the community. Many members have been on the board before; those who have strong personalities tend to easily have bigger power than the current board. The internal relationships (within CC), the external relationships (among CC and other groups), people's bonds and frictions from the past, are all very intertwined and complicated, very, very.

It was also from this wedding that I was shown how involvement in a grassroots association such as CC fosters tremendous social capital the Bourdieu (1984) posits as aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network, as well as a source of conflicts due to power negotiations. The experience of J. Chou well illustrated how the elements interplayed and combined to make a difference in his life as a CC participant, for example, being "dragged", social capital (*renqing* and circles), and grassroots power.

5.2 Dragging and *Renqing*

A small proportion of CC members joined CC voluntarily, all of whom were found to be relatively new to the local community as a result of relocating, they did not have any local network. They sought to join as they believed joining some organization to be a most convenient and effective way to "know people and know the place", enlarging their social networks in the Chinese diaspora. However, a vast majority of them were

“dragged” into it. “Dragging” was a ubiquitous practice and proved to be a prevailing and effective strategy for CC and other diasporic Chinese associations to enhance membership, as well as to enact with and to engage more people’s participation. In fact, a majority of CC members admit that they were “dragged” into the group by CC members who were their friends, colleagues or acquaintances. Apart from this, people were also “dragged” to be involved in CC by watching, donating to and helping with its APCs.

In Chinese, “dragging” means an invitation or request in a gentle yet earnest way for a person to do something. Most often, the “dragged” feels reluctant to turn down the request, as it is regarded as being inappropriate and not respectful of the dignity (face) of the “dragger”. From the Chinese perspective, a negative response to “drag” results in discomfort for either party or both, and possibly hampering the relationship between the two parties. It is a term highly entrenched in the Chinese culture, and is integral to how social relations (*guanxi*) are normally negotiated. “Dragging” had a surprisingly wide use when the diasporic Chinese tell about their institutional engagement.

It was compelling to see how widespread was the phenomenon of the participants making efforts to “drag” people. As a matter of fact, the “dragging” strategy has been very effective for CC and other diasporic associations as a means to maintain and enhance membership. In 2000, for example, when CC was in a membership crisis, L. Chang, a founding member, came back to the group and “dragged” in many of his friends and colleagues from the corporation that he worked for, and they brought their friends too. There was a time in CC’s history when nearly one-third of the members were from that corporation. The same strategy also contributed to CC’s heyday in 2007, which many CC members were proud of as “the most successful and prosperous period”, when it had over 70 members and started to put up grand APCs. The newly hired artistic director back then “dragged” in many people. Then in 2011, when CC was preparing for its 20th anniversary, in order to show its prosperity and success, the president encouraged members to “drag” many people into the group, and it achieved a membership of 70 again. As a student, I only partly participated in the group because of my fieldwork. But

after joining CC, I was “dragged” into a dance theater, an instrumental music ensemble, and a regional fellowship association by other CC members.

A significant consequence of the “dragging” strategy is that it greatly boosts and deepens the interconnectedness between people. “Dragging” is based on a certain level of relationship, or at least acquaintance; but by “dragging”, the subjects become closer due to engagement in doing things together and further reciprocal interaction. That was why people said, “Singing pals became friends, and friends became singing pals”. This model of developing social interrelatedness applied to other associations as well. An ultimate impact for individuals was that their social networks were largely blended with their institutional engagement, which implies the considerable significance of this social engagement, as it made up most of their social life. In other words, engaging in voluntary associations was important for the diasporic Chinese, because it was their way to be social beings. This echoes what Bourdieu (1983, 249) asserts about the meaning of “social capital”: “a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, or in other words, membership in a group, which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the world”. Another significant consequence of the ubiquitous “dragging” practice in institutional engagement is that, it was very common for people to be involved simultaneously in multiple diasporic groups, which tightly interconnected the groups. For example, in his interviews, L. Chang told me that he was involved in a number of groups simultaneously (seven was the most at a time), with different roles: president, board member, or active member.

Besides communal engagement in voluntary associations of people “dragged” together, I discovered that house parties played an integral role in further developing reciprocity or negotiations. There are several things to notice about house parties in my study: First, they played an indispensable part in building and strengthening reciprocal relationships. I would say that no friendship was built in the diaspora without inviting people to house parties, though house parties did not necessarily bring about further reciprocity or

friendship. The striking centrality of house parties among the Chinese participants was in contrast to situations both in Chinese and American societies, in which public spaces such as restaurants are more preferred as a place to get together with friends. Private homes were preferred over public spaces because it allowed the hosts to show their hospitality. But more importantly, the private space, usually decorated in a Chinese way, (most households were equipped with karaoke, a typical icon of popular culture in Chinese society since the 1990s), and serving home-made Chinese food, provided the atmosphere of China and offered opportunity for people to interact as Chinese, with conversations about China, the local Chinese community, and the diasporic group. During a casual conversation at a party with the host, I heard this:

Lao Mei (a common colloquial way the diasporic Chinese call white Americans) prefer public places to get together and have fun: bars, restaurants, etc. We Chinese tend to invite people to our houses... We feel more at ease in our homes...

I had observed two kinds of parties that had different purposes and functions: open parties, that were open to anyone who was interested and available, were mainly to make new friends; closed parties, with carefully selected guests, normally were held to deepen relationships with certain individuals, or to negotiate something. For example, every time when APCs or board elections were approaching, closed parties would take place intensively, with discussions happening within the closed circles before they were brought to large group discussions. I had also heard about how some CC members utilized house parties for APC fund-raising:

Every year before APC, he (referring to a devoted member of CC) invites a whole bunch of people for a dinner party at his house. They all know what that's for and feel it is disgraceful not to donate. After all, they're good friends...

After being “dragged” to the group, intersubjective relations further developed in two forms: *renqing* and circles, both of which were integral components in constructing social relations (*guanxi*) in Chinese society, which are strikingly prevalent in the diaspora as well. *Renqing* refers to the mutual obligatory indebtedness between two individuals. “*Renqing* constitutes another centrally important concept in the Chinese system of social

exchange... *renqing* indicates a set of social norms and moral obligations, ...[which] require participating in the exchange of gifts...and assistance... can be regarded as a kind of resource, such as a favor or a gift, and can be used as a medium of social exchange.” (Yan, 1996, p192) A circle refers to a group of individuals who have shared values and interests and are tied together with relatively stable and constant reciprocity. Circles and *renqing* have long been linchpins in constructing social relations in Chinese society. The interrelatedness of circles is a phenomenon that is unique to Chinese social culture. Circles have overwhelming power of involving individuals in terms of a conspired rule of mutual support and shared benefits among members.

5.3 Circles and local powers

Effective interactions generate positive feelings for the involved individuals, which motivate them to interact with the same partners in the future. As exchanges repeat, group bonds emerge, become salient and compose networks. Networks of negotiated and reciprocal exchange tend to promote stronger relational ties between partners; productive or generalized exchange will promote stronger networks or group-level ties. This is in alignment with what Bourdieu (1984, p 294) calls “social capital”: “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, or in other words, to membership in a group, which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital”. P. Tan, who has been in the group for over ten years thus describes her attachment to the circle of CC:

Personally, I’ve an emotional attachment with the folks of CC over the years, as I need a place to go for fun besides work place and home... It’s been a major social circle that I involve myself in...It (the choice of engagement) is about which circle makes me feel more comfortable.

Arguably, circles constitute an integral part of the reconstructed social structure in the diaspora space, shaping social practice as an intermediating link between individuals, groups, and the community. First, circles are so forceful and predominant in the Chinese diaspora that every person belongs to some circles inadvertently. Despite their need of

belongingness, however, their attitudes towards circles were not always positive. In fact, many people often cautiously tried not to be too closely involved in circles, so as not to be submerged by the obligation that circles brought about. The first time I heard about people being cautious about circles was when S. Wei chatted with me about how people interacted beyond CC rehearsal time and mentioned that she had been invited numerous times by another long-term member of CC to his house parties, but she did not always go, as she did not “want to be too much involved with their circles and get into troubles”. During my fieldwork, it turned out to be very difficult for me to schedule an interview around the time of Spring Festival with FXiao, who was one of “the best sopranos in the Chinese community” through years in CC despite having no professional vocal background. We had to reschedule several times, as she became unavailable. When we met at her house eventually, she told me that she was so occupied at that time because a number of Chinese associations had invited her to sing at their Spring Festival celebrations. I was astonished at how popular an amateur “local star” could be and was curious if she got paid. What these two informants mentioned was echoed by a few others in my consequent fieldwork. She chuckled and said:

There're many good singers, maybe not so much into public exposure and showing off (*pao tou lu mian*) as I am... plus, I've known them (the dance theaters that invited her for singing) for many years, got a good relationship with them, and it's hard to turn them down...But I must be careful not to be too close to them (the dance theaters), or they'll drag me to dance (laughter)...

Secondly, circles could be big or small, and are elastic and fluid. Circles are formed, strengthened, stretched and conflicted always based on reciprocal interaction. Circles were the underlying forces that drove diasporic associations to conceive, to mobilize, to form and to collaborate, to conflict, and to split. Sometimes circles overlapped with associations, sometimes they existed within or across associations. The most frequently mentioned circle, which was also most conspicuous to me, was the one composed of CC and the three dance theaters. One day at a party, I heard a member say, “the circle of CC and the dance theaters are so intricately intertwined... if our (CC's) APC invites only one of them it will upset the other two; if we invite none of them, all will be unhappy...”;

People also viewed mainlanders and Taiwanese as making up two big circles. As summarized by a man who had been in the Chinese community for nearly thirty years and had observed how it evolved, “At the beginning, there were more Taiwanese than mainlanders, the mainlanders battled with the Taiwanese; later on, when there were more mainlanders, they battled among themselves”.

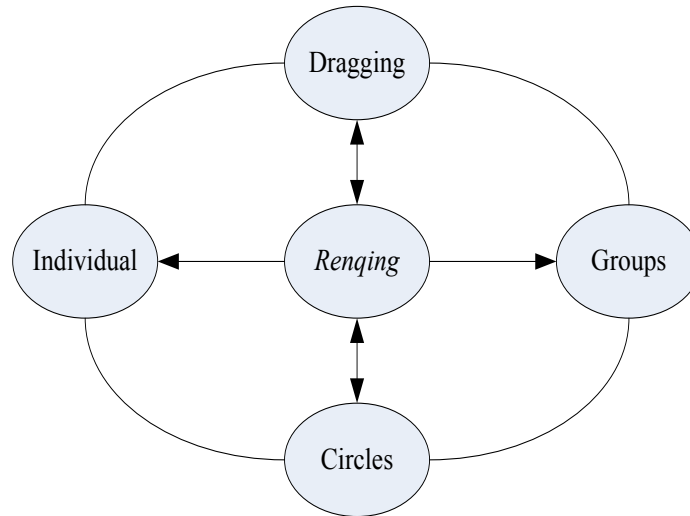


Figure 5 Dragging and interconnectedness of the community

The internal power relations of CC featured seniority. “Unlike other organizations, when the CC leaders (board members) retire from their positions, they don’t retire in power. They still remain in power without having titles, if they want to”, according to a CC member who had involved in various voluntary associations in the Chinese community. The hardcore members tended to have great influence, i.e., the longer you stay and the more involved you are, the bigger say you have. This implicit and acquiescent power of “old” members was so strong that it overrode the explicit power, such as the power of the board or president of the group. In general, new members had little say in the group and found it difficult to have sense of belonging to the group, unless they were really connected with someone or committed to something, for instance, singing on stage. In my field research, I had seen quite a few examples of new members trying to propose something or make some suggestions but being neglected by the group. One day, when

there was an informal discussion about preparation of an APC, a new member who had only been in the group for about two months made some comments about the president's plan. Another member sitting next to her reminded her in a whisper, "How long have you been here; don't bother making comments!" (See "trinity" in Chapter 6)

5.4 Summary

I call attention to the social interactions of the participants which were highly blended with their engagement in the chorus, including a ubiquitous "dragging" strategy to draw people into the groups, thereby building mutual obligatory indebtedness (*renqing*) and circles, i.e., a group of individuals with shared values, interests, and relatively stable and constant reciprocity. Such social practice demonstrated the intersubjectivity in reconstructing diasporic social orders, which featured horizontal structures among individuals, circles, and associations in the Chinese community, and were found to condition the social interaction of the participants.

My fieldwork reveals that the "dragging" approach, to a great extent, generates interrelatedness among the diasporic individuals and associations, mutual obligated indebtedness (*renqing*), as well as circles, all of which combine to construct new social orders in the diaspora, and further shape social practices of the diasporic subjects. Circles and *renqing* were intersubjectively constructed through reciprocal interactions that were embedded in engagement in diasporic associations and community events, and thereby they reconstructed new social orders and power relations that in turn shaped the intersubjective practice in the diaspora. To be specific, circles were the underlying forces that drove diasporic associations to form, to grow, to collaborate, and to split. What made them unique within the social orders in diaspora community was that, they were horizontal, due to an absence of preordained authoritative power and hierarchies normally found in regular societies. *Renqing*, prevalent as it was, created a social web that interconnected all individuals in the diaspora community. The entangled indebtedness among the diasporic individuals makes it imperative to create an occasion for this

symbolic capital to converge, to transfer and to be reimbursed, and APCs happen to be such an occasion.

The intricate circles and *renqing* made up a “web” for interrelatedness of the subjects, but on the other hand, they made serving on the CC board “an arduous and thankless task”, according to several informants. In an interview, P. Tan, who had served as a board member three times (two years for each term) told me:

I didn't agree (to be board member) at first, but they told me nobody wanted to... Surely I didn't want to see it collapse... However, it's important that those who're involved don't feel a huge burden. At the beginning (when CC was started), it relied on personal commitment (of some members), but it has to develop into a healthy structure in the long run. There should not be too much stress, some stress, but not too much! ... (chuckle)... It was too overwhelming in the past, for one or a couple of leaders to shoulder all the responsibilities. That was too overwhelming!

With the absence of predestined authoritative power and social hierarchies in the diaspora, the interactions of a multitude of circles constructed horizontal power relations that are unique in diasporic societies. They were represented by ceaseless competition for limited social resources such as members and supporters (for example, an audience or donors for APCs) as well as for recognition and leadership, which unavoidably led to conflicts. It has to be noted that, as a “model minority”, the Chinese diaspora has received less attention from the American government in the Midwestern state and other states than some other diasporas have had, such as some African and southeast Asian diasporas. The Chinese government has been trying to exert influence on overseas Chinese through its consulates and embassies abroad, as well as its Overseas Chinese Office, but their influence mainly has remained in the cultural aspect, rather than in the political aspect, for instance, they have sent transnational delegations to visit Chinese diaspora communities around the world. The role of Chicago, according to the participants, was more as a “physical symbol” than apolitical authority. People tried to maintain friendly relationships with it, but did not feel “governed” by it. This political “vacuum”, I believe, greatly invigorated the negotiation of local power through engagement, because it opened up endless possibilities for attaining power, as long as one (individual or institution)

could win recognition and support from the mass of the diasporic Chinese, and obviously community engagement was a primary approach for achieving this.

In the diaspora, many of the social norms are subject to negotiation through their daily practice, and may not be unanimously acknowledged by all the diasporic subjects. Therefore confusion, ambiguities, conflicts, and even disputes have not been unusual in the Chinese diasporic communities. It is through constant negotiation in engagement that more and more people acknowledge the justification of certain practices and values, so that they can be normalized, institutionalized and legitimized in the local context. APCs have developed into a widely accepted local tradition because of the rich symbolic significance they have carried to the diasporic subjects.

For the diasporic Chinese, the ruptures typically are in reference to interrelated social relations, widely known as *guanxi*, mutual obligatory indebtedness (*renqing*), as well as circles and fraternity (*quan zi*), which combined serve as the cornerstone of social values in Chinese society. Prior to their diasporic journey, these have been coded into the diasporic individuals as “genes”, which inherently shape their practice in diaspora, particularly when interacting with their peers who carry the same “genes”. The coded “genes”, for Bourdieu (1977), are articulated as “habitus”; as he puts it, “It is the internalization of the cosmos for the creation of an identity”(127). Habitus is created through a social, rather than an individual process leading to patterns that are enduring and transferrable from one context to another, but that also shift in relation to specific contexts and over time. Habitus is created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures, and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these Bourdieu (1986) is insightful in the following description about habitus: “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act” (170). The notion of habitus greatly illuminates the diasporic subjectivity that has been widely ignored, as it delicately portrays the interplay of structure and agency. In light of liminality and habitus, the

founding of CC was driven by the imperative need of the subjects to reconstruct social orders and re-position themselves when they were severed from the social system that once provided differentiation and interrelatedness. To a great extent, the endurable dispositions, or the mode of developing relationships through circles and *renqing* that they were accustomed to, unavoidably conditioned their intersubjective practice.

Anthropologist Turner's (1969) term, "voluntary egalitarianism", that features liminal subjects, sheds great light on the collective cohesiveness of early CC. Being uprooted in the diaspora, the subjects were stripped of all the social classifications that they had possessed in the previous social system and were leveled to an equal status of marginality, alienation, and "in-betweenness", which readily fostered empathy and like-mindedness among them. The common background of being "Chinese" certainly created a natural bond among them, as well as provided them resources with which to communicate, to interact, and to construct associations. Chinese language, tacit knowledge of Chinese "norms", and Chinese music were all examples of such resources.

Turner's (2012) argument of "communitas" is very illuminating. He insightfully points out that normally accepted differences corresponding to old structures are often de-emphasized among the subjects. Thereby forms a temporary structure of "communitas", one that is based on common humanity and equality rather than recognized hierarchy. Such homogenization of status due to a collapsed structure often gives rise to good fellowship and unity, or as the Chinese called it, "solidarity". However, such liminal "communitas" must dissolve sooner or later, with their own internal social structure developed by the liminal subjects. This precisely predicts the consequent process of CC's evolution, and the disruptions and controversies that accompanied it.

Chapter 6 APC, Stage, and “Voucher”

“My friend has donated many times to CC because of me, all in big amounts. I really owe her big *renqing*. This year she offered to donate again, and I turned her down. It’s too much for me to repay...”

“I give (free) tickets to my (Chinese) colleagues every year, but they’re not all really interested, despite the free tickets. And I don’t want to ‘force’ them to come and make them feel miserable sitting there...”

6.1 “Without APC, CC would collapse!”

