

# 自然写给春天的情书

## Nature's Love Letter to Spring



紫色丁香 | Lilac

### 丁香主题周末主要活动

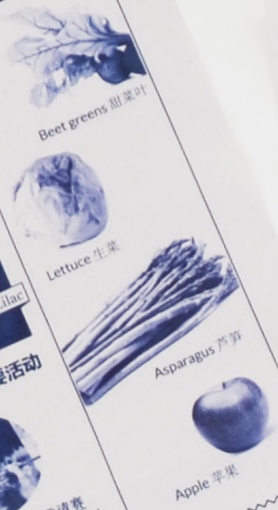
有着锦簇花枝、甘即芬芳和心型叶子的丁香是大自然写给春天的情书。这个周末我们邀请您共赏丁香这个美国花园最爱的花卉。希思家城 (The Burn Family) 丁香是我们活动的焦点。届时写生绘画、音乐、舞蹈和会谈等活动将同时展开。

### 关于纽约植物园

纽约植物园是一个标志性的纽约重要教育机构和著名植物园，现为国家历史地标。它是世界上最大的城市地区中最大的一个。它独特于多样化的景观和丰富的馆藏和花园，美景以及涵盖多学科的展览和项目。

更多活动和门票信息请查询  
公园网站：  
<https://www.nybg.org/>

公园地址：  
2900南大道，布朗克斯区，  
NY 10468-5126



Beet greens 甜菜叶

Lettuce 生菜

Asparagus 芦笋

Apple 苹果

### Seasonal Fruits & Vegetables in New York 纽约地区5月蔬果

- Dried beans 干豆类
- Herbs 香草调料
- Onions 洋葱
- Potatoes 土豆
- Radishes 萝卜
- Spinach 菠菜



### 庆祝活动

加入我们庆祝这新鲜盛开的时刻，活动包括现场音乐和园艺之旅。

郁金香  
紫罗兰

# 来布莱恩公园以球会

## Come play ping pong at Bryant

我们的乒乓球桌位于公园内靠近第六大道和42街的位置。欢迎在我们的两个最顶级的乒乓球桌上测试你的技能并以球会友。球拍和球将会免费提供。参与者请和活动主持人注册以保留10分钟的时间段。

你知道我们每月举办多场乒乓球锦标赛吗？这些锦标赛的获胜者将获得Bryant Park乒乓球奖杯。参赛者需要预先注册，注册在每个活动开始前一个月开放。

◆乒乓球桌每日  
11:00am - 7:00pm  
\*气温低于45°F不开放



Our ping pong tables are located on the 42nd Street side of the park near Sixth Avenue. Test your skills and find opponents at our two state of the art tables. Paddles and balls are provided free of charge. Sign up with the ping pong host to reserve a 10-minute time slot.

Did you know we host monthly Ping Pong tournaments? Winners of these single bracket-style tournaments will receive a Bryant Park Ping Pong trophy. Pre-registration is required and opens one month in advance.

# 清明

## Qingming

几天前在泛岛快速公路开车经过汤申路，眼快的孩子突然说：“清明节要到了，不让扫墓的人在路边停车的告示牌又摆出来了！”说的也是，今年四月五日星期一，农历二月二十一日就是清明节了。

不说各地华人过清明节的风俗，祭祀和扫墓等活动；且说“清明”是中国历史里二十四“节气”之一。节气是古代用以反映一年四季气温、降雨、气候等方面的变化，让劳动人民用以安排农事和各种祭祀活动。

中国古代天文学家以地球为中心，把太阳环绕地球所经过的轨道称为“黄道”，再把黄道均分为24部分，每一部分的起点就是一个节气。从几何学来说，黄道环绕地球一周为360度。从清朝开始，中国定0度为节气“春分”点，太阳在黄道

### A new immigrant family 新移民一家



Do you have any tips of overcoming cultural and linguistic differences with your family members? We welcome you to share your stories with us through email(12345@cosmosjournal.com). Are there any stories that have been adapted into comics and published in this journal? We welcome you to share your stories through email(12345@cosmosjournal.com) or share them with us through our website(www.cosmosjournal.com). We will be happy to share your stories with our readers.

Parsons School of Design

### 英文23

Bring 3 days worth of puzzles to Beauty Bakery (233 Mott Street) and you can get a free bread or beverage.

跟着数字顺序完成3个英文小练习。积累3张填好的英文练习可到美丽烘焙店兑换一个面包或者一杯饮品。

1 下列鲜花的英文名称你认识哪些?  
lily 百合  
rose 玫瑰

2 请从下面字母中圈出1中的英文单词。  
T U L I P G R  
V I O L E T J  
R D K I Q L O  
C H F L S L S  
O C M A Q Y E  
T F D C F I N E  
J A S M I N E

3 假如你是这位顾客，你想要你的中英文答案填入对话框。  
Customer: I would like my \_\_\_\_\_  
顾客：我想买米花让我的 \_\_\_\_\_  
Florist: What kind \_\_\_\_\_  
花店店员：你想要什么 \_\_\_\_\_  
Customer: I want \_\_\_\_\_  
顾客：我想要 \_\_\_\_\_



# CULTURAL CROSSPOINT

Design for intercultural agency through an  
ethnography-based design process

by Tianyi Qi

## **DATES**

September 2018 to May 2019

---

## **ORGANIZATION**

Chinese-American Planning  
Council Open Door Senior Center

---

## **LOCATION**

New York, NY

---

## **CONTACT**

qit644@newschool.edu

---

## **FACULTY ADVISORS**

Lara Penin, Elliott Montgomery,  
Eduardo Staszowski, Patricia  
Berne, Anna Matthiesen, Georgia  
Traganou

---

## **SPECIAL THANKS**

All administrators and members  
at Open Door Senior Center

---

# INTRODUCTION

## Thesis Abstract

This project began with my curiosity towards a group of people instead of a problem. Wishing to know the quality of life of older Chinese immigrants in the Greater New York area, I immersed myself at Open Door Senior Center, where I found an interesting phenomena: there is a group of older Chinese immigrants learning English every day even though they don't have an urgent need to use English in their daily life. I conducted design-led research to understand their motivations for learning English and attending English class. My participation in this social setting alongside the research methods I used also provided me with deep insights about the culture in the senior center and among older Chinese immigrants.