Throughout CC’s history in the over the past twenty years, the most transformative change was shifting the priority of its practice to APCs. The original idea of having APC was to ensure regular performance opportunities for CC, as CC relied on other community events for such opportunities at the beginning, primary of which were Spring Festival celebrations organized by local universities or other more established diasporic associations (Taiwanese), in addition to some sporadic performances at other local festivals or events. However, a few years later, when its connections with these organizations began to loosen due to diversified needs and interests, opportunities of performance were no longer guaranteed, even for a once-a-year show-up. This challenge greatly hampered the motivation of CC leaders and members and stimulated their desire to have their own stage, as recalled by H. Yao, CC’s founding president:

One year in the late 1990s, they didn’t allow us to sing at the Spring Festival concert, because they wanted pop songs⁸ but not the “outdated” songs that we sang. We were extremely disappointed and irritated, because it was our only chance to sing (onstage). If they didn’t allow us to sing, our whole year’s effort (of rehearsing) would go in vain. We wouldn’t be eligible to apply for grants for the following year if we didn’t have any (show) activity.

Having a stable stage obviously became imperative for the survival of this grassroots group. After it recovered from the membership crisis in 2001, CC immediately underwent

⁸As a large genre of Chinese music, pop music started in China in the late 1990s, with an influx of music from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and began to coexist with the “red” music (or revolutionary music that had been established in China during wartime).

some “reformation”, including reorganizing the board and starting its own APC. But the APC remained at a small scale in terms of input and output. This was recounted by an old CC leader, and several other old members reported this also:

The grants we received were in small amounts, so we rented some small auditoriums at high schools to put up shows... Sometimes there were more people on the stage than in the audience ... Later, we began to sell tickets, only with a very low price, three or five dollars...

Then, in 2006, this leisure-oriented voluntary association went through a fundamental reshuffling of membership, vision, group dynamics and way of interacting with the community, when it began to aim at a “grand-scale” APC with strenuous efforts and emphasis. All these marked a commonly recognized watershed of CC by its members. Talking about that transition, some members remarked with an obvious sense of pride, “CC started its real development when D. Song came and started big APCs”. And they recalled how CC marvelously achieved a membership of over 70 and attracted an audience of over 1,600 that year. D. Song, the person that they accredited this change to, was a new conductor hired by CC that year. With a few years’ experience of coaching amateur choruses in China, D. Song came to the United States for “possible opportunities” by starting a vocal studio. Having a personal connection with some “old” CC members, D. Song was introduced to the group as “a brilliant artist who should be our conductor”. Seemingly ambitious and enthusiastic, D. Song claimed that she could “bring CC to an unparalleled high level of art”. One of her goals was to lead CC in holding remarkably large and impressive APCs. Some CC members were tempted by this big dream, but opponents questioned the idea: “As a ‘party group’ for fun, why should we bother?” Then, a crucial debate broke out in the group: “Should CC remain as a ‘party group’ or try to achieve something else?” Eventually, the proponents won, and D. Song was hired. However, this offended the supporters of the previous conductor, and believed it was unfair and disrespectful to him: “After all, it was not a profitable job, and he didn’t do anything wrong!” Nearly half of CC members left with the previous and never returned. However, D. Song “dragged” in many new members with painstaking effort and by offering them stage exposure in *xiaojiemu*, literally, opportunities for them to stand out

from the large group of all the chorus members. This strategy was successful in bringing CC's membership to an unprecedented level. On the other hand, *xiaojiemu*, in a variety of forms such as duets, trios, quartets and small group singing, accompanied by dances, not only added diversity to APC but also greatly boosted the participants' engagement. All in all, the techniques brought by D. Song from the mainland made the APC "a tremendous success", as summed by some old members.

Somehow, D. Song only stayed with CC for three years, but putting up grand APCs had remained of primary significance for CC since then. As a matter of fact, such large APCs were soon adopted by the three dance theaters and developed into "flagship" local cultural events in the mainlanders community, second only to the local Spring Festival gala held with the combined efforts of a variety of voluntary associations, such as artistic groups, regional fellowship associations, alumni associations, professional associations, as well as some non-voluntary Chinese associations. CC's successive presidents, board members, and artistic directors had reached a consensus regarding the primary importance of APC, and have repeatedly emphasized this in CC's group emails, during rehearsals and in my interviews: "APC is unquestionably our goal. CC would fall apart if there were no APCs", "APC is definitely the priority among all priorities".

The centrality of APC was even more evident in the practice of CC members, characterized by a noticeable fluctuation centered around the APC yearly cycle, regarding attendance, morale and enthusiasm for participating in rehearsals. As is shown in Figure 6, the group attendance noticeably increased when the show time approached and culminated on the day of APC, normally held in late October or early November. The date was carefully chosen to avoid time conflicts with other large events in the Chinese community, such as the Spring Festival and APCs of the dance theaters. Many members began to take a break after the APC, and only resumed participation in the following fall, some did not participate until a few weeks before the APC in the following year.

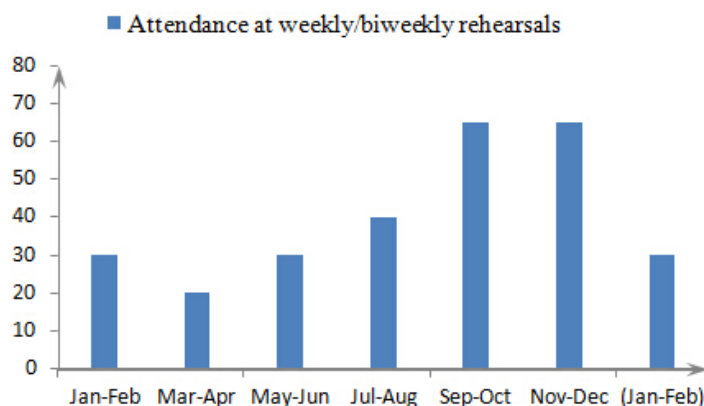


Figure 6 Fluctuation of CC participants' attendance around APC cycle

6.2 “The biggest thing CC offers is the STAGE”

In addition to the fluctuation of the members' attendance, enthusiasm and morale, what struck me most in the fieldwork was how members stressed stage exposure and how vigorously they competed for it. Based on what I saw and heard, the 2006 reshuffle, and the start of *xiaojiemu* in particular, had fundamentally transformed the group in multiple ways: First, *xiaojiemu* differentiated the “good singers” and the “not-so-good singers”, or in CC's insiders' language, the “red flowers” and the “green leaves”. Problematic as this was, there was a widely accepted assumption that only those “good singers” could and should be offered *xiaojiemu* and vice versa. Thus more stage exposure was equaled to more musical prowess. Second, stage exposure became so commonly desirable among CC members that they endeavored to compete for *xiaojiemu*. This was admitted by a dedicated CC member, “We take APCs very seriously, because it's human nature to be eager to show off”. However, to distinguish who were better than others was always tricky, because they were all amateurs and there was virtually no standard for warranting the differences.

Two factors had intensified the severity of such competitions: First, the immense shortage of professional artists in the Chinese diaspora. One day in a carpool

conversation with a CC member, the man interpreted their opportunities onstage as a consequence of the talent shortage with a Chinese saying, “In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man becomes king” (*lin zhong wu niao*). Indeed, the ratio of professional artists in the Chinese diaspora was remarkably low compared to other occupations, and the professional artists seemed to be more marginalized, possibly due to more limited opportunities and greater challenges for them to become established. Take X. Deng, CC’s conductor, for example. Despite his marvelous background in China as a distinguished composer, instrumentalist, and conductor of several first-rank Chinese orchestras, depended for livelihood in the United States mainly on income from selling instruments, coaching CC, and some sporadic local commercial performances. But success was definitely not what he had hoped for:

It is impossible for me to be a conductor here. Actually, I can say, no Chinese can be given opportunities as a conductor for any professional group, at least up till now. A very outstanding Chinese conductor, who used to be conductor of the China National Center of Performing Arts who is living in Kansas now, conducting a much lower-class group. He definitely is competent enough to conduct the Kansas Orchestra! ... Even the Japanese conductor (whose master was an extremely accomplished musician who received worldwide acclaim, according to him)...didn’t succeed in getting his contract renewed with an orchestra after one year...So you see, it is extremely difficult for (foreign) musicians to survive here...

The challenging circumstances for Chinese-born musicians, together with the wide spread fervor of amateurs “to improve their skills”, encouraged the musicians to open studios and offer them training. This practice had gain noticeable popularity in the Chinese community in recent years, as expressed by F. Zhou, the vocal director of CC in an interview:

Unfortunately, many of them weren’t able to develop their hobbies due to the Cultural Revolution. They regret missing the best time in their lives. Even with a PhD degree and accomplishments in careers, they aren’t satisfied. They come to the chorus... Some of them are so eager to improve their sing that they come to learn from me. After studying and practicing for some time, they can sing much better, and they become very proud of themselves.

On the one hand, such training turned stage-singing skills into popular “commodities” in the diaspora; on the other hand, they provided the

trainees with certain credibility of being identified as “red flowers”. However, I discovered more severe competition in many other areas including power negotiations in the group, or, “making contributions to the chorus” as they called it, for instance, fundraising and selling APC tickets.

As APC became increasingly established as the primary game rule, the group dynamics of CC turned into a game among the players, all with different roles and different concerns: The artists (the conductor and the vocal director) were in charge of teaching of music and the selection of performers of *xiaojiemu*, APC design and quality control of the performances; the members were obligated to attend rehearsals, participate in APC performances, seek donations and sell APC tickets; the board⁹ was in charge of the administration of CC and coordination of APC preparation and performance, and oftentimes as mediator between the artists and the members in disputes concerning stage opportunities. In an interview, a member who had been in CC for over ten years summarized the group dynamics as a “trinity”: “They (the artists, the board and the members) are mutually complementary and constraining, so there must be compromise.”

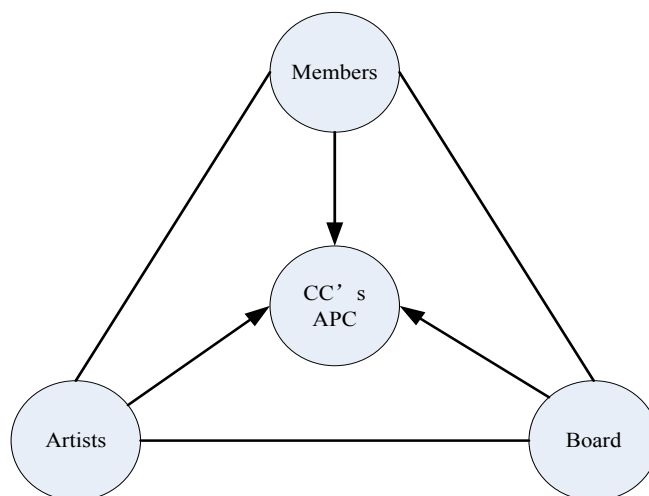


Figure 7 Group dynamics of CC: A "trinity" centered around APCs

⁹Board members were also CC members, who were nominated and elected by the other members every two years. There were three people serving on the board for each term, including a president and two vice presidents.

However, compromises were not easy to make. Competition for stage opportunities was so extreme that the “equality and unity” that CC once featured was replaced by tremendous “conflicts and intricate complexity”. Some members seemed to be tired of this, depicting CC as “a vanity fair”. A thundering drama broke out in 2011 when APC was just around the corner, a very spectacular APC in CC’s history, to celebrate its 20th anniversary. For considerations of the musical quality of such an “important show”, the artists decided to invite some professionally trained non-CC singers for leading roles in the chorus. This was harshly criticized by some members: “Why invite them? We can sing by ourselves!” The unpleasant discussion that followed soon blew up into a battle in CC that cast into doubt the artists’ authoritative power in decision making about stage opportunities. Finally, a compromise was made, requiring the members to apply for *xiaojiemu* opportunities and to have their singing audited by the artists in order to decide whether to select them or not. Nonetheless, this new measure was still widely questioned by the members as to its justification and transparency.

There had been numerous times that I, as a participant observer, was dumbfounded at people’s steadfast dedication to such “trifling” things especially when I heard over and again those “red flowers” complaining about the overwhelming stress of being involved in such “all-consuming things”. But still, they could not help getting involved. “Why do we HAVE TO sing the ‘damn songs’!?” complained a woman after a few sleepless nights worrying about her performance onstage, tensions between her and competitors and so forth. Her reaction clearly demonstrated the conflictual feelings of many of the singers’ about their participation. Later in her interview, the woman described her controversial feelings to me, which were mirrored by a number of CC members:

I really don’t like such big shows that we’re having now; personally I prefer small recitals. I kept saying to them, we don’t need to entertain others, let’s just entertain ourselves. That way, we wouldn’t have so much pressure...But truly, without such big shows, I wouldn’t be so motivated to be engaged. Also, if I was not involved in *xiaojiemu* while others were, it would make me feel I was not (as) good (as others).

The attraction of APC to CC members and their severe competition for *xiaojiemu* was best illustrated by a senior member's comment during an internal debate: "The biggest resource that CC provides is the STAGE!" After leaving CC a few months after she joined, a young member recalled the group as "unbelievable chaos" in an interview:

The group (CC) had too many 'VIPs' (very important people), often times they were at odds. Gosh, so much time was spent to resolve conflicts, still, people were not happy... I certainly understood why they were so hooked, because it (CC) had tons of significance in their lives, culture, leisure, etc... They joined (CC) for desire of singing solo, and they hunger for recognition from people; of course it was impossible to hold their own solo concerts. The chorus offered them a platform... Even in chorus singing, their voices stood out to catch attention... it was by no means what a chorus was supposed to be.

What she said made good sense: The significance of the "stage" lay in the participants' desire for recognition. In light of this, the "stage" that the participants kept talking about and so concerned about, was not merely the wooden or cement stage that they stood for singing, but arguably, a symbolic "stage" that embraced a multitude of meanings individually and collectively. A participant who had been actively involved in CC for years once commented in an interview:

There's lots of fun, but there're lots of conflicts too, conflicts for fame or profit, mostly for fame, I believe... But why fame (matters so much), I really don't know...

An utmost significance of this symbolic stage was that it differentiated the diasporic subjects between performers and audience, the applauding and the applauded, the outstanding and the ordinary. It provided those who were onstage recognition and it created local stars among them P. Tan, for example, after being a soprano in CC for a few years and after painstaking effort in enhancing her solo skills, had been recognized as "the number one soprano in the community"; D. Liu, a male CC member, had won the title of "the king of love song in the community". Such titles of "well-known singer so-and-so" first appeared in Master of Ceremonies scripts at CC's APC soon became widely known in the Chinese community by word of mouth, through local newspapers, weblogs, and so forth. Repetitive exposure in the diasporic public space and the titles by which they were recognized, made them "THE ... so-and-so", which was significant for their

personal identification and distinction. The titles might be easily obtained had they been in China, but much more difficult in the diaspora due to dissolved social hierarchy and social orders. Such recognition and differentiation lent them the sense of “I-ness” besides the “We-ness”, which was based on commonality with other diasporic peers.

6.3 The APC ticket: A symbolic “voucher”

(I’m not singing onstage this year, as I’ve been sick for a few months, I’m gonna sit in the audience this time...)

Today is the date of CC’s APC. It was at around 5:00pm, and I was waiting at Beauty Salon (pseudo name of a Chinese hairdresser popular in the community) to get a haircut, and chatting with a woman at the Salon. After finding that I was planning to go to CC’s APC, she told me: “I’m going, too”. I asked her if she would go alone or with somebody else. “I’m going with my friends”, she said, “they’ll come here and I’ll give them the tickets”. I was curious about how and where she got the tickets and followed up with questions. (Since my fieldwork, I’ve formed a habit of persistent interrogation...) Interesting stuff came. “I bought three tickets from M. Li (a CC member), then I got three from somebody, and now I’m giving away four.” She said...

--- From field note of October 20, 2013

Such an intriguing circulation of APC tickets was by no means unique to the woman that I met at the hair salon, but was found to be very common in the Chinese community. Since it started to have grand APCs, it had become a tradition for the majority of APC tickets to be distributed to its members (over 70 percent), and each member was required to sell at least ten tickets, the more the better; about 10 percent of the APC tickets were given out as VIP tickets or free tickets for supporters of APC, such as donors, leaders of collaborative associations and volunteers; only about 10 percent were sold through public channels, such as local Chinese stores or through ticketing phone numbers included in APC posters. During my fieldwork, it was very common to see the same person buy tickets, receive free tickets, give out tickets or help CC members sell tickets, which seemed very intriguing to me, and I paid close attention to how people dealt with the APC tickets.

Among the diasporic individuals, *renqing* took the form of reciprocities. One type was practical reciprocity, such as offering practical help in daily life. The most commonly

observed included watching the house for friends who were traveling and gift exchanges, such as giving homemade food or self-grown produce. A more important type was symbolic reciprocity, such as recognizing each other as friends, choosing the same side as friends did, and supporting friends in what they did. For example, to watch APC as a way to support a friend who perform onstage (*pengchang*) is such a kind of support. It is “both a notion of a relationship, and some notion of a shared obligation in which both parties perceive responsibilities to each other” (Lavelle & Brockner, 1993)

An important finding about the APC ticket was that it transmitted the obligation of CC members (selling the tickets) to the Chinese community through mutual obligatory indebtedness (*renqing*). Even though music did play a vital role for meaning making for performers and audience when they went to APC, apparently music was not the primary reason to bring people to the audience. A man at the theater gate of APC one year (I had volunteered to be an usher that year so that I could interact with the audience) told me: “I got a (free) ticket from my friend and I come to give him *pengchang*... The music? Frankly speaking, the music is ok. They’re all amateurs, not professionals; I’m not expecting too much”.

It is very important to point out that an overwhelming majority of tickets was assigned to CC members to sell, but in most cases, CC members gave them for free. To the ticket receivers, the free ticket was an invitation but also an “obligation” to go and offer support. In motivating speeches to encourage CC members to sell more tickets, the presidents always said: “To make our great efforts (in preparing APC) pay off, please ask your friends to *pengchang*”. As a matter of fact, that was exactly how CC members “dealt with” the obligation of selling APC tickets, and it was also the real reason why people went to watch the “amateur group’s show” year after year, because “we all come here for someone, to *pengchang*”.

Pengchang is a term deeply rooted in Chinese culture with the original meaning of going to a theater to applaud and acclaim someone’s performance. It later was broadened to mean that one is obligated to endorse an endeavor of an individual with whom one has an

interpersonal connection. *Pengchang* was the underlying philosophy for CC members to involve people from their network to attend APC, and could be easily understood by those who they invited without much explanation. The tacit knowing of *pengchang* and the willingness of offering it, was based on well developed mutual obligatory indebtedness (*renqing*) between the two parties that had been accumulated through long-term reciprocal interaction on the one hand, and the shared value of the significance of engaging in stage performances on the other hand. In a word, *pengchang* was a variation of *renqing* in the case of APC, and was signified by the APC tickets.