My design statement became tricky at a certain moment: I was designing for a better English learning experience for a community that is isolated from mainstream society. I realized that my interventions can't avoid carrying certain bias about how immigrants should position themselves in the larger society. Should they isolate themselves within their own community or assimilate to the mainstream society? There is no correct answer to this question but rather a personal choice. The idea that my design interventions might reflect my own proposition to this question kept bothering me because I didn't want to impose my attitudes on this community.

The proposed intervention attempts to find a humility and respect the way of bridging this community's cultural separation from mainstream society. It is a new section in existing Chinese newspapers called: Cultural Crosspoint. It helps the readers, especially those not familiar with digital media platforms, to better understand the differences between American and Chinese culture and provides strategies to cope with issues caused by these differences. The aim of this intervention is to give immigrants tools to have more intercultural interactions if they desire while letting individuals make choices at their own time and pace.

## Starting Point

My initial curiosity towards older Chinese immigrants was sparked in a research project about generational attitudes towards gentrification in Chinatown. I walked into a bakery and found there were a lot of Chinese immigrants sitting there, reading a newspaper or chatting with others, with a cup of coffee or tea on the table near to them. The goods in the bakery were very Chinese: there were rice rolls, a typical Cantonese food, and steamed buns. This scene stuck with me and since then I began to realize Chinatown consists of two parallel worlds: one world for young people and another for the old. Young people go to modern bakeries and bubble tea shops while older people go to traditional bakeries, buy a dollar-coffee and sit there for half of a day. Another fact that shocked me was, as a youth, I had never noticed this very obvious phenomena before: these people used to be invisible in my eyes. Although they are everywhere, in the streets, in the parks and in this kind of bakery. I felt really bad when these thoughts came into my mind but this complex feeling also triggered my curiosity. I no longer wanted to treat them like air. I want to know more about them: their stories and thoughts, their past and their ideal futures.

## **BELOW**

A picture I took in the bakery



“With so many immigrant neighborhoods, one of the most comprehensive health systems in the U.S. and excellent public transportation, New York has the potential to be a great place for immigrants to grow old.”

- The New Face of New York’s Seniors, 2013

## SOCIAL CONTEXT

### Service Delivery Structure

American society is graying: the number of people age 65 and over is growing rapidly and the number will reach 78 million in 2035 and edge out the population of children.<sup>1</sup> The national trend is inescapable for New York City. In the next 2 decades, the aging population in New York City will increase by 35 percent and the number will grow from approximately 998,000 today to 1.3 million in 2030.

Aside from the issues led by this rapid growth in population, New York City will face unique challenges due to its social and cultural ecosystem: as a highly diverse and inclusive city with a significant immigrant population, the aging population of New York City is diverse, too. As the home for 463,000 older immigrant residents, New York City has the largest foreign-born population among all of the cities in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> Near half of the population older than 65 are immigrants and with the current growth rates, they will become the majority in 5 years. This population is extremely diverse in aspects like ethnicity, language, education level, reasons for immigration, etc.

Although the city provides a variety of services to older people, compared with their American-born counterparts, fewer immigrants benefit from these services as the result of limited English proficiency and cultural barriers. The language barrier prevents service providers from communicating with old immigrants who are in need. Three out of five older immigrants in New York City have limited English proficiency, which means they speak English less than “very well” or not at all. Cultural barriers are another crucial challenge for the city. Different ethnic groups have distinguished ideologies about how to treat older people. For instance, in Asian cultures, family members should be responsible for taking care of the elderly, which forms a public perception that old people accessing social services is shameful. This ideology might prevent old people and their family members from reaching out to service providers.

Luckily, alongside the city government’s endeavors to make its aging population focused services more inclusive, many organizations based in immigrant

communities are bridging the gap between social services and older immigrants. They have a good understanding of the services provided by the city and the needs of older immigrants and are able to connect well with both sides. Other than the “middleman”, they are also service providers who offer services that well echo ethnic needs of older immigrants. For instance, many senior centers located in Chinese immigrant communities have a Taichi interest group. India Home, a non-profit organization that serves Indian and larger South Asian senior citizens, offers special health programs to address the special needs of these population.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, geographical areas dominated by one ethnic group, known as ethnic enclaves, contribute a lot to ensuring older immigrants’ life quality.<sup>4</sup> Manhattan Chinatown, Little Italy and Koreatown, just to mention a few, are well-known ethnic enclaves. The high ethnic concentration in these areas provide opportunities and resources to their inhabitants. Many community-based businesses and organizations are fostered in ethnic enclaves due to these benefits. Organizations that specifically serve older immigrants are able to sustain themselves in ethnic enclaves based upon local resources. Besides these organizations, other businesses in ethnic enclaves also provide the necessary social and cultural resources to older immigrants. Ethnic enclaves provide a harbor where immigrant seniors are able to spend their

late life with ease in New York City, a society that has huge cultural, linguistic and political differences with their home country.

### Manhattan Chinatown and Open Door Senior Center

The “city-ethnic enclave-local organization” structure provides most services need to old immigrants. The context I based my research on is a case of how this framework works.

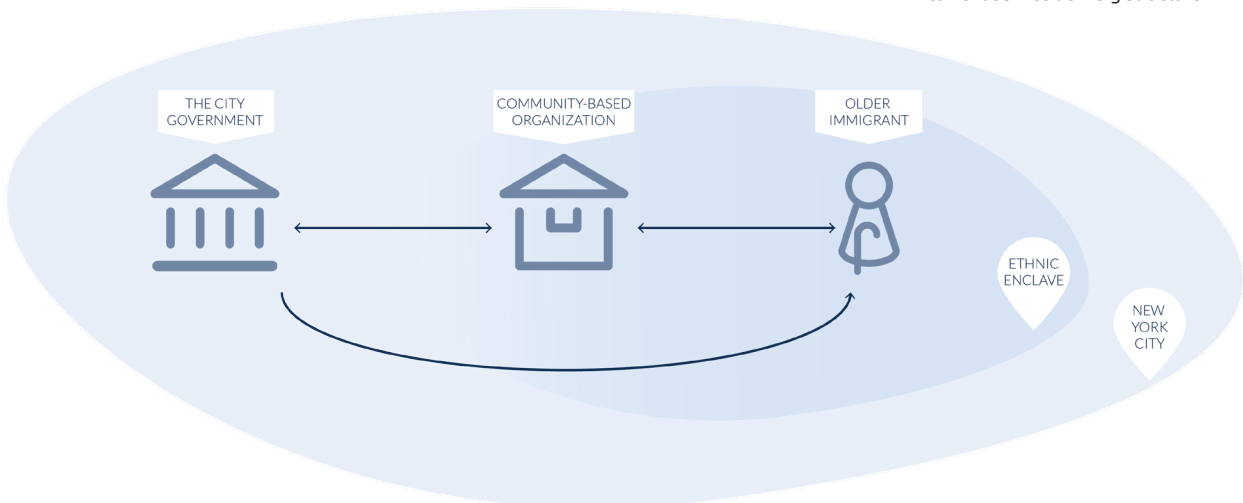
Chinatown is an ethnic enclave located in Lower Manhattan. For historical and social reasons it currently has a Cantonese-dominant culture. The history of Manhattan Chinatown dates back to the late 19th century when Chinese laborers were forced to move from California to the East Coast due to the decline of the mining business.<sup>5</sup> In the early years of Chinatown, the main demographic group was Taishanese-speaking Chinese immigrants and the population grew slowly as the result of three factors: Exclusion

**“There is a senior center near the place I live, but I didn’t like the food there and came to this one. I have been come here for about 10 years.”**

**-A member of the senior center**

### **BELOW**

A system diagram illustrating the current service delivery structure



Action, limited immigration quota, and extremely imbalanced gender ratio in Chinatown. In the late 1960s, after the quota was raised, a large number of Chinese people moved in, predominantly Cantonese speakers from Hong Kong and Guangdong province. The influx of Cantonese-speaking immigrants not only largely increased the population but also reshaped the cultural dynamics in Manhattan Chinatown. For instance, they developed the streets into Hong Kong style. They also provoked the geographical extension of the neighborhood. Cantonese culture norms have been maintained until today and Cantonese immigrants have resisted most of the influx of immigrants from other parts of China.

Open Door Senior Center is located in Manhattan Chinatown. The majority of its members are originally from Hong Kong and Guangdong province. It is managed by the Chinese-American Planning Council and funded by the New York City Department for the Aging.<sup>6</sup> It services several hundreds of seniors (people older than 62) every day. Most of them are Cantonese speakers but they do not necessarily live in the Chinatown neighborhood. Many of them live in Brooklyn, Queens, and even Staten Island. The services provided in the senior center include daily ethnic meals, educational and recreational programs. Seniors can also access social services, entitlement assistance and counseling in the senior center.

## Inspiration for Research

### Design Anthropology

My project is an ethnography-based design project, which makes it fit into the domain of Design Anthropology. Design Anthropology is an emerging field at the intersection of human and design activity that encompasses multiple practices. Gunn and Donovan outlined 3 directions based on objectives and process.<sup>7</sup> They are Da, dA, and DA. The capitalized initial is the objective of each practice. Da is similar to design research, ethnographic insights are used to inform design decisions. In dA, the theoretical contribution is for Anthropology but not design. Design is used in gaining anthropological understanding and sometimes is the object of anthropological study. DA emphasizes the convergence of efforts of the two disciplines where each one learns from the other. Knowing the different directions of Design Anthropology helped me planning and synthesizing the process of my project, especially during the transition moments between design and research.

### **BELOW. LEFT**

The building where the senior center is located in

### **BELOW. RIGHT**

Chinese Spring Festival celebration party in the senior center



# RESEARCH

## Ethnography

Ethnographic field research is a data collection method that is widely applied to gain a systematic understanding of people and cultures from the view of the subject.<sup>8</sup> It requires ethnographers to enter into a social setting and get to know the people involved in it. The ethnographer participates in the daily routines of this setting, develops ongoing relations with the people in it, and all the while observes what is going on. In this Transdisciplinary Design thesis project, I chose ethnographic research as my major research method in order to ground the project on real needs and involve stakeholders in the process. What's more important, having deep and sincere conversations with participants which requires trust. Being in the context and becoming a member of the community can help break the ice, build relationships and foster trust.



## Exploration

(2018.9-2018.12 collaborated with Megan Willy and Alik Mikaelian)

At the beginning of the project, I explored the ecosystem around the aging population in the greater New York area together with Megan and Alik. We participated in a wide range of activities, including mall-walking, line dancing, bingo, tennis practice, and anti-ageism meetup. These activities happened in different communities and locations, which gave us a broad view of the social landscape. We luckily became friends with several older people and these intergenerational friendships enabled us to have open and sincere conversations about topics that require a certain level of trust to talk about. Through this series of investigation, we gained a holistic understanding of older people's lives thus we were able to identify what specific areas we wanted to dive in at the next stage.

### TOP

Weekly line dancing event

### BOTTOM

Workshop with Ramon in his apartment

### Highlights

We met Ramon, a Filipino immigrant in his 60s when we were mall-walking in New Jersey. We became friends with him and since then we hung out several times together in the following months. Ramon invited us to a church where a line-dancing event happens every Thursday. As newcomers with little previous experience, we were invited to stand in the center of the matrix so we were always able to follow other dancers' steps no matter which direction the matrix is facing. After getting to know each other well, we invited Ramon for a workshop about types of connections older people have in this society. We designed a worksheet to stimulate conversations. He shared with us activities that he participated in every week, people he met in each activity and other information of his current life.

Jennifer is a member of the Institute of Retired Professionals (IRP) at the New School. In the first conversation, she shared with us her experience at IRP and her insights on learning after retirement. We invited her to a workshop about unpacking feelings of what it means to be young and old, where we talked about what "feeling young" and "feeling old" mean, beyond the superficial positive and negative connotations.

### Insights

From the exploration stage, we gained insights about the life of old people. Several major ones are:

- Older people begin to participate in different kinds of social activities after retirement. The objectives and ways of engaging in the activities vary. Most of the activities belong to one of these 3 categories: education, physical exercise, and entertainment.
- A social activity often has a dominant participant group, which means most of the participants are from the same ethnic group, social class and of similar age. Participants of physical exercises are more diverse in these 3 aspects, which shows that physical exercise might have a lower linguistic and cultural barriers to participate.
- Most older people have a daily or weekly routine and stick to it well.
- Social activities provide a sense of connection for older people. They might have deep, interpersonal connections with people in these activities but it is not necessary. The atmosphere of the gathering is even more important for them.

## Senior Center Engagement (2019.2-2019.5)

I based the majority of my research and design iteration process in Open Door Senior Center in order to learn the social practices of older Chinese immigrants and their interpretation of these practices. As a designer, I am aware that my objectives of conducting ethnography are fundamentally different from social scientists. The goals of my ethnographic research are identifying the potential design opportunities, understanding the social fabric of the community and creating interventions as the response to my research. I was hoping that, ideally, my interventions are located on the current social fabric. My research process consists of several stages: entering, blending, participating and intervening. The role that I played changed from researcher to designer along the journey.