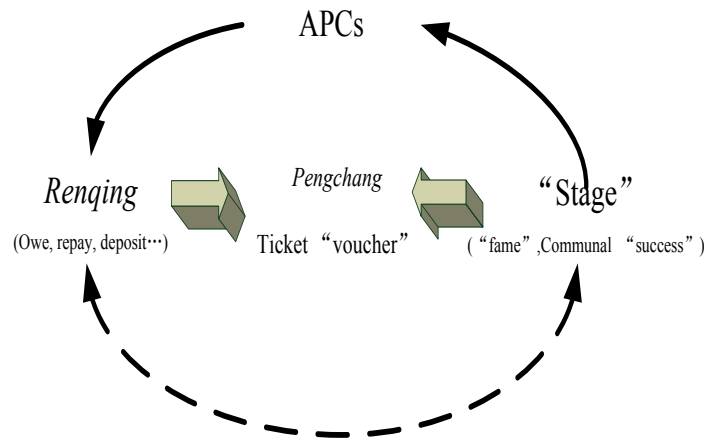


Figure 8 Conversion of symbolic capital through APC

Obtaining APC tickets through private or through public channels made a huge difference to indicate one's interrelatedness in the community. From what I observed, those who bought tickets from public channels were basically new in the Chinese community had not developed networks, or, had no *renqing* connection in the community. During my fieldwork, a man told me that he bought an APC ticket from a Chinese grocery store the first year when he moved to the state:

The first year when I relocated here from Indiana, I didn't know anybody, so I bought the ticket at Shanghai Market (a well-known local Chinese grocery store among the mainlanders) after I saw the APC poster... But later, when you began

to know people and make friends, you don't need to go and buy tickets, the tickets will always come and find you...

Some ticket receivers ignored the “invitation” by discarding the free tickets that they received and did not attend the concert, but this rarely happened. This circumstance happened either because the mutual obligation was not strong enough to make them feel “obligated” to *pengchang*, or because they did not value the stage significance as much as the ticket givers did. Thus, the APC ticket is by far not merely a permission to attend the show, but a very important symbolic “voucher” that embodied and facilitated conversion of symbolic capital in the APC setting. Failure to see the abundant symbolic significance that APC ticket carried with it, especially how its circulation was inherently related to the symbolic “stage” and *renqing*, would lead to failure in understanding an integral part of the APC, which was an institutionalized system to reinforce reconstructed social orders and to create meanings in the Chinese community.

An outstanding advantage of *renqing* as symbolic capital in the Chinese community was that it resembled a bank system, which the diasporic Chinese could deposit to, withdraw from, borrow or even mortgage from, and repay to. Once one developed some interpersonal relationships in the community, *renqing* was so prevalent that nobody seemed to be able to opt out of it. Giving free APC tickets to friends was to send a message of valuing stage significance, and to deposit or repay *renqing*. Attending APC with received free tickets was to confirm consensus of stage significance, as well as to repay or deposit *renqing*. To keep the balance of the symbolic capital on both sides, *renqing* always had to be repaid in some way: by inviting people to house parties, offering them help or giving them back *pengchang*. For example, I had noticed that CC members attending APC of the dance theaters, and volunteering at events organized by other Chinese associations. They did so to repay the *renqing* that they owed by involving others in their APC engagement. Such conversion and exchange of the symbolic capital were all contributive to further reinforcing the connections and interrelatedness of the subjects. *Renqing* could be accumulated and transferred through interactions, however, it

could also be exhausted if one party kept withdrawing without repaying or depositing. One day in an informal conversation, S. Wei told me:

My friend has donated many times to CC because of me, all in big amounts. I really owe her big *renqing*. This year she offered to donate again, and I turned her down. It's too much for me to repay...

My fieldwork revealed that the audience was relatively stable, concerning the *renqing* connections between audience and performers, which explained why a great number of people attend APC year after year, after all, “the music and the style are not crazily different; they're quite similar every year”. However, exploiting the same network over and again (bringing in the audience and seeking donation) might tire people out. Y. Ma, a long-term CC member for over ten years, told me in an interview:

I give (free) tickets to my (Chinese) colleagues every year, but they're not all really interested. They don't necessarily want to come (to the APC), even though the tickets are free. And I don't want to ‘force’ them to come and make them feel miserable sitting there...

By the same token, all CC's interaction with the Chinese community that centered on APC preparation and implementation, including fundraising, collaboration, and front-stage and back-stage volunteer work. All these were coordinated through conversion of the symbolic capital of *renqing* and the stage, as well as signified by the APC ticket, because those interactants were also involved in offering *pengchang* to certain CC members, and they also received free tickets. Fundraising provided such an example, because even though CC had been striving to arouse attention and recognition from the larger society, it always turned out that fundraising through personal networks was the most effective approach. This was indicated by J. Chou, the CC president:

We've done painstaking work for fundraising (through public channels), but not quite effective... For those private donors, they donate this year, maybe very reluctantly, it'll be hard to ‘push’ them donate again next year.

To sum up, *renqing* that had been intersubjectively constructed among the participants were further strengthened through communal efforts in holding grand APC. On the other hand, the success of such communal efforts largely depended on the interwoven social ties among the participants. In a sense, APC could be regarded as a trading place where

the two types of primary symbolic capital (*renqing* and “stage”) in the local community that had been accumulated through daily practice were intensively exchanged and transferred.

6.4 Summary

This chapter focuses on the symbolic ways in which the diaspora recreate their individual and group identities through the CC group. First of all, the rise of APC gave rise to a symbolic “stage” on which the Chinese participants win recognition and gain personal identification, and which incurred tremendous competition and conflict between the individuals. Secondly, the value of such recognition was so widely accepted by the diasporic Chinese, that the “stage” gained the power of involving wide participation by the Chinese community as performers, audience members, donors, and supporters in other ways. A fundamental consequence was that the “stage” turned into symbolic capital, that is mutually convertible with *renqing*, another prominent type of symbolic capital inside the Chinese community. APC thus became a “trading place” for the reimbursement and conversion of symbolic capital, which greatly reinforced the reconstructed social norms and strengthened both the interrelatedness and the differentiation of the Chinese participants. Interestingly enough, APC tickets, which signified and facilitated the exchange of symbolic capital, became a symbolic “voucher” that circulated in the community and knitted the social ties among individuals.

As Clifford Geertz (1973) asserts, “Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (97). To explore how the diasporic subjects think, feel and act, and why they think, feel, act as the way they do, I delve into the symbolic meanings of their interactions and their narrative-making, as well as a multitude of symbols and metaphors in their practice and discourse. For example, the APC that the CC members are devoted to, is theorized to be a symbolic “stage” that enables them to distinguish themselves and win recognition for personal identification, as well as to create a public space to exhibit,

to celebrate and to communicate meanings for collective narrative making. Stage exposure, as well as the ubiquitous *renqing*, gain compelling value within the Chinese community and become transferable, provided a system to facilitate such transfer. Bourdieu (1984) identifies three dimensions of capital each with its own relationship to class: economic, cultural, and social capital. These three resources become socially effective, and their ownership is legitimized through the mediation of symbolic capital. APC happens to be the system through which the symbolic capital (i.e., stage exposure and *renqing*) is transferred, and the APC ticket is in some sense a symbolic “voucher”. The circulation of APC tickets among the diasporic Chinese signifies the exchange of symbolic capital. Furthermore, the symbolic themes repeatedly appear in CC’s music making, such as the idea of leaves owing love to the root and pathetic emotions about the homeland, which seemingly represent their nostalgia but in reality are discourses that they utilize to arouse resonance among the diasporic Chinese. These discourses that they adopt in negotiating a collective “Chinese” identity, aside from their exuberant extolling of Chinese prosperity and vitality, however, incur various dissonances or estrangements instead of reaching an omnipresent sharedness as expected.

As a result of social and cultural disorientation in the diaspora, the public sphere for their practice was largely shrunken. In fact, most diasporic Chinese in my fieldwork categorized their lives into family life, career life and leisure life. That was why the diasporic Chinese took their leisure so seriously and participated with unusual passion and commitment, as reported by a few participants, “We’re so committed because it’s our spiritual pursuit”. For them, leisure was far more than killing time or reducing boredom, but one of their primary approaches for public engagement, central to their sense making and identity construction as social and cultural beings. In a nutshell, the symbolic “stage” enabled the diasporic subjects to have their talents fulfilled, witnessed, and recognized in public, especially by their diasporic peers. I argue for the centrality of intersubjectivity, given the interplay between individual distinction and collective public engagement. In other words, engaging in the diasporic voluntary association of CC created possibilities

for them to “achieve something” with collective effort. In some sense, putting on grand APCs was based on the maturity of the Chinese community with well-developed interrelatedness and widely accepted social norms, which not only provided necessary social resources, but also triggered aspirations for achieving something higher, as being a participatory casual leisure “party group” no longer satisfied the ambition of CC and its members.

As matter of fact, such avid engagement is unique in diaspora, which can be difficult to understand by outsiders, i.e., people not in the diaspora. During my field research, a number of participants admitted that they would not be so engaged in voluntary associations or leisure activities had they not been in the diaspora, which they jest about as “goofing around for no good” or “to engage in idling” in a self ironic way. However, the devoted engagement was easily understood and was in fact widely shared among themselves. It had been legitimized as part of local value that such engagement was meaningful, important, and should be admired and supported. In the case of CC, with the commonly accepted value, the “stage” became symbolic capital in the diasporic community, which turned out to be mutually convertible with *renqing*. What distinguishes the two types of symbolic capital is that, *renqing* represented ingrained enduring dispositions brought from the pre-diasporic experience; while the symbolic “stage” emerged from everyday life negotiation of being Chinese in “between and betwixt”. For those who were not involved in CC, based on my observation, they acquired symbolic capital by being involved in similar ways in other voluntary associations such as alumni associations. *Renqing* seemed to be ubiquitous among all Chinese participants in my study, but how it was converted and what it could be converted into varied according to the circles to which they belonged.

Chapter 7 The “In-betweenness” of Music Making

In the past a few years, we had focused on introducing Chinese cultures, traditional and contemporary, to our audience. In this proposed concert project, also the first time in CC history, we will take a bi-directional approach, i.e. to mingle Chinese and American vocal arts by collaborating with an American chorale. The main objective of this project is to help the Chinese community to appreciate American music and culture, on the other hand also help American people to appreciate Chinese music and culture. The project will enable us to continuously pursue our mission of breaking the social barriers among different ethnic groups, and therefore allow communities to connect more harmonically.

Digest from CC's 2009 grant proposal

7.1 Ritual, symbols and narrative making

It should be noted that the symbolic “stage” of APC constructed an institutionalized system that facilitated the conversion of symbolic capital in the Chinese community. By creating a ritualized space in public to exhibit, to celebrate, and to communicate meanings; to create personal history as well as to create a collective narrative, it also enriched identity negotiation of the diasporic subjects. Engaging in such a “stage” was an approach of “growing out new roots” in the diaspora, and was deemed to be part of their “spiritual pursuit”, because it was intrinsically related to their sense of longing, being and belonging.

Over the years of practice, APC has developed several layers of meanings: a cultural product, as well as cultural production and consumption, which were integral in the identity negotiation of the diasporic Chinese. By being dedicatedly engaged in APC, the Chinese participants also created a ritualized space for their narrative making to exhibit, celebrate and communicate meanings. In the ritualized space, a set of practices was conducted by following certain publicly accepted procedures, and legitimized to become part of the local tradition. By making and presenting Chinese music, APC drew on memories from the past and created a memory of the present. Also, it was of a symbolic

nature, containing abundant symbols and transmitting certain values and principles of behavior through repetition.

APC took place every year before the Midwestern weather became too harsh, normally in late October and early November. CC remained inactive and had limited activity during the first half of the APC yearly cycle (from March through August), meeting once every two weeks to rehearse (less than two and half hours each time), and less than half of the group members participated.

Starting from September, when APC was about two months away, there were more activities centering around APC: the group started to meet once a week to learn and practice the music (three hours each time), CC members began to “come back” and attended the weekly rehearsals; the concert program began to be finalized, especially *xiaojiemu*, “the focus of the whole chorus”, were discussed over and over and decided; grant had been applied for or had been received; to ensure the budget, fundraising and ticket selling started. In the meantime, the enthusiasm and morale of the group members remarkably increased aiming at a common goal of “a successful APC”. However, power negotiation and conflicts became enormously more intensive too.

Beginning a month prior to the APC, the board sent out “final push(es)” to remind and urge members to become more engaged in musical practice, fundraising and ticket selling, which indeed greatly boosted the members’ energy and dedication. Rehearsals of *xiaojiemu* became tremendously intensive, and usually met two or three times a week, apart from the large group rehearsal. Internal communication and external coordination for collaboration were also vigorous and intense, evidenced by incredibly frequent group emails, more frequent parties, and frequent phone conversations. When APC was about a week away, the group members had been carefully and finely groomed, including getting grey hair dyed and beards shaved, female members starting to wear make-up when attending rehearsals, and having their performance clothes ironed. Assiduous attention was not only paid to appearance, but also musical practice and logistics, such as

fundraising, ticket selling and finding volunteers for backstage and front stage coordination.

Then, finally came the APC. Normally it took place on a Saturday, so that people did not go to work and could have a good rest the next day after the “exhausting day”. The show began at 7:30 pm in an auditorium rented from a certain local college, and ended at around 10:00pm. However, all the participants (artists and members) arrived at the venue by 9:00am for make-up and getting dressed, as well as to go through several rounds of final rehearsals, involving the lighting and sound effects, backstage coordination, clothes changing and rehearsal of final bows. The rehearsals were strenuous and without any break, therefore most participants were too busy to eat and stayed hungry from the morning until the end of the show. Notwithstanding the physical exhaustion, it was the time when group morale culminated.



Figure 9 CC members helping each other to put on make-up



Figure 10 Having a quick meal after dress rehearsal



Figure 11 Singers excitedly waiting to get onto stage



Figure 12 Singing a song about home and harmony at 2012 APC

All the participants were energized by their excitement and united by collectivity, camaraderie and exceptional group solidarity. Jokes were made, laughter burst out and numerous amusing incidents happened, which were captured and documented in writing and by photographs and videos, later shared among the group and created recurring memories of the excitement and further amusement. To attend such a “magnificent event”, many audience members dressed up and were well prepared for it in advance by marking their calendars and changing schedules. There were screams, laughter, applause when some “star singers” walked up on the stage. Applause and laughter also broke out when people saw their acquaintances or friends rather different looking than usual or doing some funny things on the stage.

The show also brought families together. It was very common for non-CC spouses to provide unconditional support for their spouses who were engaged in APC. Once, a woman member shared in her response to a group email that, “my husband freed me from all the housework for concentrated preparation for my performance”. The spouses were also actively involved in APC as backstage or front stage volunteer workers. For a number of CC members who were couples, singing with their spouses onstage and appearing in the same photos were memorable experience and treasured memories, particularly for those couples in duets or trios.

The stage created all kinds of dramaturgical effects, with the symbols and metaphors contained in the music, the “Chinese” atmosphere created, and overflowing emotions aroused by participating in APC and producing music in the ritualized setting. The meaning of such congregations substantially transcended the physical and material everyday lives of the participants, but addressed the more implicit and intangible parts through the dramaturgical effect of music production on the APC stage. “(R)itual reinforces the traditional social ties between individuals; it stresses the way in which the social structure of a group is strengthened and perpetuated through the ritualistic or mythic symbolization of the underlying social values upon which it rests” (Geertz, 1967, 142). For the Chinese participants, the ritual brought their “past” memories into their “present” life, and their experience “there” into narrative-making “here”.

Creation and communication of meanings were not confined to the ritualized space that APC created, however, but took place before and after APC as well, by means of enthusiastic commitment to preparing for the performances, excited (sometimes frustrated) conversations about their engagement in APCs, laughing over anecdotes and happily spreading news of them. During my data collection, I discovered, to my surprise, quite a few CC members carefully collected verbal and non-verbal documents of their engagement in CC over the years, such as APC programs, news articles, journals, photos or videos taken of their APC performance. Thanks to the courtesy of those who kindly shared with me their collections, I gained valuable information about CC’s practice

throughout the years, but more importantly, the collections showed me how personal memories were woven into collective memory and vice versa, and how the collective memory conveyed and transmitted the narrative making of the subjects as “being Chinese” in the diaspora.

As a matter of fact, the growth that CC as a grassroots diasporic association had undergone over the past two decades, displayed by the documents was a vivid portrayal of blended personal and collective histories: from black and white photos to beautiful color photos; from the plain design of an APC program printed on regular copy paper to a splendidly designed program printed on coated art paper; from a small group with a few more than ten members wearing casual clothes onstage to a vibrant group of about 70 members with several sets of costumes; from some easy “student-party-level” performances to carefully designed and thoroughly prepared “close-to-professional level” performances. By all means, as the participants proclaimed in their interviews, CC had been “enormously upgraded and better developed”.

During the interviews, many of the participants clearly recalled what songs they sang in which year with whom, and what feedback they received about their performances. Their enthusiasm in creating and collecting the documents, their zeal in making themselves look better in those images, their avidity in watching the images over and over, and the excitement of sharing their stories with their friends and relatives, are all clearly indicative of the significance of their participation in their sense making.

In a sense, the APCs that they participated in were benchmarks highlighting important moments in their diasporic personal histories. A good example was the experience of A. Gong, a man who had joined CC with his wife in the mid-1990s and survived a life-threatening stroke in 2009 a few days after APC. The couple received enormous help from other CC members, who supported them in going through the extremely difficult recovery process. Knowing that he was an active member of a chorus, the doctor set two goals for his therapeutic exercises: the lowest goal was to be able to take care of his own daily life; the highest goal was to return to CC’s stage to sing. With his wife’s whole-

hearted support, a determined mind and unwavering effort, A. Gong realized the “highest goal” that his doctor set for him. He came back and rejoined CC’s APC two years later after the stroke. This was expressed by A. Gong’s wife in her email sent out on the second anniversary of A. Gong’s stroke, which was forwarded to the whole group of CC members:

We’re very appreciative of the chorus members’ persistent care and support, we always had a “home” feeling about it. We remember you took turns to bring us food and visit us at the hospital. Our hearts were always filled by a warm current, whenever we thought about that...We still freshly recall the scenes when we attended a CC party the first time after he was sick. I was very worried if he could make it, but he insisted on going, and was obviously excited. We were so warmly greeted and cared when we got there, somebody even joked, “You’re absolutely more popular than Obama”! Your spiritual support has meant a lot to us, a lot more than you can imagine... The biggest lesson that we have learned from this (sickness) is, don’t overwork! Nowadays, people are always pushed by desires instead of needs. Health is absolutely more important than money! Singing is good for us, to relax, to take care of ourselves, to love life and to enjoy life. It is not only about music, but more about life philosophy...

Local media of the diasporic Chinese contributed to the collective narrative making by actively advertising and reporting the stories (news reports or articles written by the participants). With wide distribution in the local Chinese community, the local media enhanced the visibility of APC events, as well as re-creating, consolidating and transmitting the meanings that had been created in the ritualized settings. Through such a “spotlight” on the symbolic “stage”, a sense of community was constructed and strengthened. This sense of community was based on the highly intertwined interdependence and intersubjectivity negotiated through personal interaction as well as the public engagement of the Chinese participants. It was by no means an endowed entity of primordial ethnicity, but was intersubjectively perceived, conceived, and lived, featuring the triad of social production of space that Lefebvre (1991) asserts. The setting created by APC is a ritualized space apart from everyday life, for meanings to be produced, communicated, transmitted, and legitimized, despite unavoidable misrepresentations and misinterpretations.

There were prevailing symbols in their music that contained rich metaphorical meanings: “roots” (versus “leaves”), “distant parents/mother/home” (versus “sojourning son”), “mothering rivers” (such as the Yangtze River and the Yellow River, both of which are entrenched symbols in Chinese culture to stand for the Chinese nationality), “hometown” and “homeland”. The symbols of “home / hometown / homeland” that appeared in CC’s music were almost without an exception related to the warm, loving, beautiful, and desirable; while on the contrary, the symbols of diaspora, such as “sojourning/ distant/ being away” unanimously corresponding to the desolate, gloomy and sorrowful. Two repetitive themes in the music were grieving about being “here”, or extoling “there” with exuberant emotions. Seemingly emphasizing the “past” and “there”, the definition of “homeland”, however, appeared ambiguous or intentionally adapted at times. For instance, CC had a mixed chorus song *Toasts to Our Homeland* with a collaborating American chorus as the epilogue of its 2009 APC, originally a bel canto song created to celebrate the return of Hongkong to China from British colonization and full of profuse sentiments about China and good wishes for its sustaining prosperity. Because of the guest American singers, the title of the song was translated into “Toasts to Our Nations” in the MC scripts.



Figure 13 Postcard of CC’s 2010 APC themed “Stories of the Yangtze River”

Another noticeable example was the “home” symbol, which universally refers to a place where one grows up or lives in, and is always associated with one’s sense of belonging. This sense of belonging, interestingly, however, appeared to be constantly at variance regarding which place it related to. A majority of CC’s repertoire was works composed by non-diasporic musicians in China, but they were sung outside China by the diasporic participants. More often than not, their lyrics appeared to indirectly refer to their lives “here”, or their “home” in the midwestern United States, instead of places in China that the lyrics originally referred to. But sometimes their music conveyed in a more explicit way their emotional connections with “there”, though not necessarily identified as much by all participants. At the 2011 APC, a male trio of CC called “The Path of Heart Ensemble”, presented “the journey and emotions of sojourning Chinese being thousands of miles away from home, living, working, and striving for success in the midwestern United States”¹⁰, including three songs: *Love for My Old Dad*, *Love for My Old Mom*; *A Song from A Sojourning Son*; *Devoting Myself to the Nation, Dead or Alive*. The following was a poem written by a CC participant as the background narration:

Passion filled in heart,
 tears filled in eyes,
 I, who was soon about to fly across the oceans,
 vaguely saw my mother’s thin figure,
 and greying hair at her temples.
 My heart had exuberant melancholy,
 for departure and separation.

Today we, students settled in(the midwestern USA),
 are recalling the pathetic moment years ago...

Watching waves in the (midwestern) River,
 my thoughts are flying back to the rivulets in hometown

¹⁰ Digest of CC’s 2011 APC MC scripts.

.....

In a foreign land, I ache for my homeland,
 where I was born and nurtured.
 Twenty years flew by,
 numerous memories have been driven away,
 but never the Yellow River and the Yangtze River in my heart.
 My dear homeland!
 Thousands of your sojourning sons and daughters
 have their hearts drawn to you, yearn for you,
 feel proud of you and glorified by you.

Also, analogies are made between the exile of the new Chinese diaspora and the displacement of their earlier counterparts centuries ago driven by needs of survival by stressing similar nostalgia and melancholy about separation. For example, in the Master of Ceremony's script of CC's 2013 APC, there was such a narration: "Ancient people found life on the Silk Road. In a sense, the Silk Road has extended to America, when people left their country to live, study, and work here. One shared experience is the heart-breaking feeling of saying good-bye to loved ones, and the happiness when reunited".

7.2 Transnational Trajectory of music making

Such an "imbued controversy" was difficult to eliminate, as CC relied largely on China as orthodox and the source of inspiration, material, and repertoires for its musical practice. The ongoing transnational trajectory of music dissemination had been greatly facilitated by global media and telecommunication technologies.

CCTV *Chun Wan* was an example of such. With a history of thousands of years, the Spring Festival has been entrenched as one of the most important festivals for the Chinese, domestically or abroad. But the CCTV *Chun Wan* only began in the 1980s. Broadcast nation-wide on every Chinese New Year's Eve, it gained national popularity in the age of limited cultural entertainment, and has gradually developed into a cultural icon

of China, despite wide criticism of its affected style and propaganda. It is even called the “spiritual New Year’s dinner of the Chinese people” by Chinese media.

Thanks to the development of global media and telecommunication, the CCTV *Chun Wan* now can be watched worldwide and has become extremely popular in Chinese diasporas. This cultural icon has been widely transplanted into diasporas since the 1990s. It is very common for diasporic Chinese communities, the post-1980s diasporas in particular, to hold their own *Chun Wan* around the Spring Festival time.¹¹ In the community that I studied, for example, there has been *Chun Wan* for over ten years. Such a cultural icon apparently exerts a great influence in the local cultural production of the Chinese diaspora, and is not only regarded as an important model for the diasporic Chinese to imitate stylistically, but is also identified as an orthodox way to calibrate their own performances or to affirm their qualities.

Aside from CCTV *Chun Wan*, other popular singing shows have also caught the attention of the diasporic Chinese, who closely keep track of them, such as the “National Young Singers Tournament”, “Voice of China”, and “I’m a Singer”, frequently mentioned by the Chinese participants whom I have studied. One day during an informal conversation after rehearsal, L. Chang chatted with me and said:

My wife watches those Chinese pop (choral) contests on the internet all the time; she couldn’t be more familiar with the contestants. She has learned quite a few new songs (from the shows) which I don’t know”.

In recent years, the growth of Chinese pop culture, Chinese pop choral contests, global media and the internet have provided steady resources for the diasporic Chinese to update their repertoires, and have lightly affected CC’s music selection. For example, one or

¹¹To a great extent, the significance of CCTV *Chun Wan* for them can be equated with the lion dance of the old Chinatown dwellers. Usually, *Chun Wan* in the Chinese diaspora are not held on the Spring Festival Eve, because of the time difference. In addition, Spring Festival is not a public holiday in the United States nor other countries, and people have to work. However, diasporic Chinese still call it *Chun Wan* following the Chinese tradition. In general, diasporic local *Chun Wan* does not have as diverse performances as CCTV *Chun Wan*, but mainly takes form of singing and dancing. Some popular types of Chinese language performances at CCTV *Chun Wan*, such as comic talk shows (*xiang sheng*) and comic skits (*xiao pin*) are very unusual to see at the local diasporic *Chun Wan*.

two of the latest popular songs that stood out from those pop shows were performed at CC's APCs.

The nature of CC's music making reflected transnational practice in several ways: First, most repertoires were adapted from Chinese non-chorus songs, and they also provided inspiration for creating new pieces. Second, it draws on resources from China for APC costumes and stage props, making painstaking efforts to coordinate with people's trips to China in order to buy those materials. In 2011, for example, for its 20th anniversary APC, CC ordered over 70 costumes from China, and managed to have all of them brought back by several participants and their families. These materials were ordered from China because of their low prices, about only one-seventh of the price in the United States.

7.3 “Four rulers” and dilemmas of music making

One night after rehearsal, the board of CC had a meeting with the artists to discuss some details of music design concerning the upcoming APC. Because I asked to audit the meeting for the purpose of my research, I was allowed to stay. When walking towards the meeting room, I met the conductor in the hallway, who, as he spoke to me, sounded vehement and agonized by some members' criticism of his music choices:

These Ph.D.s and Masters, they're excellent in their professions, but they never understand music!! I've been a musician all my life, I surely know better than they do! ... CC has been (in existence for) 20 years; it is not catching up with music trends at all, either in China or in the US! ... They've been singing “red” songs for years, and they're stilling singing them! People are tired of it... It doesn't matter if we don't sell tickets. But think about the 1700 tickets that you're selling!... They just don't understand...Even at CCTV¹² *Chun Wan*¹³, the songs are accompanied by many dancers...

As a diasporic music group, CC appeared to be hopeful of reaching out to the broader society (Chinese and American combined) equipped with music as a “universal language” that “has no borders”, as they believed that “good music touches people and draws people closer”. It sounded optimistic, but in reality this notion was paradoxical in

¹²CCTV: Central Chinese Television

¹³*Chun wan*: Spring Festival celebration

that music is intrinsically related to tastes and identities. In retrospect, when CC was a “self-entertaining” club of a group of mainland Chinese who were “birds of a feather flocked together”, music selection “was never a problem” for it. Repertoires were mostly “old songs that we all liked”; when some members proposed a song, most often others would agree on singing that song.

But later on, when it endeavored to put on grand APCs that involved a much greater population, CC’s music making became a rather contested practice. In recent years, debates in the group concerning how to make music, what music to make and what the music should achieve never ended. CC did make great efforts to achieve these by involving Chinese and American performers, repertoires, Master of Ceremony (MC), and bilingual MC narrations. They even managed to collaborate with local American choirs at its APC in 2009 and 2011 by presenting both English and Chinese repertoires. They also intended the APC themes to sound “cross-cultural”: for instance, “Bridge of Songs: Appreciation of American/Western music”, “A Rainbow across the Pacific”, and “Music across Mountains and Waters”. Nevertheless, were the borders really crossed and the gaps really bridged as they expected? A metaphor used by the CC president vividly captured this dilemma:

CC’s music making had to be gauged by “four rulers” that were not quite in accordance: Chinese tastes; western/ American tastes; CC members’ tastes, and the audiences’ tastes.

Themes of CC’s past APCs:

2002 “Bridges of Songs” (The idea was to mingle Chinese and western vocal music)

2003 “An Arts Ride Through Chinese Holidays” (This was an introduction of important traditional Chinese holidays, with purpose of educating the Americans about Chinese culture as well as to bringing memories to Chinese participants)

2004 “The Changing China” (The purpose was to showcase the social economic changes of China in the past three decades)

2005 “Soul of the Yellow River” (The idea was to consolidate the local Chinese community by commemorating the historical success of Chinese people fighting together with Japanese invaders and winning back the sovereignty during WWII)

2006 “Only Love” (By acclaiming human love, including romantic love, love for parents, friends, nations, and universal love, the APC aimed to bridge cultural differences and foster belongingness of the diasporic Chinese in the host society)

2007 “Western Impression” (“Western” and “Eastern” were discourses emerged during the great economic reformation of China since 2000, aiming to bridging the huge gap between the once poor and backward western areas of China and the developed wealthy eastern coastal areas)

2008 “What a Beautiful Jasmine” (The meaning of this theme was two-fold: it displayed the beautiful and colorful cultures of the eastern areas of China, to be consistent with the 2007 theme; it utilized the musical language of “What a Beautiful Jasmine”, a Chinese folk song that had become internationally well-known and resulted in the iconization of jasmine as a symbol of China)

2009 “A Rainbow Across the Pacific” (Continuing CC’s mission to bridge cultural differences and to promote multiculturalism in the Midwestern state, this APC borrowed a traditional Chinese metaphor of “rainbow” as bridge)

2010 “Stories of the Yangtze River” (Since the Yangtze River had been regarded as a cradle of Chinese civilization, the APC tried to bring collective memories to the diasporic Chinese to maintain the Chinese cultural heritage and to bring them together)

2011 “20 Years of Music” (Founded in 1991, CC had been part of their life for 20 years. The APC was to celebrate CC’s journey of thriving as a diasporic grassroots

organization, as well as to celebrate their own diasporic journey on “foreign land” that had become their second “home”)

2012 “Music Across Mountains and Waters” (CC’s APC themes added)

2013 “Charm of the Silk Road” (The Silk Road had symbolized China’s prosperity and pride of its significant role in world economy and cultural communication since ancient times. Having this theme echoed the Chinese government’s latest strategy for economic development in the new global context)

Making “Chinese” music by a group of Chinese having lived outside China for many years was very troublesome and incongruent, concerning the distinctive backgrounds of the audience that it intended to cater to, the identities that the participants were inclined to negotiate, and more importantly, the intricate transnational contexts that these practices were situated in. Even though as a “Chinese music group in America”, it felt somewhat “obligated” to “cater to all”, obviously it was not an easy task to do so. What was “good” Chinese music or “real” Chinese music, in the first place, remained problematic.

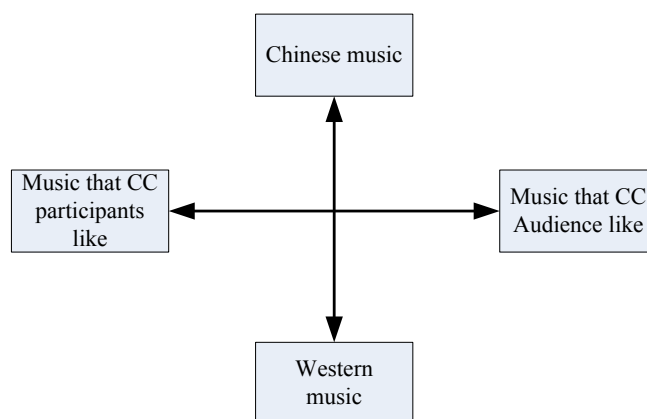


Figure 14 Contested Music making of CC gauged by "four rules"

The conductor himself strenuously emphasized “novelty and originality”, which he believed would attract the audience, especially the American audience, with its “freshness”. Trained as a folk musician who excelled in composing and playing

traditional Chinese instruments, he had composed a few pieces for CC's APC, most of which presented the cultures and lives of minority groups in China. Since 2010, he had taken a trip to China every year after the APC and visited minority groups to aid him in his music composition.

The buoyant musical pieces did attract a great number of people, despite some confusion and misinterpretation of what the music tried to convey. *Street Banquet* and *A Wedding on the Prairie*, two mini-musicals depicting minority groups in southwestern and northwestern China featuring jubilant dancing and alcohol drinking, for example, impressed many people and received plenty of applauses. In fact, adapted Chinese minority folk music was prominent in CC's repertoire, rather flowery and portraying the rosy and happy lives of the minority groups.

On the other hand, most of CC members, who had grown up in the late-Mao era and had left China in the post-Mao era, favored "old songs" or otherwise called "red songs", which has been a dominant genre of contemporary Chinese music since the revolutionary times. The "red" repertoires had been so deeply implanted in their minds and connected to their memories of their youth and the cultural roots. As some CC members indicated, those songs "were built into my blood and easily aroused a strong sense of affinity whenever I heard or sang them". Featuring a sonorous timbre, grandiose themes, strong melodies and rhythm, most "red" songs conveyed exuberant emotions, often extoling one's devoted love to "the people and the nation" and the power of "unity". One of the most commonly favorite songs mentioned by CC members, *My Homeland*, also named *A Big River*, created in the 1950s, expressing revolutionary spirit and the soldiers' strong love of the motherland. Amore recent favorite solo piece of CC members, *Fisherwomen on the Yellow River (Huang He Yu Niang)*, created in the past ten years, is a grandiloquent hymn of vigorous emotion, grand structure, and magnificent style written as a tribute to working people and their hometowns.

Without a good understanding of the lyrics, the American audience nevertheless appeared to be attracted to and impressed by the exotic novelty of the music, even though

unaccustomed to the “protuberant high voices”, according to quite a few American audience members in my fieldwork. Many of them noticed the difference between chorus musicality in the Chinese style and the American style, with the former more focused on melody and the latter more on harmony of voices.

To have a better understanding of the distinctions of Chinese and American musicality, I had a conversation with Dr. Carlton Macy, a music professor of Macalaster College. Dr. Macy illustrated several contributive factors from historical and comparative perspectives: Western chorus (or choral) music had a religious origin and has evolved through church, theater/ opera and secular settings. Compared to Chinese choral music, Western choral music has much larger repertoires created by a much larger body of composers over centuries, and is composed of greater complexity, such as a greater variety of chords and more varied ways of presenting them. On the contrary, Chinese choruses such as CC, have many fewer choices for repertoires, and they had to convert a great deal of solo music to choral music.

His knowledge was helpful in technically interpreting the variance between and the challenges involved in CC’s choral music. But I realized it was imperative to bring to light the social, cultural and transnational contexts, for the purpose of a more thorough understanding of the striking predicament that CC had been struggling with. What does making “Chinese” music in the diaspora mean to them, what was the most challenging and why? My questions became more eager after I was struck by a ruthless criticism about CC’s music made by a young woman, who attended its APC a couple of times to support a family member:

To be honest, we don’t really like the music... They pay too much attention to how many costumes to change, standing stiffly, singing some minority folk songs, but it was not fun! ...too old-fashioned, too hard to make connections with young people, especially those born after the 70s (as she was). Those songs sound like CCTV *Chun Wan*...Despite some modern songs, such as *Ju Hua Tai* (a song created in 2006 for a movie), the way they interpreted it, oh my, I could barely tolerate it! Some songs made me feel like the Communist Party’s propaganda; even though the melodies sounded good, the lyrics made me sick...

Such harsh criticism was not very commonly heard in my fieldwork, but it apparently amplified some milder reservations of other people, and greatly intensified my desire to probe deeper.