### Entering

I met frustrations when I first tried to get access to the senior center. I contacted the senior center through email but didn't get any response. I visited in person and expressed my wish to conduct research. The administrators of the senior center didn't trust me at the beginning and required me to provide them with verifiable materials, like my resume and letters from my advisor to prove my intentions. I prepared all the materials as they said along with a research plan depicting the activities I planned to have in the senior center. The social worker there assigned me a position to assist the teacher of one of the English classes in the senior center, which was how I found my role in that place and got interested in the topic of English learning.



### Blending & Participating

I came up with many plans of teaching English in the senior center but was discouraged after I noticed the power dynamic in the classroom. The teacher, Mr. Heh, has been teaching in the senior center for years and has a strong authority over the class. He is in his 70s and has been in the US for several decades but his verbal English is not very fluent. From the conversations I learned that his activities have been limited in Chinese ethnic communities. The language he speaks in the class is majorly Cantonese. In spite of the fact that his English proficiency is limited and the ways he teaches in the class doesn't meet the needs of part of the attendants, his humor and the ability to have engaging discussions in the class make his class very popular. I didn't want to "steal the show" and decided to respect the current ways English is taught in that classroom. I positioned myself as a "learner" who was interested in the life experience of the old people and participated in the class when Mr. Heh invited me. Aside from sitting and participating in the class, I also talked to many old immigrants and became friends with them. I could only speak with Mandarin speakers, which made me feel limited. I felt very welcomed by most of the members in the senior center.

### **BELOW**

The English class I participated in

### Intervening

after I built enough trust with English class attendees and some Mandarin speakers in the senior center, I began to conduct design-led research and test prototypes with them. These activities will be explained in more detail in the "research" section.

### Insights

The question I investigated changed from "how might we design for a better English learning experience for older Chinese immigrants?" to "why do they want to learn English?" after I knew the way they learn English and their social context. I began my inquiry in the senior center with a focus on the language barrier and English learning because I thought they are tangible problems which would soon open a lot of design opportunities to me. The statistics shows 92% of older Chinese immigrants are reported to have limited English Proficiency and 55% live in linguistically isolated neighborhoods. This data demonstrates that Chinese senior immigrants have a low cultural assimilation rate and, as a result, they might face problems like social isolation and lacking access to social services.

With the research going on, I realized that the majority of the senior center members have very limited English skills but their life seems not to be influenced much because they make good use of the resources and services provided in Chinese



ethnic enclaves. From the conversations I had with people in the senior center, I learned that many of them have been in the U.S. for more than ten years but there are only a few people can use English well. The senior center and the surrounding neighborhood are very linguistically and culturally convenient for them. When they need help with English, they either use translation applications in their phone or seek help from people who have better English proficiency. Also, they don't have English speaking friends so there is no socialization need. As a result of the points above, most old Chinese immigrants don't have strong motivations to learn English. Learning English becomes a choice but not an urgent need. Even among English class attendants, who choose to learn English, none of them expressed that they have urgent needs to use English, but all said it is better to know English well. I decided to step back and investigate older Chinese immigrants motivations of learning English before entering the design phase.

**BELOW. LEFT**

Mr. Heh, the English teacher

**BELOW. RIGHT**

Snacks that the class attendants gave to me

## Inspiration for Sense-making

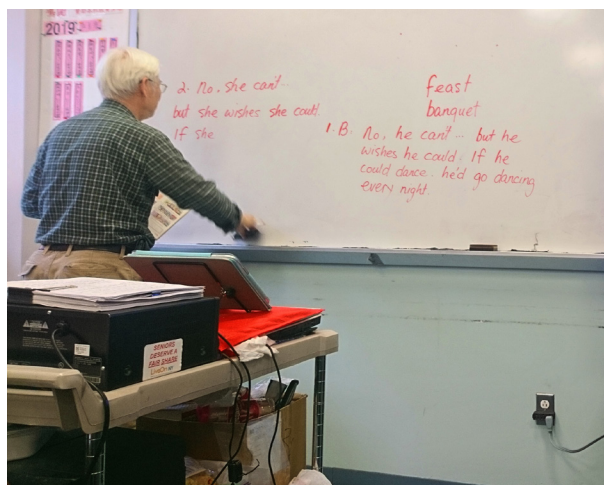
### Second Language Acquisition

These theories in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) helped me plan my research and inspired me to come up with my own theoretical framework that explains older Chinese immigrants' motivations for learning English in New York City this specific social context.

Many scholars have cast their eyes on the topic of motivation in the field of SLA. Gardner and Lambert introduced the notion of integrative and constructive motivation.<sup>9</sup> Constructive motivation refers to the desire that one wants to learn another language for utilitarian purposes, like to fit in a job or to pass a test. Integrative motivation means motivations that related to helping one blend in the target language community. Bonny Norton criticized their theory by arguing that it might oversimplify the relationship between power, identity, and language learning.<sup>10</sup> She

“They like you because they consider you as their grandkid.”

--Po-ling Wu, the director of the center



proposed to use the concept of investment instead of motivation and brought the notion of cultural capital into the discourse to better understand the complexity. She argues that one learns a second language in the hope of gaining symbolic or material resources, which in turn will increase their cultural capital. All these theories helped me in understanding the complex motivations for immigrants to learn a second language. I should not only investigate the practical aspects of learning a language but also examine the cultural significance attached to English to holistically understand the meaning of learning English to older Chinese immigrants.

Norton's study was also influenced by poststructuralism, especially inspired by Weedon's conception of social identity and subjectivity. She argued that it is necessary to develop a conception of the language learner as having a complex social identity under the large and often inequitable social structure. The unitary identities of a second language learner might influence the ability for them to practice this language. For instance, In her study with two immigrant women, she found that when with people from the mainstream community, they will be more aware of their immigrant identity and feel timid about speaking English. They speak English more actively and with confidence when they are aware of they are mothers/caregivers and multicultural citizens. This theory made me be aware of the relationship between language and identity. In the research phase, I paid additional attention to the role older immigrants play in the scenarios where they want to use/learn English to fully understand this tension and how it is connected with motivations.

## Design-led Research

Alongside the ethnographic research, I used design-led research methods to investigate "English learning and usage" this very specific aspect of older Chinese immigrant community. Design-led research is a research method that involves design process and practices in data collection and synthesis.