7.4 “We don’t have our own songs”

Across oceans, the engrained cultural value of “redness” had been exerting a profound impact on the practice of CC in their music making and aesthetics, as was demonstrated by their favoring of “red” songs in choosing the repertoire, their magnificent style in presenting the music, and even their design of APC programs, which usually have red-colored covers. In a sense, such an involuntary inclination toward “red” music was an outcome of cultural hegemony and otherness in Mao-China. However, in the diaspora, where the hegemony was absent, such an imbued taste in music was perceived and received in rather differing ways by participants, with or without their self-awareness. Some young people doubted if the music was really sincere in flamboyantly extolling the homeland and waning melancholy about being away from it, as was displayed in a conversation with a Chinese man who watched CC’s APCs:

They have all lived in the US for over 20 years and have become American citizens. But every time they sing, ‘oh, I ache for my homeland’, ‘I want to return to my beloved homeland’ (*luo ye gui gen*), that’s kinda pathetic. This is your home, right? It’s ok to have nostalgia for your roots, but is it sincere to always sing ‘I wanna return’, ‘sojourning children hunger for home’, ‘I’m miserable’, etc? That’s kind of ‘impressing with affected gloom’ (*wei fu xin ci qiang shuo chou*). The spirit of music lies in the value it conveys; anyway, maybe I’m asking too much of them...

Even the singers themselves seemed to feel conflicted about the “redness”, helpless as they were, in that, “We do not have our own songs”. Despite the absence of the grand narrative in diaspora, alternative ways for them to express their real emotions were very limited. The controversy about CC being confined to “red” songs well embodied the tension of identities negotiated in-between past and present, here and there.

With some bewilderment as well as curiosity, I carefully applied triangulation in later interviews of CC members concerning the woman’s comments, particularly with regard

to “making connections with (young) people”, repertoires, minority songs, “CCTV *Chun Wan*” styles, and even “propaganda”. None of them seemed to have ever thought about whether there was anything wrong with “singing some minority songs”. A unanimous response I heard was, “Aren’t they (minority songs) sung in China all the time?” However, under the impact of political interference, Chinese ethnic music (the primary genre of contemporary Chinese music), became an academic re-creation of traditional folk music including its collection, organization, and academic appropriation. According to Wong (2006), the Uyghur minority ethnic Chinese songs are created by Han Chinese composers by utilizing some noticeable minority musical elements, and are not regarded by those minorities as their authentic music, thus is China’s minority music exocitism. In addition to minority songs, “red songs” are also predominant in China. A woman in her 50s interpreted the difficulty of “making connections with young people as age gap:

Generational gap is inevitable in terms of music. Most of CC members were born in the 50s, the 60s, or the 40s, and they were rooted in those ages. One age, one song. They can barely connect with younger generations, even if they want to. Just as my son would feel awkward, if I sang his songs...It is an unbridgeable gap, because what we care, what we have experienced, what we want to express, what we treasure, what we feel connected to are all different.

What greatly struck me in their remarks, in fact, was how “repertoires and styles” related to “memories”, how “memories” related to “propaganda”, as well as their “strong emotions”, how those “strong emotions” turned out to be “so controversial”, and moreover, how the recurring “controversies” actually reflected and aggravated their diasporic identities. What the woman said made good sense. There is a wide gulf between those born before the late 1970s and those after it in terms of taste and value, as the late 1970s were a time marked by the collapse of the Mao-era and the rise of the market economy in China. This historical watershed fostered fundamental transformations in public discourse and ideology, characterized by the start of individualism and “popular” culture introduced from outside mainland China, starting from Hong Kong and Taiwan and moving to the West. “Popular music” was something entirely new in China until the 1980s. Before that time, contemporary Chinese music was epitomized by an all-

embracing “redness”, which is still the paramount genre of Chinese music. During the 10-year Cultural Revolution, in particular, there was little entertainment and few songs to sing. “Eight hundred millions of Chinese were singing the ‘Eight Sample Operas’ and a few extremely ‘red’ songs. It was an entire ‘culture desert’”, recalled a woman in an interview, who had experienced the Cultural Revolution, and whose “music path actually started from ‘the Propaganda Troupe of Mao’s Theories’”:

Walking out from the culture desert, any beautiful melodies would be remembered, regardless of their lyrics... At that time, when we didn’t have much to eat, anything could be delicious; now we have more choices, but after having tried different things, we thought what we had before was the most delicious.

Her feelings were echoed by many other people, with Y. Ma as an example:

I was sick and tired of them (the Eight Sample Operas) when I was little, broadcast on the blaring speakers day and night... Now, surprisingly, I have strong resonance when I hear it again... I guess it relates so strongly to my memories of when (I was) young...

In interpreting CC’s music selection, a CC member candidly admitted it to be a result of “propaganda”, which had been deeply imbued in them and had become part of them:

Music in mainland China is all extolling songs...It is indeed propaganda, there are three levels of this: first, lyrics include “Chairman Mao”, which is even not common in mainland China; second, lyrics include no chairman Mao, but the Communist Party, there might still be a lot in China; third, lyrics about homeland or hometown, which are thematic songs, or so called “red songs”...

“Red songs” encompass those classical “red” songs and operas created with the spirit that Mao Zedong proclaimed in his speech *To Inherit and Carry Forward the Excellent Traditional Ethnic Music* at the Forum of Art and Literature in Yan’an in 1942. Mao’s speech marked the starting point, when all artistic creation including music began under leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. Guided by Mao’s direction that “art and literature should serve the people, and serve socialism”, red songs have served as a major way to eulogize the party, socialism, the leaders, the army, the people, the homeland and hometowns. Advocated by the Chinese administration and strenuously promoted by the public media, red songs had apparently been the “thematic music” in Chinese society for decades. The annual “Chinese Red Songs Tournament” sponsored by Jiangxi Provincial

Television indicates such effort. Z. Hua, admitted his mixed feelings of “red song” in an interview:

We don't have our own songs; that's why people who don't like the Chinese Communist Party also like to sing those extoling songs. We grew up with the red songs, so we could only sing those songs, even though those songs don't express our hearts, or are even against our hearts. A paradox, emotionally, we feel sick of the lyrics, but we like the songs because of the familiar melodies... Those that we had from our youth, like those songs, have been firmly ingrained in our hearts.

7.5 Summary

APC, which had developed into one of the largest annual social and cultural events in the Chinese community, created a ritualized space in public to exhibit, celebrate, and communicate meanings exemplified by the rich metaphors and symbols in the music, and the dramaturgical effect of the musical performances, as well as the camaraderie formed during APC preparation. Narrative making through APC was significant for the Chinese participants both as a collective and as individuals, in that it allowed individuals to weave their personal memory into a collective memory.... the transnational trajectory of CC's music production indicated the unavoidable dilemma of producing Chinese music in a third place. With a detailed examination of how CC's musical style and repertoire was formed, how such musicality mirrored the thematic “red” music in contemporary Chinese society, and how such music was perceived by CC participants and the broader community, I argue that CC's dilemma in music making was associated with “otherness” resulting from the Cultural Revolution in China and with dislocation in “another” culture.

In sum, the tension of the “four rulers” fully discloses the dilemma of CC as an institution in the liminal diaspora space, with the inclination to bridge the gap between past and present, here and there, yet always finding their efforts as bridging an “unbridgeable”. “Music has no borders”, but in reality, as a cultural product and production, music not only signifies but also amplifies borders, the age gap, and more engagement in the larger American society exemplified this. Interestingly, Bourdieu's (1979) conclusion that aesthetics is a result of class finds an exception in the Chinese diaspora as well as

contemporary Chinese society, because class differences have been demolished by the revolutions. Therefore, the dilemma of CC's music making indicates the complexity of a group of Chinese negotiating their identities in exile.

Chapter 8 Contested Endeavors of Community “Solidarity”

“The Yellow River (Cantata), yes, absolutely a consolidation of the Chinese community, of our spirit... When we were singing on stage, about 250 of us, especially when we were singing the final stanza “protecting the Yellow River, protecting our hometown, protecting the whole China...”, the audience were all singing with us and clapping with the rhythm...Many people burst into tears...Some people in the audience said that overseas Chinese are even more patriotic than those who’re not abroad...”

8.1 A disaster relief campaign tying the transnational communities

One intriguing matter in the study was that the participants talked about “the (Chinese) community” and they were involved with dedication to “the (Chinese) community”, but the conception of “the (Chinese) community” remained ambiguous to me. For example, how large was “the community”, who were included and who were not, and how the participants reacted and interacted as a “community”? Because there was not a noticeable Chinese congregated settlement, these questions appeared also challenging for the participants themselves. Everybody could feel the existence of “the community” in daily life, but it largely remained invisible and intangible.



Figure 15 CC members singing “United Will, Invincible Fort” at the disaster relief concert in 2008

A critical event that took place in the Chinese community helped me to understand, though in retrospect. It was a disaster relief campaign that took place in 2008, as a response to the devastating “5.12” earthquake that occurred in China. This event, which widely involved the diasporic Chinese and produced profound effect, was inferred by the participants to be a time with “unparalleled solidarity”, yet, regrettably, “unparalleled conflicts” as well.

The earthquake which occurred on May 12th 2008 in Sichuan Province, southwest China, was measured at 8.0 M and caused unimaginable damage, including 69,195 people killed, 18,392 missing, and millions homeless. The disaster caused widespread attention across China and the whole world, including the overseas Chinese. The day after the earthquake was reported, the Chinese community immediately responded by starting a disaster relief fundraising campaign and planning a disaster relief concert. In about a month, nearly \$140,000 was raised, including \$40,000 from concert ticket income and donations at the concert. As one of the leading organizations in the campaign, CC played a significant role in fundraising and by coordinating and performing at the concert. This campaign unprecedentedly involved the widest participation of the individuals and organizations in the Chinese community, mainly the mainlanders, but also some of the earlier Chinese immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong. A local Chinese website was utilized as the main community platform, with an “earthquake news report and disaster relief column” opened, to update news from China as well as the efforts and progress of the community campaign. It also actively advertised the campaign and encouraged the donations. Such communal effort, unexpectedly triggered by a natural disaster, immediately consolidated the local Chinese community, and hugely reinforced its connection with the homeland at a distance, as stated in the fundraising documents:

Nature is merciless but humans are merciful. In facing such a catastrophe, the distant lives become closely connected, because we’re all Chinese descendants. Let’s unite our wills to conquer this disaster together!

On the other hand, a fierce conflict broke out among several organizers, which was regarded as a notorious “shame of the whole (Chinese diasporic) community” by the local Chinese. The dispute stemmed from different ideas of how to use the funds that were raised. A severe fight was said to have broken out in that some organizers insisted on using the money for the restoration of a school that collapsed during the earthquake, and giving the money directly to the receiver as was originally planned, according to the informants; while some others had the idea of giving the money to the Chinese Red Cross, and used for buying tents for the homeless. Because there was not a peaceful solution, the money was split, with the majority given to a destroyed school and a small portion given to the Red Cross. But the actors involved, who had been good friends, became enemies as the dispute escalated into a lawsuit. No one was found to be in the wrong by the judge; he sent them home and said: “All right, that’s it... Don’t spend taxpayers’ money like this”.

The conflict so profoundly affected the Chinese community that even the local Spring Festival celebration (*Chun Wan*) ceased for a couple of years, and only resumed last year with great efforts in coordinating it. In some sense, the local *Chun Wan* was a “touch stone”, indicative of how united or fragmented the community was. The “lose-lose” outcome of this conflict had very negative impact on the community. Widely recognized as a “fight for community leadership”, it even turned “community leadership” into a rather ironic phrase that nobody would be pleasant to be called “the leader of the community”, according to one participant in the fieldwork. A woman told me she “felt shame as a Chinese” with this incident having been known outside the Chinese community. She was by far not the only one who expressed such concerns. A great number of participants in my fieldwork had expressed a strong wish for solidarity in the Chinese community, and deep disappointment at seeing conflicts among the Chinese.

It was intriguing to observe how the Chinese subjects perceived “conflicts”. For most of them, such “conflicts” were attributed to disparity between the “Chinese” way and the “American” way, and more often than not, the former was considered inferior to the

latter. Many tended to attribute conflicts to Chinese national characteristics. In casual conversations and interviews, people repeatedly referred to cultural stereotyping (Yang, 1992) for interpretation, “Interethnic fighting is entrenched in Chinese culture”, “this’s what the Chinese are, like a sheet of sand, loose and disunited, always in conflict, Americans wouldn’t ...” S. Zuang, who taught at a local community college, said this while addressing the community conflicts:

The whites (*Lao Mei*) also have conflicts, but I’m not clear how ... Sometimes you see group emails forwarded, including very ferocious words. But I had little idea what the conflicts were about, and I didn’t care... It’s none of my business, I don’t get involved...

A woman CC member interprete this from a more political perspective:

I think they haven’t adapted to American culture, even though they are in the US. We receive grants,(the grants) require us to be non-profit and non political, but they don’t abide by that. For example, they go to sing for minister of the Chinese government¹⁴. I think we should think about how to better understand the constitution of the United States, and abide by it... We’re American citizens, and the chorus is supposed to serve the community, for the benefit of Chinese in the American society.

With intentions of strengthening connections with diasporic Chinese for the purpose of its national development, the Chinese government has been greatly strengthening cultural and economic communication with overseas Chinese in recent decades. “Affinity ties: A great China” is an important example of such endeavors. Supervised by the Overseas Chinese Federation, and coordinated by Chinese embassies in other countries, ultimately it reaches out to the diasporic Chinese communities through local Chinese associations. The Overseas Chinese Federation has also organized transnational events and invited diasporic Chinese to participate. The grand choral singing that B. Luo and her chorus members participated in in Beijing and Shanghai were such examples. Notwithstanding the intention and endeavor of the Chinese government to involve in the overseas Chinese, its political influence has been found to be greatly weakened in the diaspora. Based on

¹⁴The minister of the Ministry of Health of the People’s Republic of China paid a visit to the midwest state for scholarly and cultural communication with the local American institutions and Chinese diasporic associations. During his visit, some Chinese groups organized a musical party to welcome him.

observation and interviews in my fieldwork, I found that the Chinese administration in the Chinese diaspora seemed to be more symbolic rather than a political authority or supremacy, in spite of subtle ideological perceptions of the Chinese political authority.

8.2 The WWII commemorations: Who to unite?

In my fieldwork, several CC members referred to the World War Two (WWII) commemorations as some of the most impressive events that they had participated in, and many of the songs that were sung at the commemoration concerts as their favorite songs. The tradition of commemorating the victory of WWII every ten years has existed in Chinese diasporas for several decades. In the Midwestern state that I studied, the tradition started in 1995, the 50th anniversary of WWII, mainly organized by some Taiwanese diasporic associations, and participated in by some mainlanders either as individuals or as groups. In 2005, CC was invited by another Chinese chorus in a metropolitan hub for a joint grand WWII commemoration concert that involved six Chinese choruses, coming from some Midwestern states, middle states, and even one from Canada. When a few CC members were asked to recall their experience (about seven years ago) of participating in that event, their excitement still seemed fresh:

The Yellow River (Cantata), yes, absolutely a consolidation of the Chinese community, of our spirit... When we were singing on stage, about 250 of us, especially when we were singing the final stanza “protecting the Yellow River, protecting our hometown, protecting the whole China...”, the audience were all singing with us and clapping with the rhythm...Many people burst into tears...Some people in the audience said that overseas Chinese are even more patriotic than those who’re not abroad...

Another participant recalled in the interview:

When we were singing “Protecting the Yellow River”, the final piece (of the Yellow River Cantata)¹⁵, the audience was clapping with the rhythm, which was very uplifting, so uplifting! ... Over 200 people singing the forceful melodies of the Yellow River (Cantata); everybody felt our will united as strong as a fortress (*zhong zhi cheng cheng*)...Some strong ethnic emotions were excited by the

¹⁵ The *Yellow River Cantata*, created in the late 1930s, is one of the most important choral masterpieces of China. By depicting how the Chinese were savagely tortured by the Japanese invaders during the war and the holocaust in Nanking, and calling on all Chinese to fight together to expel the invaders, the cantata played an irreplaceable role in consolidating ethnic spirit and unity during the war, and had become an essential piece in all WWII commemoration concerts of the Chinese.

songs...I was thinking if there were Japanese on the spot, they would probably be l uneasy, on pins and needles...”

In 2005, inspired by the “exciting” grand commemoration concert that it participated in jointly with other choruses, CC invited several other Chinese mainlander groups, some veterans of the American air force who took part in that war, and some local scholars in its home city for another concert commemorating WWII. In my interviews, several Chinese participants were already excitedly talking about the 2015 commemoration, which was yet to take place. Astonished by how much they valued the events, I was curious about how this tradition started. One of the organizers told me:

It has been a long tradition, valued by overseas Chinese both in new generations (post - 1980s) and old generations (prior to 1980s). With more and more Chinese coming overseas from the mainland (China) in recent years, this tradition has gained increasing significance.

But I wondered what such a tradition meant to them, and why it was so important? CC had been actively involved in the commemorations; when I posed these questions, the answers came from all the CC presidents that I encountered in my fieldwork was:

It has huge meanings to all Chinese. Even though many of us did experience the war, most of us, actually. There’s always some pulsating ethnic sentiment about it... Plus, this is a great way to unite and consolidate the overseas Chinese community.

It was interesting to notice the different wording used to refer to the same war between China and Japan in the 20th century¹⁶ for the American audience and the Chinese audience. For the American audience, they used the phrase “World War Two”; while for the Chinese audience, they used “the Anti-Japanese War”. As was explained by the organizers, “Anti-Japanese War” was easier to arouse empathy, ethnic animosity and sharedness of the Chinese diaspora, because that miserable part of history had been

¹⁶The Anti-Japanese War (1937 – 1945) was that part of WWII which resulted from Japan’s invasion of China. *The Rape of Nanking*, authored by Iris Chang, a distinguished historian who taught at Yale University, is an exhaustive narration of the Japanese massacre of the Chinese in Nanking from 1937 to 1938. The victory of the Chinese against the Japanese invaders and the winning of independence was a significant source of ethnic pride for the Chinese people.

deeply etched into the minds of all Chinese people. However, they intentionally chose the “neutral” term beyond the Chinese community, so as to involve the Americans in the commemorations, and to avoid causing unnecessary unpleasantness from the Japanese diaspora. In fact, an unpleasant incident took place in 1995 due to conflicting perceptions of the history between the Japanese diasporic community and the Chinese diasporic community. Some Chinese leaders made an effort towards reconciliation of this incident by creating a large musical work involving musicians of Japanese, Chinese and Korean heritage (the latter being victims of the Japanese in WWII) together with some American musicians. The musical creation stressed world peace and universal love, and mourned for all the lives lost in that war. With such an effort, they were hoping to build friendship between the Asian diasporic communities rather than alienation among them. This is an interesting conflict that is unique to the diaspora, given it is situated in a third place. The Chinese participants struggle with whether they should only unite around a shared heritage, or whether they should transgress “that history” (being enemies) and recreate new meanings in the diaspora, such as reframing the relationship with the diasporic Japanese.