### Investigating Motivations

The "4 skills worksheet" was designed to encourage old immigrants, both English learners and non-learners, to think about the occasions where they need or want to use English. Any language encompasses four basic skills: speaking, listening, writing and reading. By splitting English, this large and abstract concept into four basic skills, participants can better connect it to their everyday life and think more holistically about the scenarios they encounter English. I used it as an interview tool and it worked successfully in encouraging participants to recall their past experience. Many detailed stories were collected and they are important data input for understanding their underlying motivations for learning English.

### BELOW

The "4 skills worksheet"



## Insights

Based on the stories collected from the conversations with older Chinese immigrants, I made the following diagram demonstrating the five major motivations for learning and using English. Among these motivations, four of them are associated with the deeper wish of adjusting to the relocation and the other one comes out from resisting the negative changes of the aging process.

### Capacity: retain the ability to handle everyday tasks

Almost everyone began their conversation with this sentence: “I learn English to make my life more convenient.” Although New York is making efforts to make itself more culturally and linguistically inclusive, which has hugely benefited many non-English speakers, there are still aspects that require one has a certain level of English proficiency. Participants shared the tasks that they need help with English in their lives: ordering food in restaurants, reading letters and filling out forms, just to mention a few. An interesting insight into the issues in this category is that participants mentioned more reading and writing demanded circumstances than listening and speaking related tasks.

When asked how they currently handle these tasks, participants told me they can seek help from the senior center or people who they know that have better English proficiency. One day when I was in the senior center, an old guy offered to pick up lunch for me because he needed help understanding an English letter. I found it was a letter sent by a department of New York government about the status of a subsidy that he applied for recently. The letter is in English and the information is so poorly organized that even I had a hard time figuring out some sections.

### Identity: achieve the ideal power dynamics

Many older immigrants, especially those who came to the US in their late life, experienced changes in power dynamics with their family members and lower social status comparing with when they were in their home country. These identity crises are sometimes highly connected to other motivations.

When they were in their home country, they were independent and enjoyed a certain degree of authority in their family because of their life experience and familiarity with the society. After the relocation, alongside losing the capacity of living independently due to the language and cultural barriers, they became dependent on their relatives in the US, in most of the cases, their children. These power dynamics affected the identity they established before. Participants expressed their desire of being less dependent and to have more common languages with their kids: these are examples of they want to “retain” certain identities in the new environment.

On the other hand, in some situations, they also wish to establish new identities that do not exist in previous life stages. It is reflected most obviously in their relationship with their English-speaking grandkids. Many of older Chinese immigrants have grandkids who can't speak Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese) fluently, which creates barriers for intergenerational communication and, furthermore, affects older Chinese immigrants to build their “grandparent” identity. The desire to match their ideal image of a good grandparent encourage

**“ Can you help me translate the English letter? Let me pick up your lunch! ”**

**“ I am afraid my grandkid will feel awkward if I don't say anything to his friends.”**

them to learn English and have more verbal communication with their grandkids.

“I live in a public building where all my neighbors are ‘foreigners’. I want to talk to my neighbors in English instead of using body language.”

“I learn English because one shouldn’t detach from the society where one is in.”

#### Connection: connect to family, social circle and the larger society

If the senior center is a place where old Chinese immigrants connect to people who come from a similar cultural background, the action of learning English reflects their wish of connecting to a foreign culture. The ways of connection and objects they connect to cover many aspects and a huge range, from talking to an English-speaking son-in-law to having a feeling of connection to the American society. Although in general lacking direct social connection with the mainstream community, they are building connection in other ways.

#### **One-directional connection: awareness**

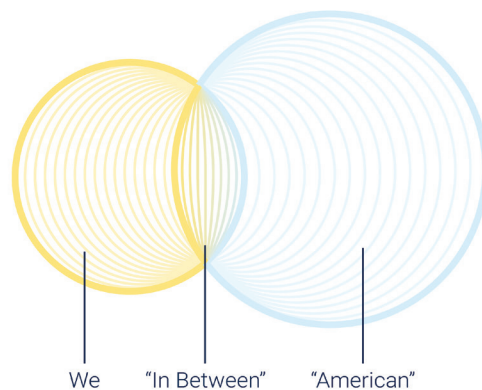
Knowing what is happening in mainstream American society makes older immigrants feel they are a part of the community and are not isolated.

#### **Two-directional connection: communicating**

Although they don’t have much direct interpersonal connection with people from the mainstream American society, they have friends and family members who live “in-between” the two communities and these are the indirect ways of connecting to American society. These “in-between” people in their life include their kids, their friends who worked in non-Chinese owned business and other random people like an English teacher who works in the senior center and, me. These “in-between” people are capable of understanding the situation of both Chinese communities and the larger society so they can have better conversations with old people about things happening in mainstream society better.

#### Exploration: experience new things in a foreign environment and culture

Immigration to a foreign country opens an entirely new world for these people to explore. Participants shared their experience of traveling around and within the city during conversations with me. It can happen in very small aspects



#### **RIGHT**

A diagram showing older Chinese immigrants' view of the social structure

like going to a McDonald's and order food. The exploration doesn't exclusively refer to experiencing new places and activities, some participants told me about their desire of learning classic literature.

Keep Mentally Active

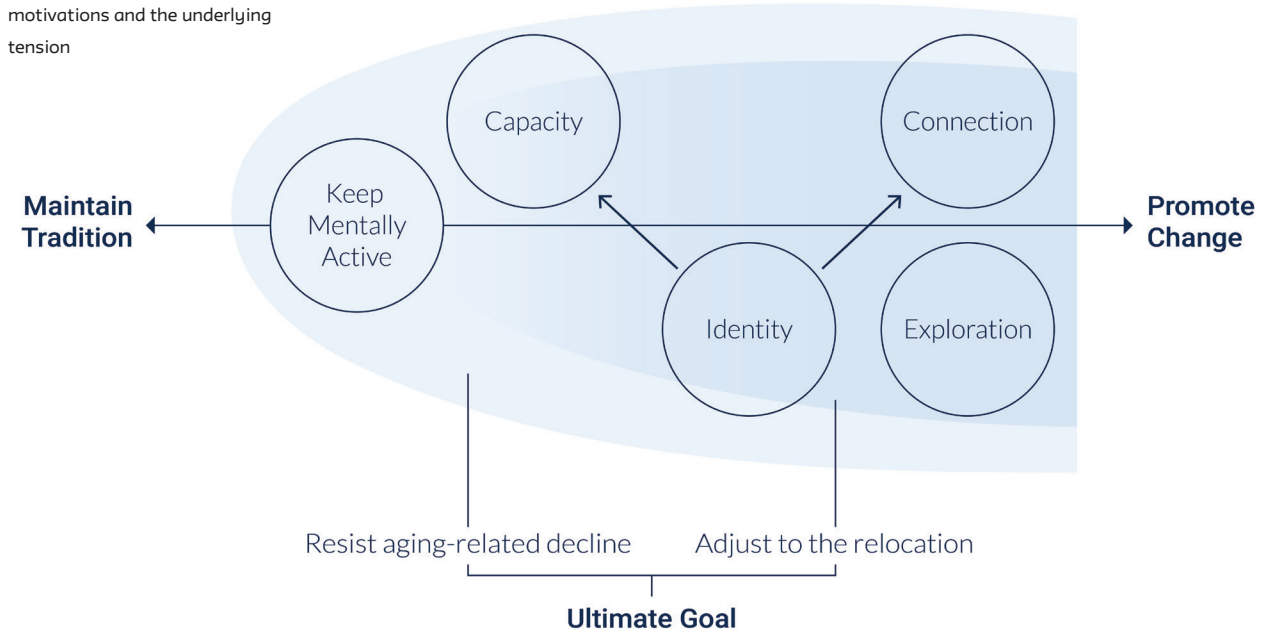
Aging brings negative changes to one's body, mentally and physically. From my investigation at the senior center, I found that many older Chinese immigrants participate in activities that can help them resist these negative changes. Learning English is one of these activities. Mr. Heh, the teacher of an English class, told me that keeping mentally active is the main reason he put so much effort and time into this job.

The Tension: maintain tradition vs promote change

Four out of five motivations (shown in the darker blue area in the diagram) are associated with a deeper wish of adapting to changes caused by immigration or relocation in New York City. I identified a tension between "maintain tradition" and "promote change" among these motivations. "Maintain tradition" refers to the idea of pursuing similar situations as before the relocation and "promote change", on the opposite, describes the intention of wanting changes to happen after the relocation. John Berry's acculturation theoretical framework proves these assumptions. He described cultural maintenance and contact and participation are the 2 major issues that groups or individuals in plural societies have to work out in their daily encounters with people from other cultural groups.<sup>11</sup> Although his study has a focus on the cultural aspect of the adaptation process, the basic idea of cultural groups facing pressures relating to maintaining and changing one's status is similar to my theoretical framework.

**BELOW**

A diagram illustrating the five motivations and the underlying tension



“I can’t understand the menu in McDonald’s so I only go there when I am with my son.”



### Idea Iteration

Acknowledging that the first stage of research had a small number of participants and the unavoidable bias I carried in the data synthesis, I needed to verify my research insights with participants. Hoping the verification process would be engaging and have a direct contribution to idea generation, I decided to use scenarios that describe potential needs and design interventions to prompt conversations about both the two aspects. I brainstormed ideas corresponding to the motivations I identified and presented them through a set of hand-drawn cards.

When having conversations with participants, I showed them the cards, described the problem I wanted to solve and what my idea/design is. I observed the reaction of the participants and asked them for feedback.

### Ideas

- AR menu reader: an App for mobile phones that recognizes food names on English menus and introduces the dishes by presenting pictures and introductions. (Exploration)
- Biography workshop: a workshop where people create a bilingual biography which can be used for telling stories to their English speaking kids/grandkids. (Identity and connection)
- “Guest of the week”: invite one native English speaker per week to have a conversation with members of the senior center. (Connection)
- Salad bowl activity: each student writes one thing they want to learn on a small piece of paper and put in a “salad bowl”. Take one out each time and discuss the thing. (Diverse motivation)
- Minimal English capacity pack: a brochure about the “Must-know” English expressions. What does minimal English proficiency look like? (Capacity and confidence)

### TOP



## Insights

- Story sharing and documentation are the needs of older people: all participants had a strong reaction to the “Biography Workshop” idea. One mentioned that her grandkids are not interested in listening to her stories, though she likes sharing them, which made her upset. Another participant said that he once met an old guy who was proud of having a biography, “It’s like he retrieved his dignity”.
- Design proposition: The “Guest of the week” idea led to a discussion between me and one participant about my design proposition. He asked me if the design should be subjective or objective. He thought this idea doesn’t respond to the needs of the members in the senior center.
- The importance of medium: No one gave positive feedback to the AR menu idea because of the low penetration of mobile phone among this group of people. The “minimal English capacity” idea was also challenged because of the medium.
- Participatory learning: The participatory and entertaining features of the salad bowl activity made is a welcome idea. Additionally, it is easy to implement. An English teacher said that it is a good way to let teachers know what’s the needs of the students so they can prepare for the class with this content.

## Rough Newspaper Prototype

My participation in the community enabled me to know the social practices and interactions within the community. One important insight is that newspapers are the major media among older Chinese immigrants: reading newspapers is a part of their daily routine and newspapers are very easy to access in Chinatown. This finding encouraged me to consider using local newspapers as the platform to place my intervention. To test the potential interventions and get feedback from the target users, I designed two fictional newspaper sections, glued them on local newspapers and presented them to the members in the senior center. They had positive feedback on the Wordsearch section but felt confused about the introduction of tacos.

**“What’s your design criteria? Subjective or objective? Many immigrants have been here for several decades and are totally okay without knowing English.”**

**-- A participant’s response to the idea “guest of the week”**

### TOP. LEFT

Rough newspaper prototype

### TOP. RIGHT

A picture of testing



## Inspiration for Design

Along my research process, I realized that older Chinese immigrants' attitudes towards English usage and learning reflects, and is a part of, their strategy of dealing intercultural tensions as an immigrants in the U.S. society. I also found my proposed interventions more or less carry my own idea of how should they interact with mainstream society and other ethnic groups. These findings encouraged me to take these two tensions into consideration in my final design.

### Acculturation Strategies

Acculturation refers to a social, psychological, and culture change process resulting from two cultural groups adapting to each other. In most of the cases, it happens when one cultural group enters a society that has a distinguished, dominant culture. Both two cultural groups experience changes in acculturation but in practice, it tends to induce more change in one of the groups. Individuals and groups from both non-dominant culture and dominant culture have to deal with two issues in the acculturation process, they are:

- 1. to what degree they want to maintain their own cultural identity.
- 2. to what degree they want to interact with other ethnic groups in the society.

For non-dominant cultural groups, several acculturation strategies emerged according to their attitudes and behaviors that respond these two questions. They are assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization.