In an informative interview during my fieldwork of Dr. Yue-Him Tam, a distinguished Japanese studies professor, I learned that the Sino-Japanese relationship had continued to be complicated since the end of the war, because of the militarism and chauvinism that were still dominating Japanese administrations, evidenced by Japan’s refusal to apologize to and compensate the victim countries, and its increasing budget on military expansion. However, in recent years when China was focusing on national economic development and trying to create a beneficial international environment for its economy, such as cross-national investment made by Japanese enterprises and international business cooperation with them, the Chinese government had been very cautious in dealing with WWII commemorations. As a matter of fact, the tradition of overseas commemorations preceded those in mainland China by a few years. The relationship between the two countries has more or less exerted an impact on their diasporic population, and has

become sensitive and somewhat complicated, “Because when residing together in a third place, friendliness is important”, the professor said.

Among all the grassroots social or cultural events, the WWII commemoration was definitely one of the most imposing, and was commonly recognized by the diasporic Chinese as “the most glorious event of the Chinese community”. Recognizing the events merely as a commemoration of the past would be partial. It should also be regarded as transnational participation of the diasporic Chinese in the homeland’s undertaking. In an interview of B. Luo, the president of the chorus that initiated the six chorus transnational collaborative WWII commemoration in 2005, told me that she brought a number of American junior high and high school students to participate in a huge-scale *Yellow River Cantata* chorus singing in Beijing in 2008 as part of the Olympics celebration; and in 2009, she and some chorus members joined a multi-city grandiose outdoor celebration of the 70th anniversary of the birth of the *Yellow River Cantata*, involving over thirty thousand singers in Shanghai. According to the participants, the significance of such commemorations was to arouse “solidarity” of the diasporic Chinese community, which was clearly asserted by its organizers in their closing remarks during the event, published in local Chinese newspapers:

We’re very proud to see the unprecedented numbers of people and organizations that are involved in this activity. We only have one wish, it is that all Chinese and Chinese organizations will be united and contribute to the Chinese community with combined effort, so that the Chinese community will develop into the most united and influential (minority) community locally.

Perceptions of the relationship between the Chinese community and the “mainstream society” also appeared to be at variance among the Chinese subjects. Being recognized or valued by “the mainstream society” seemed to be honorable, as some organizational leaders would mobilize the Chinese participants with such as an appealing goal. Some participants delighted in working with or winning recognition from American institutions. For example, collaboration with the two American choruses for its APCs were recalled as an “enjoyable” experience by most CC members, not only because it was “fun”, but also because it was somewhat a sign of their integration with American

society. However, such integration and recognition was by no means the ultimate goal of their public engagement. In an interview with P. Tan, a long-term CC member who was a board member of CC and also an outstanding scientist serving a large transnational corporation, she described CC's engagement and "the mainstream society" as a "mutual choice", so had been her personal experience in interacting with her American neighbors.

To promote intercultural communication is only part of the mission, so we've collaborated with American choirs and learn to sing American songs, and they also learn Chinese songs from us. But eventually this has to be a mutual choice, they kind of think your style interesting, but won't think you sing well. Introducing Chinese culture to Americans is a long task, just like food. Americans cannot tolerate Chinese food for every meal, but they may find it "interesting" if have it once in a while... So, it's only part of our mission, but not our ultimate goal. (Ya: Do we need to be recognized and accepted by the mainstream society?) Mainstream society? Who cares! Exactly! American society is a melting pot, our exposure makes them know that, ok, this is your culture, this is your music... (interrupted by her husband who came home, and then resumed talking about her own experience) The "mainstream" invites me, and I'm not that interested. (Referring to her being invited to neighborhood parties by the American housewives of the other nine households that she told me about earlier in the interview). In my neighborhood, I'm the only woman who works... The main topics at the parties were trivial things or gossips about the households, I'm not interested at all! I joined them a couple times, and stopped going, too boring. This is mutual choice, they're very open and invited me, but I had no interest...

8.3 Summary

In accordance with Hall's perspective of diasporic identity negotiation, Sokefeld (2006) stresses the power relations in diaspora by pointing out that diaspora is not simply a "given" of migrants' existence that is in itself permanent, but has to be effected time and again by agents who employ a variety of mobilizing practices. Sokefeld also problematizes a prevailing easy notion of the "community" of diaspora without delineating interactive social practice and network building within that population, because community is a discursive construction rather than a social reality.

I then further the discussion with an in-depth investigation of the making and re-making of a diasporic "Chinese community", which was confounded by a connection with "past" or "there" on the one hand; and the practical complexity of "here" in "present" life on the

other hand. Two critical incidents with wide community involvement, both with CC being a proactive advocate, exemplify “solidarity” as a communal desire and undertaking of the diasporic Chinese and the difficulty of achieving it. Such “solidarity” was essentially paradoxical, given the complexity and the somewhat conflictual nature of negotiating the “I-ness”, “We-ness” and “They-ness” contextualized in historical and transnational social-cultural settings, including building relationships between the past and the present, as well as building relationships among themselves, with the white society, and with the homeland. Building this “community” is integral in the diasporic identities. I argue concerning the case of the Chinese education diaspora that the diasporic identities were subjectively and intersubjectively negotiated through local and transnational engagement.

My immersion in the Chinese community during the fieldwork revealed to me an extraordinarily strong desire for overall “solidarity” of the Chinese community, a hope that they could think as one mind and speak as one voice. This appeal of “We-ness” as Chinese might be partly due to a “collective” imprint from their pre-diasporic experience, and out of practical concerns about being respected as a minority group in liminality, because they clearly knew that “it empowers to combine”. However, this idea was essentially paradoxical, because conflicts are built-in assets of any social capital (Bourdieu, 1965). Moreover, as social and cultural beings, they had to make friends with whom they felt close and to choose side with them, which unavoidably alienated others; they inevitably advocated and strove for things that they deemed meaningful and valuable, but which might not be shared by others, or even conflicted with others. In a place “in-between”, they also unconsciously struggled with American values and Chinese norms that might be disaccordant at times. In other words, the “habitus” they carried along with them, though enduring, was inevitably subject to change and adaptation, often in different directions and at different paces, and ultimately resulted in distinctive narrative making by the Chinese subjects. Nevertheless, the Chinese subjects did not interpret these as I do as an “outside” observer. Their feeling of “being part of the

community” undoubtedly gave rise to a strong appeal for “solidarity”, and deep “shame” about not achieving it. Being troubled by this convoluted notion was central to their identity negotiation. The “Chinese community” that they talked about over and again, was not a physical entity due to their geographical dispersion around the metropolitan areas, but only existed in their perceptions and conceptions, through their daily action and interaction.

“Solidarity” was not so much an unquestionable loyalty to the distant “homeland”, or primordial belongingness on the basis of ethnic ancestry that was supposedly vested on the Chinese subjects in diaspora; but rather a goal for them to undertake and seek to accomplish through grassroots endeavors; as well as a discourse to utilize in negotiating collectivity and localized power relations, yet almost always leading to conflicts and disputes. These local efforts responding to a distant “homeland” “there” yet disrupted by everyday concerns and relationships “here” perfectly embodied their transnational identity construction. This “solidarity” was paradoxical: on the one hand, it was a common memory that aroused empathy and likemindedness. In other words, common ethnicity “there” might render it easy to arouse a sense of sharedness and solidarity; however, whether solidarity worked and how it worked depended on practices and power negotiations “here”.

Conflicts might become aggravated in the Chinese diaspora, due to the interplay between collectivism that was ingrained in them, which had a strong impact on their behavior, and inner drive for personal identification as diasporic individuals. In light of this, conflicts were not due to Chinese nationality, nor were they “domestic ugliness”; in fact, they embodied the complex dilemma of their identity negotiation incurred by displacement, and was deeply rooted in their liminality, i.e. in-between past and present, here and there. In addition, such conflicts were the outcome of an enduring disposition, or “habitus” negotiating itself in a new social, cultural and historical context.

“We”, “I”, and “they” are constantly as well as consciously negotiated in the diaspora. With whom to unite and how to unite depended on the context. Not only were they a

matter of subjective practice (practical concerns and inclination), but also they were conditioned by historical and institutional impacts in the diasporic “local”, as well as by transnational and political – economic forces, such as social changes in China, Sino-US relations, policies, and economic, social, cultural and political disparities. The subjects in the Chinese education diaspora are more adeptly navigating crossculturally and transnationally than their “labor” predecessors in the earlier Chinese diaspora, yet their subjectivities were more contested as well.

Chapter 9 A Liminal “Niche”: “Recharging” and Re-rooting

J. Chou came for an interview today, and an interesting conversation took place between us. When he sat down, he glimpsed at the “Diaspora” books stacked on my desk. This made him curious and he asked me what that word meant. I always find it hard to explain this “favorite” word of mine to outsiders in a few words, for it is rich in controversies, complexities and endless quest. Thinking for a few seconds, I came up with some “classic” definition that I had read: “It refers to scattered populations living outside their own country that are characterized by hybridity, fluidity, and rootlessness...” Before I could finish, he immediately interrupted: “Rootlessness? No! I’m gonna make myself rooted here...”

----- From field note of May 8, 2012

The above memo was taken during the early stage of my data collection. The message that came from J. Chou, one of my key informants, had been resounding in my mind throughout my research as I was trying to make sense of the everyday practice and sense making of my research subjects. On the one hand, I was intrigued by the inconsistency between this insiders’ voice and the canons that I was taught and had almost taken for granted; On the other hand, from time to time, I was amazed at how this remark made perfect sense concerning the diasporic subjects’ thoughts and behavior. There were numerous times, when I was interviewing my subjects, listening to their conversations, reading through the documents, or being bewildered by their “hard-to-understand” reactions, his message, the earnestness in his eyes, and the conviction in his tone, suddenly revealed to me the significance of re-rooting in understanding the stories of the diasporic participants.

9.1 “Recharging” from the distant home

A sense of belonging has centrality in diasporic identities, which are formed and reformed in daily practice of the Chinese participants in the diaspora, but also through their transnational connection with the homeland. Their affinity to China or to the United States largely depends on constantly comparing the two societies with regard to their vision, needs, and satisfaction with life and feeling of well-being. A broader vision of the

dramatically changed social, cultural and economic contexts in China and the United States, as well as the surging global trends, renders a better understanding of the life choices and perceptions of the diasporic Chinese.

For most of them, to “return” or to “stay” was commonly an important yet difficult decision to make upon their receiving degrees. Many factors were taken into consideration to calibrate the choice, such as job opportunities and educational opportunities for their children. As H. Qu, an old member of CC who came to the United States for study in mid-1980s with his wife, recalled in the interview, “The first day when we came here (the United States), we were planning to return to China, but the “June 4th” (the Tian’anmen Square incident) changed our minds because there was an amnesty (the Chinese Student Protection Act) to get a green card”. This circumstance was true for a great number of early arrivers into the new Chinese education diaspora, who came to the United States to study prior to 1990, though later comers appeared to be more inclined to stay.

It is of crucial significance to notice that their vision of life and calibration of life choices were transnationally conditioned and constructed. In my fieldwork, most of the Chinese participants admitted directly or indirectly, envisioning their lives as “more successful” yet “more (undesirably) stressful” in China than in the United States. This vision, however, was not a result of their “real” choices, but consequent to comparing themselves with their peers in China or with those who did return to China. “Many of my friends or previous colleagues in China are millionaires now, owning quite a few properties”, said X. Wu, another long-term CC member, who came to the United States in the early 1990s and witnessed a few diasporic friends that she had made who returned to China, told me in the interview:

A few friends of us (in the United States) went back to China in the mid-1990s, and got very good promotions. One (a previous CC member) was even promoted the president of Asia-Pacific area of his company! ... Had we gone back to China in the 90s, we might have had higher social status, compared to here. We might feel we’re kind of ‘above’ ordinary people, like we’re somebody. My friends in China all have become SOMEBODY, such as deans or have chief leadership

positions at universities, at least professors. But here, you just feel that you are the same with others... Yet, the stress (in China) is enormous! My former classmates in China, they all look very old! Can't even recognize them! Life has been too stressful (in China), and too much social life too. Unlike here, life is simple, we go home directly after work and eat at home... It really depends on what you want...

Another CC member told me in the interview:

I go back to China every year, two weeks or so for vacation. There are big changes in China now, dramatic developments. All my friends in China are leading a wealthy life, much more wealthy than at the time when I left China. But, some people seem very adrift; it's becoming an overall mindset in China. I feel the overall atmosphere is not as peaceful or tranquil as in the US. The things people talk about, they care about, I don't know, not very tranquil.

The somewhat overall anxiety and adrift mindset in recent China observed by the above informants, resulting from the surging economic transformation and rising materialism in China, appeared to be a common perception of the country by the diasporic Chinese, on the basis of their connections with China. Such perceptions greatly affected their awareness of their lives in the diaspora as more "at ease and tranquil", and in addition, in their weighing of the pros and cons of deciding what kind of life they wanted to have.

Another side of the transnational "calibration" was about how their peers or relatives in China perceived their diasporic lives, which had undergone dramatic changes as well. In the early years of the "going-abroad fever", going abroad and staying in those "wealthy" countries triggered tremendous admiration from other Chinese, particularly due to the competition for such opportunities, and the huge economic gap between China and the United States. "Years ago, (Chinese) people regarded you as 'successful' if you were residing in the US", according to the Chinese participants, "no matter what you did and what your life was like". But the admiration has noticeably decreased in recent years, resulting from China's surging economic boom, creating large numbers of wealthy people in all walks of life. Meanwhile, Chinese people's curiosity and fantasies about "the outside world" also largely decreased, as China become increasingly integrated into the globalized world, demonstrated by larger numbers of Chinese making international travels for study, business or tourism.

When I went to China to visit relatives or friends a few years ago, they were curious about the US and they asked me everything about it. Now when we get together, they talk more about their lives in China, they won't be very interested (in knowing about the United States) unless they plan to send their kids to study here...

Compared to earlier years, their connection with the homeland had been greatly strengthened by more frequent visits to China, as well as fast-growing global media and virtual social networks. In recent years, most Chinese participants managed to pay visits to China once a year for a couple of weeks on average, some of them visit China more frequently for purposes of work or business.

In the interviews that I had conducted, a Chinese participant vividly described his trips to China as “recharging” himself. Such trips were indeed “recharging” in many aspects. It is very common for the diasporic Chinese to bring gifts for their relatives and friends in China, such as electronics, luxuries, cosmetics, or health supplements. They also bring back gifts received from China, goods that are unique or of lower price in China, such as clothes, foods, Chinese herbal medicine and music. Such goods exchange between the global North and the global South not only diminishes material gap between the two localities, but also composes a transnational reciprocity, which maintains and strengthens emotional ties facilitated by gifts. Their trips to China also enable them to be updated with changes that take place there by witnessing and experiencing. But such “recharging” is by no means limited to transnational travels. In fact, the increasingly developed social media makes it much more convenient for them to “recharge” from a distance by watching Chinese news reports and pop shows, as well as maintaining network via global social media. Their image of China is thus shaped and modified, even though they are located outside China for most of the time, reported by M. Sun, a woman who received her Ph.D. degree in the United States in 1990s:

My overall picture of China comes from media that I read and hear in the US. It is good that we can read about both China and America here. And of course, my relatives in China are also my source of information. I read and hear about China every day... Yes, we care about China because it is the land that we grew up and came from. It's impossible not to be emotionally connected with it, though a very complicated emotion...

9.2 “A foreign land turned into home”

From my fieldwork I discovered that most of the Chinese participants had obtained US Citizenship, while a small number of them held green cards. However, having or not having citizenship did not make a huge difference in their sense of belongingness, as most of them clearly stated that “here” was their home, while associating China with their cultural roots. In an interview, M. Sun told me, “China is where I grew up; here (the United States) is of course my home, and I’m living a good life here. But I’m still caring about things in China, because that’s where my root is”. S. Wei told me in her interview:

This is my home, China is homeland. We wouldn’t consider going back to China for work, and we’re too old. Joining the chorus made me “settled down” to a great extent, because staying is more than having a job; we also have a group, a hobby, a life here.”

For them, the “in-betweenness” rendered them greater flexibility of navigating the two social cultural systems, and actually created a “niche” in-between. For instance, many of them carefully made career choices that were related to China, or found them more advantageous competing for such opportunities by having a Chinese background. The “in-betweenness” also provided them with flexibility of opting out of the social norms that they dislike, as was told by a CC participant: “Here you can choose not to strive crazily hard if you don’t want the stress, but in China, you wouldn’t have the choice. The culture wouldn’t allow this, as everybody is living in that way. But here, it’s not a problem at all, as long as you do your job well. Nobody would question you for not ‘trying to be more successful’, nobody wouldn’t laugh at your ‘idling your time in a chorus’”. In an interview, another Chinese participant reflected on the social problems in recent China:

The economic growth in China is absolutely a miracle...Chinese people in the 80s had strong spiritual pursuit, which greatly outweighed material pursuit. Then starting from the 90s, when China started economic reformation, many people began to make big money in businesses. Deng Xiaoping’s “no matter white cat or black cat, it’s a good cat as long as it catches mouse” (makes money). In that social context, the basic moral and ethic norms were much undervalued.

Having a “spiritual pursuit” indicated how Chinese intellectuals had identified themselves throughout history, characterized by a sense of “mission” and social responsibility. Intellectuals had been actively engaged in advocating for public well-being and political practice in China, or at least appealing for something beyond pure materialism. However, for the first generation Chinese education diaspora, there was not much opportunity for their political involvement. In this midwestern state, in particular, where the Chinese diaspora had not been well-established, their “spiritual pursuit” appeared to be more related to public engagement socially and culturally. In an interview, a Chinese participant expressed her concerns for the diasporic Chinese of engaging in formal politics in the United States:

...If there's nobody to make voice of the Chinese community and fight for its interest, they (American society) would ignore you, that's it, they wouldn't offer it to you without you fighting for it. Admittedly, this has something to do with the length of our stay here. Generally, the first generation is disadvantageous in language and cultural adaptation... We came here to study, after we settled down, we're almost in our 40s. It's not completely impossible for us to run for (political) election, but you have a choice to make if you want to pay the cost...

Safran (1991) postulates a “homeland myth”, referring to a long-lasting dream of returning to the homeland. Safran's argument about “returning” well depicts the circumstances for earlier Chinese diasporas such as the labor workers centuries ago, who dreamed of “fallen leaves returning to the root” (*luo ye gui gen*). However, such a myth does not apply for the education diaspora that I studied. A wide spread conviction for them is they are “being re-rooted” in the United States. Because their commitment to the “alien land” becomes stronger, encompassing career, family, social networks, self-actualization, and a sense of belonging, it ultimately results in a reversal of “homeland” and “alien land” (*ta xiang bian gu xiang*), even though they maintain strong emotional connections with their cultural roots. Ong (1999) writes of “flexible citizenship”, or transnationality being always on the move with multiple citizenship. Return or frequent travels back and forth, both configured the relationship of the diasporic subjects with their homeland within a nation-state framework. Acknowledging Ong's assertion of transnationality as frequent movement across national borders and owning citizenship in

multiple nations, my study extends this conceptualization beyond the nation-state to communities that are local as well as transnational. To end this chapter, I would like to quote remarks made by a long-term CC member in his email to the community members, encouraging them to participate in an annual antithetical couplet contest that he co-organized with some other Chinese:

Even though lives are not easy here (in the United States), but we're all living a full life in this "alien land", no matter what we do. Now that we're living here, we've got to take on an active attitude towards work and life. We try to create circumstances, one way or another, to possibly enrich our material and spiritual lives...(quoting a couplet submitted by a contestant) "Recalling the past, striving as a foreigner; envisioning the future, turning the 'alien land' into a second 'hometown'; Gazing the snow-covered earth, ..., conceiving unlimited vibrancy to sprout; Embracing the long-treasured dreams, ..., converting the 'new' home to a real 'home'".

9.3 Summary

I position the analysis of transnationality in an increasingly globalizing era and accentuate the association between "re-rooting" in a diasporic "home" and "recharging" from the homeland. The world has become smaller, with the growth of global media and communication technologies; therefore, for the Chinese diaspora, the homeland "there" and the hostland "here" are no longer mutually exclusive as they once were. They are brought together into close interplay in the everyday life of the diasporic Chinese, especially as influenced by China's rising power and the increasing interdependence of China and the United States.

In light of these transformations, the "homeland myth" (Safran, 1991) seems problematic, because the permanent dream of "returning" to the homeland is no longer the primary concern of the diasporic Chinese; what concerns them however, is how to be "re-rooted" in a diasporic "home". In other words, the proficiency of the education diaspora in navigating across national borders unleashes the negotiation of identities that used to be confined to the diasporic "local", but spans transnationally in this globalizing world.

Being in the interstice between two distinct social and cultural systems (Chinese and American), most often a rather disruptive and controversial setting, makes identity

negotiation complicated and compelling, and actually is necessitated as part of their way of being in everyday life, just as I have observed in my fieldwork. “Which is home, here (the United States) or China?” What characterizes “we Chinese” and “they (white) Americans”, or “What about the Chinese here (in diaspora) and the Chinese in China?” are questions they ask or discourses they use, consciously or unciously, every minute in their lives. That said, “identity negotiation” is not and should not be made up questions by “outside” researchers, but an integral part of their being and belonging in diaspora. Therefore, the insiders’ subjectivity can never be overemphasized in diaspora studies. It is highly imperative for researchers to keep their eyes and ears open during fieldwork, but more importantly, to interact with them and be involved in their daily practice, to experience their excitement, aspiration and frustrations, so as to make narratives that not only make sense to the researchers, but also make sense to the subjects. After all, meanings are constructively created between researchers and research subjects.

Chapter 10 Conclusions and Implications

This study is prompted by a social anthropological concern about the consequences of globalization as an education scholar. In this study, I call attention to the remarkable Chinese “education diaspora” that formed since 1980s and their identities. The term “education diaspora” is created to specifically refer to those who go abroad to study and stay overseas. As an exemplification of the Chinese education diaspora population, a diasporic Chinese chorus (CC) that has been in existence for over 20 years in the United States and is virtually composed of education diasporic individuals, is chosen for “deep description”. Through two years’ field work, I explore how and why their singing practice is integral to their identity making, and how their singing engagement embodies and facilitates their identity making.

The analysis begins with their “identity anxiety” that is associated with the social-cultural disorientation resulting from their diasporic journey, particularly collapsed social orders that used to differentiate the participants with positions and hierarchies, as well as disrupted collectivism that Chinese society features. I then examine CC’s “dragging” strategy to recruit and retain members, which nurtures horizontal social structures that is unique in diasporas and conditions the diasporic social interactions in return. Over the years, CC’s APC had grown into a phenomenal event of the diasporic Chinese community and involved tremendous efforts and input. As a consequence, two prominent types of symbolic capital formed and became convertible within the Chinese community: the mutual obligatory indebtedness (*renqing*); and the symbolic “stage” that offered individuals recognition, personal identification, but also incurred severe competition and conflicts. As APC turned into a “trading” space for the reimbursement and conversion of symbolic capital, it greatly reinforced the reconstructed diasporic social norms and strengthened the interrelatedness and the differentiation of the diasporic individuals. In a sense, APC tickets, which signified and facilitated the exchange of symbolic capital,

functions as a symbolic “voucher” that was circulated within the community and knitted the social ties among diasporic individuals.

Another significance of APC was that it created a ritualized public space to exhibit, to celebrate, and to communicate meanings exemplified by the rich metaphors and symbols in the music, the dramaturgical effect of the musical performances, and the camaraderie formed during APC preparation. Producing “Chinese” music in a third place is contradictory, as is shown in CC’s transnational trajectory of music production, and contentious and paradoxical musical styles. A close examination of CC’s musicality and perception of its members and receivers indicates that the dilemma of music making, as well as the contested diasporic identities actually, were inevitably impacted by the “otherness” of diasporic individuals in post-Mao China, and their dislocation in “another” social culture. Two critical incidents in the Chinese community, i.e., a disaster relief concert and WWII commemoration concert, both of which had CC as a significant organizer and participant, indicates that “solidarity” of the Chinese community was a communal desire and undertaking, as it was regarded integral to their diasporic identities by the participants; however, it was extremely difficult to achieve, given the complexity and conflictual nature of negotiating the “I-ness”, “We-ness” and “They-ness” contextualized in historical, local and transnational settings.

CC’s case presents that the analysis of transnationality of Chinese education diaspora has to be positioned in the increasingly globalizing era, and the association between “re-rooting” in a diasporic “home” and “recharging” from the homeland has to be accentuated. The world has become smaller, with the growth of global media and communication technologies. Therefore, the homeland “there” and the hostland “here” are no longer mutually exclusive as they once were, but are brought together into close interplay in the daily practice of the diasporic Chinese, particularly as influenced by the increasing interdependence of China and the United States.

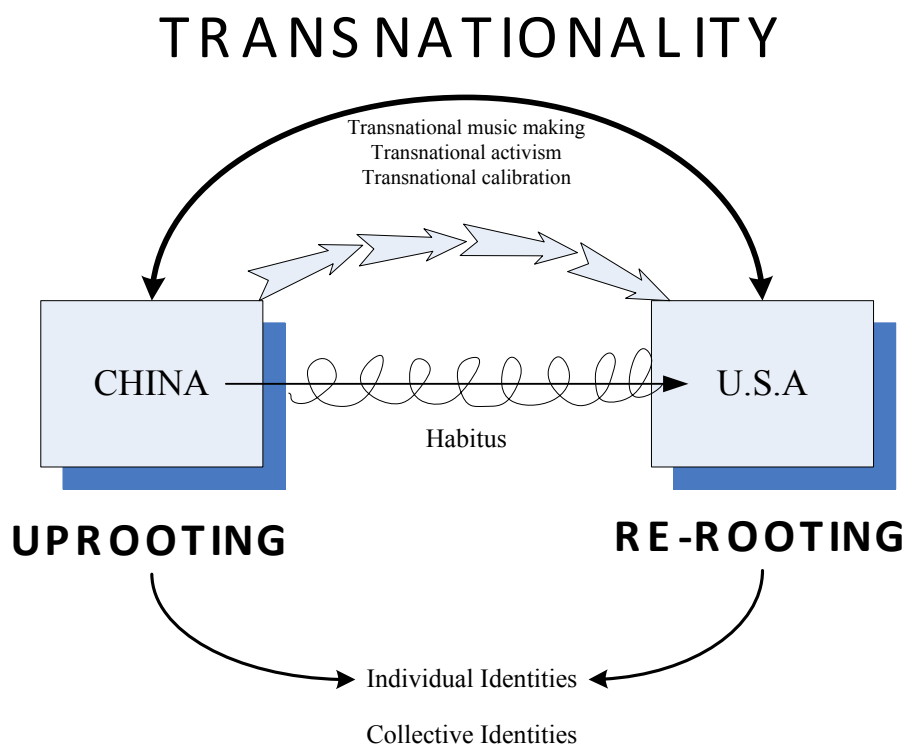


Figure 16 Re-rooting, transnationality, and habitus

Such transnationality was central to all forms of their intersubjectivity: the way they act, react and interact are the key components of the identities of the new Chinese education diaspora. In sum, the identity negotiation of the Chinese “education diaspora” is distinguished that of the labor diaspora centuries ago and the business/ capital diaspora that Ong (1999) studied over a decade ago. Based on theorization grounded in fieldwork, I emphasize that the identities of the new Chinese education diaspora, with CC as an exemplification, were subjectively and intersubjectively negotiated locally (in the host society) and transnationally (with the homeland). I propose to conceptualize their identity negotiation as “contested transnationality”, given its characteristic of being contested under historical, social, political, and cultural impacts; and given its nature of transcending national borders in terms of practice, meaning making, envision, and sense of belongingness, no matter where the subjects are located physically, “here” or “there”.

Admittedly, this ethnography centering on CC is by no means an exhaustive narration of either the overall Chinese education diaspora, or the Chinese community in the midwestern state where my fieldwork was conducted, even though CC is deeply embedded in the Chinese community and well exemplifies the larger population. As an ethnographer, I remain clear that this study is not meant to provide a definitive profile of the midwestern Chinese diaspora, especially given that the Chinese diaspora is so rapidly growing in such a changing world; instead, my study provides a snapshot of the Chinese education diaspora in the past three decades.

But this period of time has tremendous significance, marking the start of the education diaspora and the first generation re-rooting in the midwestern state. It also has to be noted that, CC is only one of the many diasporic voluntary associations, and one of the oldest of such associations in the Chinese diaspora that I studied. Therefore, it has tended to attract more “older” individuals in the post-1980s Chinese mainlanders, and is more actively involved with them. The dynamics of other/newer types of diasporic voluntary associations are somewhat different from that of CC.

The alumni associations, for example, tend to attract younger and later comers from mainland, and appear to be more focused on knowledge dissemination in the local community and the promotion of transnational collaboration between China and the United States. These newer associations and younger Chinese subjects are not discussed in my study, mainly because they are not actively involved with CC. Also, participants of Chinese religious groups and the second generation of the diaspora are not the focus of my study, but they would be intriguing and important topics for future studies. The research approach in my study and some of its findings, for example, the analytical frameworks of contextualizing the diasporic subjects in time, space and human; the symbolism of *renqing* and circles, attempts to produce transnational music (or other cultural products), may be theoretically important to consider in other diaspora groups, including other social groups, as well as other generations.

In light of “liminality” as thoroughly examined by Turner (1967; 1969), I highlight the socio-cultural disorientation resulting from their diasporic journey, including collapsed social orders which had provided the diasporic Chinese with positions, hierarchies and differentiation, as well as disrupted ideologies, such as entrenched collectivism and patriotism. Accordingly, originating and engaging in CC and other diasporic institutions are subjective and intersubjective practices of the diasporic Chinese to develop social relations, to reconstruct social orders, and to recreate meanings individually and collectively. My fieldwork revealed a model of such social practice that was unique to the Chinese diaspora. Simply put, it was a social “web” constructed through “dragging” (to the groups), *renqing* (mutual obligatory indebtedness), and circles (dynamic yet fluid groups with communal interests and bonds), which provided them with interdependence and interrelatedness with their peers, as well as with social norms in the diasporic local that conditioned their social interaction.

APC played an integral role in the identity construction of the participants. It enabled them to exhibit, to celebrate, and to communicate meanings in a public space for individual and collective narratives, for example, they made connections between past memories and present life, brought symbols from the “homeland” and found meanings in a new context. It also served as a symbolic “stage” that made personal identification possible through communal effort. More specifically, APC gave rise to two types of prominent symbolic capital that was locally formed in the Chinese diaspora, *renqing* and “stage”, and facilitated the conversion of symbolic capital as an institutionalized system, which was signified by APC ticket as a “voucher”. APC is intrinsically related to their sense of longing, being and belonging, and it largely reinforced the new social orders, strengthened the interrelatedness, and recreated new meanings for the participants.

Sokefeld (2006) problematizes a prevailing easy notion of the “community” of diaspora without discussion of interactive social practice and network building within that population, as he maintains that community is a discursive construction rather than a social reality. What Sokefeld asserts was substantially manifested in my research

findings, which revealed intricately entangled subjectivity and intersubjectivity in constructing the “Chinese community”, typified by an extraordinarily strong desire for overall “solidarity” of that community, hopeful that they could think as one mind and speak as one voice. Such an appeal for “solidarity” was not so much an unquestionable loyalty to the distant “homeland”, or a guaranteed sharedness deriving from a common heritage, as assumed in the majority of scholarship; but rather an undertaking for the participants to accomplish through grassroots endeavors with music as a facilitating element. For example, the Chinese participants organized local WWII commemorations of an ethnic history of being conquered and of victory in winning independence through united effort; they organized annual local Spring Festival celebrations (*Chun Wan*) through collaborations of diasporic Chinese groups. A most compelling endeavor was a disaster relief campaign in response to a “national crisis” in the “homeland”, which “unprecedentedly consolidated” individuals and groups across the community, yet ended up with deep conflicts and fragmentation of the community. Conflicts were already in existence in their daily practice in various ways, and were aggravated by such grand events.

The yearning for diasporic “solidarity” was in itself paradoxical, in that inevitable contestations are deeply rooted in the experience of the Chinese education diaspora given its unique historical, political, socio-cultural, and global contexts, including social changes in China, Sino-US relations, foreign policies, and economic, social, cultural and political disparities. The subjects in the Chinese education diaspora were more adeptly navigating crossculturally and transnationally than their “labor” predecessors in the earlier Chinese diaspora, yet their subjectivities were more contested as well. Individual and collectives are not always in accordance, which might give rise to ambivalence or conflicts. For example, on the one hand, CC’s APC incurred severe competition and endless conflicts among participants for stage opportunities to win “fame” and recognition; on the other hand, putting up APC required collective efforts and was a way

for the participants to “form a group and belong to it”. Such contested meanings were manifested by the participants, involuntary dedication to the group engagement.

Some conflicts are outcomes of an enduring disposition, or “habitus” negotiating itself in a new social, cultural and historical context. In light of Bourdieu’s conception, the pre-diasporic “habitus” they carried along with them into diaspora, though enduring, was inevitably subject to mutation and adaptation in changed contexts, which very often resulted in divergence and contestations. CC’s attempt of producing transnational music by relying on China for repertoire and music style was such an example. As a diasporic music group, CC intended to cater to the diverse tastes of diasporic Chinese who had a wide age range as well as to an American audience. However, the “thematic” music of extollation with its grandiose style, despite the novelty felt by some of the American audience and sympathy of some Chinese born in the Mao-era, created confusion and ambivalence in the audience and even within the participants themselves. Such contestation was associated with “otherness” in their country of origin due to its social upheaval, and was compounded by dislocation in “another” culture. The diaspora was a “contested” diaspora; their identities were inherently conflictual and controversial. “We”, “I”, and “They” were constantly as well as consciously negotiated in the diaspora. Self-making and community building were subjective and intersubjective practices conditioned by historical and institutional impact on the diasporic “local”, as well as by transnational and political – economic forces.

The world is becoming smaller with the globalization of the economy, culture, media, and technology. For diasporic Chinese, the homeland “there” and the hostland “here” were no longer mutually exclusive as they once had been. They were brought together into close interplay in the everyday life of the diasporic Chinese, especially as influenced by China’s rising power and the increasing interdependence of China and the United States. In light of these transformations, the “homeland myth” (Safran, 1990) seems problematic, because the permanent dream of “returning” to the homeland was no longer the primary concern of the diasporic Chinese. What concerned them, however, was how

to be “re-rooted” in a diasporic “home”. In other words, the proficiency of the education diaspora in navigating across national borders unleashed the negotiation of identities that used to be confined to the diasporic “local”, but spans transnationally in this globalizing world, because by pursuing degrees in the West, they have acquired global cultural capital that has greatly enhanced their competency and flexibility as transnational beings.

Differing from Ong’s perspective that argument that transnationality is created through frequent transnational movements, the transnationality that I argue about the education diaspora, however, is embedded in the diasporic “local” but extends beyond national borders and creates transnational meanings. It was manifested by the transnational trajectory of CC’s music making; it was demonstrated by transnational activism through music and the united efforts of the Chinese community; it was also characterized by the transnational observation, comparison and the calibration of life choices of the diasporic Chinese. I stress the significance of a more implicit approach to transnationality, which is embedded in local practices in the diaspora, corroborated by Appadurai’s (1992, p31) discerning articulation of “global imagination”:

The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is somewhere else), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility.

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Appendix 1 Profile of Key Informants

These people became the key informants of my study, as a result of purposive sampling and intersubjective relationship building during my fieldwork. The commonality and diversity of their age, educational background, profession, path in diaspora, role in CC and the community, and main perspectives, vividly manifested the daily practice and narratives of the diasporic Chinese singers under study. They were the people who I had most conversations with, and closest observations of. I had interviewed some of them multiple times, to know the history, the other people, the contexts, their own stories and sense-making, and for member checking.

C. Shi, female, at her 40s. She came to the United States in 1990s and received a Master's degree in finance. She was "dragged" to CC by a coworker, and later she was "dragged" to a dance theater. Claiming that she was not a good singer or dancer, she stayed in the groups because of the stage opportunities offered to her and the friends that she made there.