### Design as An Ontological Tool

Design, aside from its applied and technological facets, is a powerful ontological tool capable of transforming the social and cultural reality and modeling human experience, subjectivity, and lifestyle.<sup>12</sup> It embodies our cultural, moral and social values. Design may have colonial features when it carries a set of specific ontological and epistemic notions and is forcefully imposed on a context. A profound insight from my previous research is, my design interventions more or less reflect certain kinds of attitudes about how this

immigrant community should interact with the larger society. The ontological nature of design and its colonial tendency cautioned me to be careful about not to impose my ideology and attitudes on the community that I designed for.

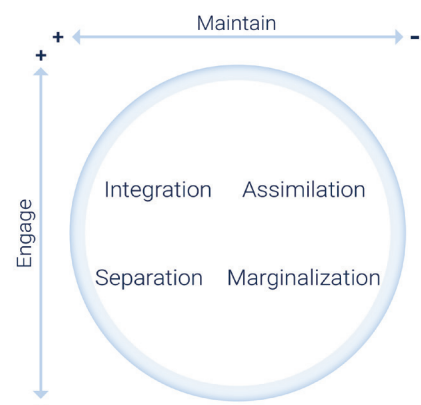
### My Design Proposition

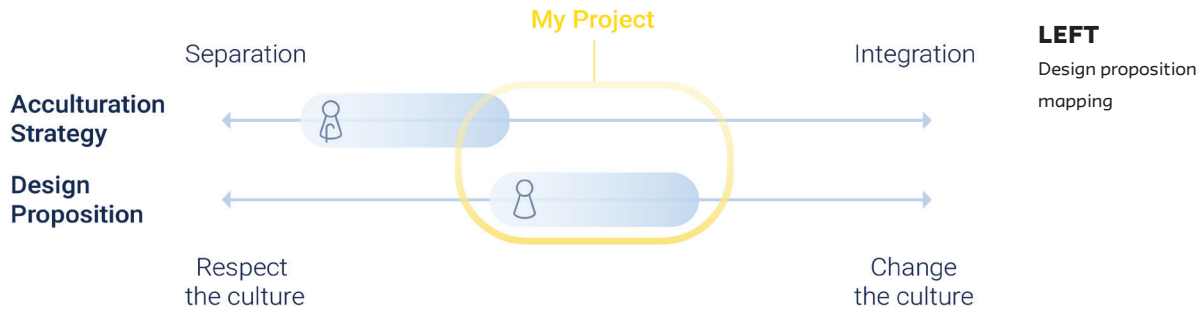
In order to be clear about how I hope my design intervention influences older Chinese immigrants' acculturation strategy, I made the following diagram. From previous research, I found that most older Chinese immigrants are separated from mainstream society and some of them have desires to integrate more. This tension is shown at the top the spectrum. The spectrum at the bottom shows the causal relationship between my design proposition and my project. My project will be the projection on the top spectrum of my design proposition. For instance, If I fully respect their current culture, I will not try to influence their acculturation strategy, vice versa.

I located my design proposition at the middle of the bottom spectrum and my project will be aiming to mildly change their current acculturation strategy. I wish my intervention to help those who are interested in integration better achieve their goal by letting them know more about events and activities happening in mainstream society and providing communication tools and strategies. These two aspects are inspired by the two ways that older Chinese immigrants currently connect to mainstream society.

### **BELOW**

John Berry's acculturation diagram





## Precedent Projects

I examined projects that aim to promote positive interactions between different communities and design interventions for creating social connections for older people. Both these projects take cultural tradition and existing habits of older population into consideration in their design, which made me more confident about using newspapers, an already popular media among older Chinese immigrants, as the platform for placing interventions.

### Social Oven

Social Oven is a cookery kit that provides elderly female residents of housing estates in Poland, who are often isolated from the larger society, tools to socialize with their neighbors through exchanging home cooked food. This is a subscription service, both the elderly and their neighbors can subscribe to. Neighbors can either pay the chef money or

### BELOW

A picture of Social Oven



claim tasks like buying groceries or fixing things around their home.

The designer is a Central Saint Martins' product design student, she grew up in Poland. Through having conversations and interviews with elderly females live in the neighborhood, she found many women who live without other family members suffer from depression and lack of purpose in their late life. She also found out that the hospitality quality used to exist in the neighborhood is now almost gone. Aside from tackling these two social issues, this design also responds well to Poland traditions of women being in charge of preparing meals for the family.

### India Home's Congregate Meal Program

India Home is an organization that provides services mainly to South Asian elderly people. Its Congregate Meal program provides an opportunity for elderlies to gather together, sharing food and conversations. Studies have shown this program has both physical and mental health benefits to the participants. The food is healthy and culturally appropriate, which helps to address the food insecurity issues many low-income families are faced by. The program also creates a space for the elderly to socialize and contribute. Through participating in the dinner preparation, seniors feel they are a part of the community. During a conversation with Christian Gonzalez, a researcher at Center for Urban Futures whose research focuses on old immigrants' living situation, he mentioned that meal-related programs in India Home breaks the barrier between the old Indian community and people from other cultural backgrounds.

# CULTURAL CROSSPOINT

My proposed intervention is a new section in existing Chinese newspapers called: Cultural Crosspoint. It helps the readers, especially those not familiar with digital media platforms, to better understand differences between American and Chinese culture and provides strategies to cope with issues caused by these differences. The aim of this intervention is to give immigrants tools to have more intercultural interactions if they desire while letting individuals make choices at their own time and pace. It consists of four parts that each cover one aspect.

## BELOW

Prototype of Cultural Crosspoint newspaper section



## Cultural Differences

Articles about different aspects of Chinese and American culture will be posted in this section. The topics cover a wide range and are mainly associated with everyday life. The example on the newspaper is about neighborhood relationships. The article is neutral and has no judgement on both sides of the culture.

## Comic Series "A New Immigrant Family"

"A new immigrant family" is a comic series that depicts stories happened in a fictional new immigrant family with a focus on the intergenerational aspects. The main characters are the grandma, who came to the US to take care of her son's family, and her American-born grandkid. There is a language barrier between them but they both try hard to connect to each other with other ways. The stories are evolved from these interactions.

## Place, Activity and Food

These two sections introduce places, activities and food that readers can experience in New York City. My previous research demonstrates that, for many immigrants, even those who have been in New York City for a long time, ordering food in non-Chinese restaurants and go to places outside of ethnic enclaves is still challenging. Lacking knowledge about other cultures in the society limits their mobility.

## Mini English Class

In this section, games like crossword puzzles and wordsearch that helps one build English proficiency will be incorporated. Learning English is a need for immigrants, especially new immigrants, and they are also the major readers of ethnic newspapers. Adding English-learning content can make these newspapers cater to the needs of their readers better. Other ways to encourage readers to use this section is by newspapers collaborating with local businesses like bakeries and makes the participation rewardable. I tested three prototypes of this section with the English class attendances and general newspaper readers in the senior center, the results showed that this section should cover both basic and advanced content to attract readers of different English proficiencies.



# REFLECTION

## Ethnography-based Design Process

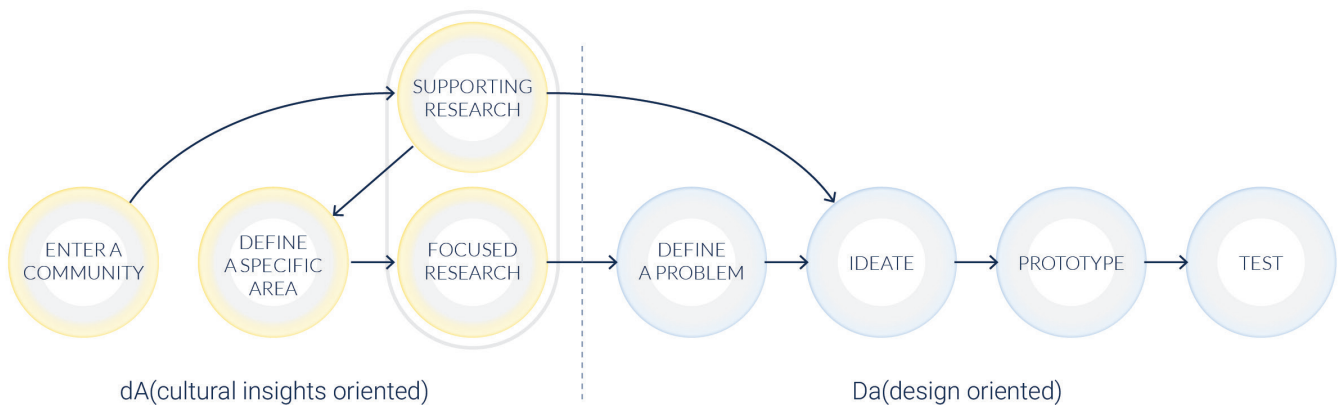
Contrary to a traditional design approach, which is to start the inquiry with a problem, my project began with an investigation of the culture of a group of people. Through combining ethnographic research and design-led-research methods I collected deep insights about different cultural aspects of this community. I applied ethnographic research methods, like participant observation and interview, to understand their daily behaviors and practices. At the same time, I used design-led-research methods to explore a more specific area, which are their motivations and practices of learning English. These two parts of knowledge made the transformation of my project from the cultural-insights-oriented (dA) stage to the design-oriented (Da) stage progress smoothly. my English-learning related investigation led me to find problems that I can use design strategies to resolve, well as principles that I should let my design intervention to meet. The ethnographic insights from my research allowed me to develop design solutions from an unusual angle that was still beneficial for my target audience.

After reflecting on what worked and what didn't work along the entire process, I synthesized my insights of an ethnography-based design process into a diagram. This diagram is built upon design thinking processes.

Looking back to the entire process, I realized that my position as a part of the community had a strong impact on the major decisions I made, for instance, research and participatory-design methods. Notably, as the result of a certain degree of cultural barrier and age-related hierarchy, I often felt overwhelmed in the senior center, which made me develop methods and even interventions that I would make the format more comfortable to conduct in the senior center. Involving personal emotional considerations in decision making process has rarely happened to in previous design projects that I was involved in, so it was a new experience for me.

## BELOW

Project process diagram



### Ending Point: Integration Without English

As I always did before, I brought the newspapers to the senior center to ask for feedback from older Chinese Immigrants. To my surprise, many of them told me the contents I designed can educate immigrants who behave improperly in American society that jeopardize the public perception of Chinese immigrants as a whole. This pattern I observed from the comments is something that has triggered my curiosity. It made me think, probably I was wrong on one conclusion I made before. I used to consider older Chinese immigrants as separated from the larger society and not interested in integration. I drew this conclusion based on the fact that few of them are proficient in English and have limited direct social connections with mainstream society. As someone who speaks a English as a second language, I failed to understand the way they integrate into the society.

From their reaction to the newspapers I designed, I realized that even though they don't have any direct social connection and can't speak English, and thus are not able to vocalize themselves in mainstream society, they made great efforts to pick up the social norms and habits after they came to this country in order to make the mainstream view them, and the immigrant community at large, positive. In this way, they are definitely an integrated part of the society.

### BELOW

Pictures of testing with participants



# ENDNOTES

- 1 Nasser, Haya El. "The Graying of America: More Older Adults Than Kids by 2035." Census Bureau QuickFacts. December 13, 2018. Accessed February 11, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/03/graying-america.html>.
- 2 González-Rivera, Christian. THE NEW FACE OF NEW YORK'S SENIORS.Report. July 2013. <https://nycfuture.org/pdf/The-New-Face-of-New-Yorks-Seniors.pdf>.
- 3 India Home. Accessed February 12, 2019. <https://indiahome.org/>.
- 4 "New York City Ethnic Enclaves." Wikipedia. January 26, 2019. Accessed February 12, 2019. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_York\\_City\\_ethnic\\_enclaves](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City_ethnic_enclaves).
- 5 "Chinatown, Manhattan." Wikipedia. June 16, 2019. Accessed June 17, 2019. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinatown\\_Manhattan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinatown_Manhattan).
- 6 "Open Door Senior Center." Chinese-American Planning Council. February 25, 2019. Accessed June 17, 2019. <https://www.cpc-nyc.org/programs/family-support/open-door-senior-center>.
- 7 Gunn, Wendy, and Jared Donovan, eds. Design and anthropology. Routledge, 2016
- 8 Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- 9 Gardner, Robert C., and Wallace E. Lambert. "Attitudes and Motivation in Second-Language Learning."
- 10 Peirce, Bonny Norton. "Social identity, investment, and language learning." TESOL quarterly 29, no. 1 (1995): 9-31.
- 11 Berry, John W. "Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation." Applied psychology 46, no. 1 (1997): 5-34.
- 12 Tlostanova, Madina. "On decolonizing design." Design Philosophy Papers 15, no. 1 (2017): 51-61.