F. Zhou, female, at her 50s, was the vocal coach and artistic director of CC. She was invited to involve in CC by its members several months after she moved here with her husband from Canada. She was the only vocalist who had professional background, who received her master's degree in Canada. As more and more people intended to learn singing from her, she opened a vocal studio that received many CC members. She was the primary contributor of designing the 2009 APC "Music Across Oceans", with the ideas of connecting people with Chinese and American cultural backgrounds with music. Her musical accomplishment was recognized by several grants in Canada and the United States.

G. Nie, F. Zhou's husband, one of the earliest Chinese Ph.D. holders in food science, was a high-ranked executive of a large multinational manufacturing company, participated in

CC while I was doing the fieldwork. Not only participated in CC's APC performance, he gave out tickets to his colleagues to invite them to watch the shows.

H. Qu, H. Yao's husband, received his master's and Ph.D. degrees in engineering and worked for a large multinational hardware company. Along with his wife, H. Qu was also a member who joined CC from the beginning and is still actively engaged.

H. Yao, female, at her 60s. was the founding president of CC. She was at her thirties when she came to the United States for graduate study in 1980s, funded by the Chinese government. A few years later, her husband and young daughter came to join her. Both of them received Ph.D. degrees from a local university, and changed their visas after the Chinese Student Protection Act 1992 was issued. H. Yao began to work for local government agencies to date, and was in charge of educational development programs for public school systems. She was one of those early mainland comers to the Midwestern state, and had been there for over 30 years. Similar to L. Chang, she had witnessed the growth of the local Chinese community, and expressed her concerns about the "solidarity" of CC and the Chinese community in the interviews.

J. Chou, male, at his 40s. Received master's degree in finance and worked for a big national bank. Relocated here from Canada in 2008. Was "dragged" by a co-worker to CC, and then elected the president of the group. Met his wife, who was a teacher of a local dance theater, during preparation for CC's APC. Becoming the president enlarged his social network and influence to a great sense. The large attendance of his wedding was a good example. Such connections, however, had brought him mixed feelings.

L. Chang, male, at his 60s, the president of CC for the longest time. He came to the United States in 1980s and received a Ph.D. degree in biochemistry. He worked at the same multinational company with P. Tan as an advanced scientist and had a number of patents. His wife had also been a committed CC member too. During the years of stay, he had been actively engaged in several Chinese organizations, such as CC, a dance theater, a professional association, and had developed wide networks. Despite officially granted

titles, he was regarded as an “influential” person in the Chinese community. He was one of the main organizers of the disaster relief campaign, the 2005 WWII commemoration, and several other events.

L. Sun, at his 70s. He spent half a year every year to maintain the effectiveness of his permanent residency, which was sponsored by his daughter who received her Ph.D. and stayed with her husband and children. During his stay in the other half-year in China, he was a member of a senior choir composed of all retirees. But he found the group dynamics there rather different from CC. Lao Chen joined CC, instead of senior centers that most senior parents joined, because he was attracted by the group dynamics: lively, well organized, and “had ideas”.

M. Sun, Lao Chen’s daughter, epitomized younger generations of the education diaspora, who were born near the end of the Cultural Revolution and grown up during China’s fundamental transformations. When she and her husband came to the United States to pursue graduate study, they were at their 20s, and received help from her relatives who had finished their degrees and already settled down. Other contextualization included a much more developed local Chinese community, more flexible policies concerning the Chinese education diaspora in China and the United States. M. Sun believed that the diasporic Chinese should negotiate their good more aggressively and more strategically. Every year, M. Sun and her family went to watch CC’s APC to support her father onstage, though they did not have strong resonance of the “red music” that CC mostly produced.

P. Tan, female, at her 50s, received her Ph.D. degree in France and came to the Midwestern state for postdoc in late 1980s. After relocating in several places in the United States, she came back to the Midwest and began working for a large multinational conglomerate company as an advanced specialist for years. In 2000, P. Tan and her husband were “dragged” to CC by L. Chang, when CC was in a membership crisis. Her husband quit in a couple of years, and became a loyal supporter of CC, who made donation and volunteered for backstage help for its APC every year. P. Tan stayed in the

group since then, and became one of the most distinguished “red flowers” of the group. She was even known as the “best (amateur) soprano” in the local Chinese community and had frequent stage exposure at community events. Despite professional training, joking that she had “irritating voice”, P. Tan improved her singing skills by learning from F. Zhou, who was the vocal coach and artistic director of CC, and by watching videos online.

S. Wei, female, at her 60s. She and her husband were at their thirties and professors at a distinguished university before they came to the United States in the early 1990s. They both received Ph.D. degrees in humanities and taught at a renowned public university here. The couple had been in CC for over 20 years. A talented amateur singer, S. Wei was one of CC’s “red flowers”, and was selected for *xiaojiemu* almost at every APC. Besides CC, she was also actively involved in a local Chinese opera club. Both she and her husband took vocal lessons from F. Zhou.

S. Zuang, male, at his 60s, was an advanced natural science researcher of a top national research institute of China before he came to the United States as a visiting scholar in the 1990s. After he decided to stay, S. Zuang changed several jobs and had been teaching at a local community college for years. In his spare time, he taught Taichi and Chinese kung fu for several local public schools and dance theaters. Unlike other CC members who made time commitment to participate in the regular singing practice, S. Zuang only cared about APC stage opportunities, and had been chosen for *xiaojiemu* many times, owing to his connection with the group leaders.

W. Bing, at his 50s. He was an outstanding scientist who received national funding and directed a lab of a renowned university in China prior to becoming a visiting scholar in the United States in the early 1990s. He and his wife were “dragged” by L. Chang to CC while the group was during membership crisis. Admitting himself to be a “terrible singer”, he had remained actively engaged in CC for fundraising, promoting, and coordinating things. In addition to CC, W. Bing had been actively involved in several other voluntary groups in the local Chinese community, and had played important roles in

community events, such as the WWII commemoration, the disaster relief campaign, and the spring festival celebrations.

W. Xie, male, were at his late thirties when he came to the United States for engineering Ph.D. degree in 1980s. His wife and children came to join him a few years after he arrived, due to the rigid policy of the Chinese university that he worked for. He believed he would have been much more successful had he stayed in China, and always talked about his past. After completing his Ph.D. degree, he was employed by a local construction company. W. Xie joined CC near the beginning. Though involvement in CC was “too time-consuming”, he and his wife were actively involved in CC’s performances and logistics. They took part in *xiaojiemu* at CC’s APC almost every year. Having lived here for over 30 years, W. Xie had a large social network locally. He was also a founding member of the oldest regional fellowship associations.

X. Deng, male, at his 70s, was the conductor of CC for many years. Before he came to the United States, he had been an exceptionally accomplished musician in China with a number of incredible achievements. His accomplishment was greatly restricted by his English proficiency that was very basic. But with his American ex-wife’s help in communication, he received several grants to compose and perform. Despite the honors, his income mainly came from selling instruments at local bazaars. He had been the main contributor of designing CC’s APCs in recent years. X. Deng strongly advocated for making “real Chinese music” and CC’s own branded music. Unlike F. Zhou, whose music style was more western, X. Deng stressed Chinese folk music. To maintain freshness of music making, X. Deng went to areas densely resided by ethnic minority groups in China for inspirations.

Z. Chen, L. Chang’s wife. She had been a committed CC member along with her husband, and supported his dedicated engagement and leadership over the years. Besides her job as a lab staff, involvement in CC had been an important part of her life. Despite no professional background, she had taken efforts to refresh her repertoires and music

knowledge by watching popular Chinese musical entertainment shows online, and had remained a “red flower” on CC’s stage for years.

Z. Hua, S. Wei’s husband, came to the United States a couple years before his wife did. He had been a CC member for over 20 years. He went to college the first year after the Cultural Revolution was over. As a dedicated CC member, Z. Hua carefully kept record of CC’s past APC programs and loaned them to me for my data collection. He was elected the president of CC when it was preparing for its 20th anniversary celebration. Being the president involved huge amount of work, and he felt “very relieved” when he finished his term. For success of the 20th anniversary celebration, Z. Hua took great efforts to “drag” many people to CC. From our conversations, I noticed that he was very concerned about the “solidarity” of the group and the local Chinese community. In order to add “bicultural” component to CC’s APCs, he had brought in several of white American students who learned Chinese from him at the university he taught.

Appendix 2 CC's submitted grant in 2011

Amount of Request: \$ 10,000 Project Start Date: 7/1/2011

Total Project Cost: \$26,550 Project End Date: 2/28/2012

Applicant Group: CC

History of arts programming No history of arts programming

Project Summary:

This project is to produce a concert entitled "Twenty Years of Music" on October 29, 2011, at XX Auditorium in the College of XX. The concert will present local Chinese immigrants' cultural heritage, acculturation and integration in American society as reflected in the Twenty-year history of CC.

Narrative:

This year CC will celebrate her 20th anniversary by staging a high-quality concert that represents the cultural heritage of the Chinese Americans in ABC (the Midwestern state, applies to the whole proposal), their acceptance of American culture, and the integration of the two cultures embodied in them. To reach this goal, CC's Board of Administration has decided to hire Mr. X. Deng, the best Chinese conductor and composer in ABC, and F. Zhou, the best Chinese vocalist in the area, as Conductor and Artistic Director to design a program, to train the amateur singers of the choir, and to conduct the choir in order to reach the highest possible artistic quality.

I. ARTISTIC QUALITY

The concert will present the cultural heritage, acculturation and integration in American society of the Chinese residing in ABC as reflected in the Twenty-year history of CC.

This special concert will be programmed to embrace multiple art forms including vocal and instrumental music, poetry recitation, and dances. Our Artistic Director is an excellent soprano herself, and has successful experiences designing and directing excellent concerts. Our Conductor is a highly renowned Chinese-American musician whose music career has spanned more than fifty years, many of which conducting choirs and instrumental ensembles. In addition to CC, this concert will also feature guest

professional artists and other Chinese art organizations, including two other professional Chinese sopranos, a professional tenor, two professional ballet dancers, three Chinese dance organizations, and a children's choir whose members are American children in a Chinese immersion school. The concerts will be performed by about 120 professional and amateur artists. The professional Chinese artists are the very best not only in ABC, but also in this country. The amateur singers and dancers have been taking classes and private lessons from professional artists, and have made great progress. With the high caliber of our professional artists (Artistic Director, Conductor, composer, pianist, vocal soloists, and choreographer), the much improved ability of our amateur performers, and the experience of participating organizations in running and performing high quality concerts, the program will be well planned and carried out successfully.

With careful planning, exhaustive literature research, effective rehearsals, aggressive promotion, and high quality performance by professional and amateur vocalists, instrumentalists, and dancers, we will deliver a high quality, enjoyable, and educational concert to our audience.

II. DESIGN OF PROGRAM

The program will have two parts. Part One features the cultural heritage of Chinese immigrants. It includes two mixed chorus songs, a female chorus, a male trio, a female solo, a group of antiphonal songs, two dances each by a dance theater, and a chorus with a professional soprano as lead singer accompanied by dance. The songs in this part include not only a classical Chinese poem set to music by our composer X. Deng, several famous modern Chinese folk songs from various parts of China, but also five classical Chinese love songs performed by five pairs of male and female members of CC.

Part Two of this program reflects ABC Chinese immigrants' acceptance of American culture and their integration into the American society. It includes mixed chorus, male chorus, female solo, male solo by a professional tenor, female trio by professional sopranos, dance, and a poem recitation accompanied by music. The songs in this part include both Chinese and Western songs. For example, "Cherish" (a Chinese pop song), "The King of China's Daughter," "Magnificent Horses," "Love Story," "Ballet in Spring," "On the Wings of Music," and "This Land Is Your Land." The concert will be climaxed with a poem titled "Twenties Years of Music" written by members of CC and set to music by our renowned composer X. Deng.

We strongly believe that the concert will be successful because (1) CC has successfully produced a number of high quality concerts in the past, which altogether attracted more than 9,000 spectators and received overwhelmingly positive responses from audiences and local media, especially the 2009 and 2010 productions, which were said to be of the highest quality in CC's history; (2) This concert will be designed, directed, and conducted by highly qualified professional musicians: e.g. Mr. X. Deng (Conductor and

composer), Ms. F. Zhou (Artistic Director), are both renowned Chinese artists; and (3) The concert will feature high quality professional artists.

Accompaniment for singing and dancing will be done using live music and CDs. We will work hard to elevate the artistic quality of the proposed project to an even higher level and bring the best of Chinese choral music and dance to a broader audience.

III. PROMOTION

- (1) We have organized our chorus members to write a series of 20 articles to commemorate the 20th anniversary of CC to be published in local newspapers, March - October, 2011. Promotional articles will tell in vivid language the history of CC, and how it reflects local Chinese immigration experience.
- (2) The concert will be promoted July - October 2011 in major Chinese newspapers in ABC with more than 30,000 readers.
- (3) Press releases will be sent to other local news media from August through October 2011.
- (4) Promotional newsletters will be distributed monthly, July through October 2011, through the email networks of local China-related organizations, which collectively will reach more than 15,000 households.
- (5) CC members who teach at local universities will promote this production among university students.
- (6) Disability assistants will help disabled audiences to seat.

At the concert, feedback forms will be distributed to audiences, guest artists and choir members. The artistic quality will be evaluated through the feedback. Financial success of the project will be determined from the balance sheet.

IV. COMMUNITY NEED/SUPPORT

Community and individuals served

- i. Since 1980, a large number of Chinese people have come to ABC to live, study, and work. They all have interesting stories and valuable experiences, and collectively their personal stories reflect the Chinese immigration experience as a whole. But there has never been a concert that presents such unique experiences. As CC is the only Chinese choral organization in ABC and enjoys a good reputation among local Chinese people, members of the Chinese community and American friends have expressed to CC that they would like to see these experiences represented in music on stage. CC thus decides

to celebrate her 20th anniversary by presenting the cultural heritage and acculturation of about 30,000 Chinese immigrants in ABC to meet the need of the community.

The top objective of the proposed project is to promote our audiences' understanding and appreciation of Chinese immigrants' cultural heritage and their integration in American society. Our core audiences are the local Chinese community and American friends who are interested in Chinese culture and history. In our previous annual concerts, we received strong support from our local communities. With China playing a more and more important role in the world and the increasing success of our production concerts, we expect to see strong growth in our audience base this year. We are confident that the proposed project will again draw strong support from the local Chinese community and American audiences.

In addition to serving audience from different communities, we also serve professional and amateur artists of our community. Sixty members of CC and estimated 60 members of other art organizations will be served by the proposed project. This project will unite a large number of professional and amateur artists to excel under the common goal. We have had lots of successful collaborations with professional artists before. With effective communication and coordination, we are certain this project will also succeed.

Community and individual support

As we did in the past six years, besides the grant (this proposal is for), our financial sources will include donations from choir members, businesses and individuals in local communities. Choir members, dancers and musicians will also dedicate significant amount of their time, about 80 hours/person/year, to activities such as practice, rehearsal and performance, as well as publicity campaign, outreach, and fundraising activities.

V. DIVERSITY

Our artists are well diversified in gender, age (10 – 60), levels of artistic training, forms of art, career, and educational and economic backgrounds. Uniting such a diversified group to produce a successful program is one of the major motivations for this project. Similarly, our board members are diversified in gender and age, and our audience consists of people with diversities in race, gender, age, educational and economic backgrounds. We will continue to make extra efforts to better outreach the non-Chinese audience. Our concert will include traditional, folk, and popular Chinese songs, classical Western music, poem recitation, and Chinese dances. Our singing will have diversified formats: solo, duet, trio, male chorus, female chorus, and mixed chorus. With our well-thought plan, experience, good teamwork, and strong support from local Chinese and American communities, we are certain that we can successfully carry out the project.

VI. PROJECT BUDGET

| Estimated Expenses | Cash | In-Kind | Explanatory Notes |
|--|--------------------|------------------|--|
| 1. Personnel (employee or contract) | | | |
| a. Artistic | | | |
| Artistic director | \$ 3,500 | | |
| Conductor | \$ 3,800 | | |
| Choreographer | \$ 1,500 | | |
| Composer | \$ 2,200 | | |
| Accompaniment | \$ | | |
| | 2,400 | | |
| b. Administrative & other personnel | | | |
| Concert production technicians | \$ 400 | | |
| Concert production custodians | \$ 300 | | |
| c. Employee benefits&payroll | | | |
| 2. Supplies | | | |
| taxes | | | |
| Costumes | \$ 800 | | costumes for the concert |
| scores, folders | \$ 350 | | performance, purchase of music |
| stage props | \$ 500 | | scores, buying stage props |
| 3. Printing & postage | | | |
| Program | \$ 900 | | |
| Poster | \$ 500 | | |
| 4. Space & equipment rental | | | |
| Concert Hall/Equipment for production | \$ 6,800 | | |
| Rehearsal space rental | \$ 300 | \$ 1050 | HCC charges us \$30/use, while regular charge is \$65/use, (65-30)x30=\$1050 |
| 5. Transportation | | | |
| transportation compensation | \$ 400 | | |
| 6. ADA-related costs | | | |
| Disability aids | \$ 200 | | |
| Signage/printing | \$ 200 | | |
| 7. Other (explain) | | | |
| Concert program design (professional) | \$ 300 | | |
| Publicity/promotional, poster, | \$ 150 | | |
| brochures, printing and mailing | | | |
| 8. Subtotal | A \$ 25,500 | B \$ 1050 | |
| 9. Total Expenses (Add lines 8A & 8B) | | | \$ 26,550 |

VII. INCOME

Please check your math. Project budget errors or ineligible expenses may affect your grant request.

| Estimated Income | Amount | Explanatory Notes |
|---|------------------|---|
| 1. Grants and Contributions | | |
| a. Individual Contributions | | \$ 3,600 Membership fees and donations of choir members and others through United Way and other organizations |
| b. Foundations and corporations | \$ 1,900 | Donations from local China-related units |
| c. Government | \$ - | |
| Subtotal grants and contributions | \$ 5,500 | |
| 2. Earned Income | | |
| a. Sales | | |
| b. Admissions | \$ 10,000 | $600 \times \$10_{\text{reg}} + 500 \times \$8_{\text{disc}} + 400 \times \$0_{\text{free}} = \$10,000$ |
| Subtotal earned income | \$ 10,000 | |
| 3. Add subtotals for Parts 1 & 2 | \$ 15,500 | |
| 4. Total in-kind | \$ 1,050 | |
| 5. MRAC Request | \$ 10,000 | |
| 6. TOTAL INCOME | \$ 26,55 | |