Introduction
Walking on Water

On a spring Sunday afternoon in 1999 I stood in the fellowship hall of the Church of Grace to the Fujianese in Chinatown, on New York's Lower East Side, eating lunch with about 150 recently arrived immigrants. Over a bowl of Fuzhou noodles, a young man named Li Lin told me the following story:

> *We left from Changle City to the east of Fuzhou. It was March 11, 1993. I was twenty-one years old. I hadn't planned to go but a cousin of mine was going. So I went with him. The snakeheads [smugglers] in Changle sent us by bus to Wenzhou, twelve hours north on the coast. We waited in the mountains of Wenzhou one night and then were loaded onto an old fishing vessel the next evening. Somewhere north of Taiwan we were transferred to a Taiwanese cargo ship. One hundred and forty of us.*
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> *It was April 12 before we reached Mexico. A Mexican boat came out into international waters to meet us. We changed ships and then when we were in sight of land small groups of us were put on motor boats for a speedy ride to shore. The Mexicans took us by bus to a safe place overnight and then north to the U.S. border the next day. There were twenty of us in the group, ten Chinese and ten Mexicans, plus two Mexican leaders. I couldn't believe the river at the border was so small. It was barely more than knee deep. But before we could cross that night, helicopters with spotlights appeared, searching for illegal immigrants. We lay still in the low underbrush until three or four in the morning when they disappeared and we made our way across the border.*
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> *The van that met us was soon stopped by police. We all ran for our lives and managed to escape into the nearby mountains. One of the Mexican leaders had a cell phone and called for another car, which took us to Los Angeles. Chinese smugglers met us again there. We stayed for two*

nights in a hotel full of illegal immigrants and flew the next day to Washington, D.C., where we waited until our relatives and friends were able to make the $20,000 payment for our journey.

We encountered many storms during that month at sea. It was an extremely difficult crossing. I wasn't sure we would make it. Many times I found myself singing old hymns I had learned in my childhood in the house church meetings my mother led. Sometimes in the early morning, if the weather was calm, I would go up on deck and sit in the ship's prow. The old hymns would come back to me. In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever. I didn't really know what it meant. It just came flooding back out of my memory. When I started to sing, my entire being felt comfortable and safe. I had never had this feeling before, this feeling I had on the boat. At the time I didn't really know what the feeling was about. But when I got to America I realized that God had been present with me on that journey. Even though I grew up in a Christian family I hadn't really taken it seriously. But on the boat I finally learned how to pray, to pray with my heart, not just with my mouth.

Li Lin's story, like that of so many recent immigrants from southeast China, is a story of great hardship endured in the hope of making a better life. Like many of his compatriots, his journey connects religious communities and networks in New York and in China. For many immigrants, religious communities are an initial point of entry into U.S. reality. They are a place for reconnection with family and fellow villagers, for sharing news of home, for exchanging ideas about how to survive in this alien and exploitative environment, to give thanks to their particular deity for safe passage, and to make petitions for a successful continuation of the journey. They are also a place for organizing support for their religious communities—churches and temples back home.

When I got to New York I ended up finding a room right next door to the Church of Grace. My mother had told me to look for it but I didn't know where it was. I never imagined how wonderful it would be to find a church made up solely of people from Fuzhou, speaking my own dialect. When I went to church, all the intense pressures of the outside world fell away. My entire being would relax. And I felt warm and comforted. The church has really helped me a great deal. I wasn't a very serious Christian in China. But I'm very involved here. I've even become

a member of the church's Board of Deacons. The Church of Grace is my home here.

Fuzhounese Immigrant Religious Communities in New York

Since the early 1980s, tens of thousands of Chinese from the towns and villages outside Fuzhou, in southeastern China, have made their way to New York. This massive international migration, spurred by economic restructuring in both China and the United States and facilitated by a vast and highly organized international human smuggling syndicate, has uprooted whole segments of Fuzhounese communities, dislocating people economically, culturally, and legally, and placing them in a receiving country for which they are unprepared and which is unprepared to incorporate them. The undocumented status of many of the new immigrants further complicates the picture.

Their primary destination is Chinatown, New York, a densely populated Chinese community on Manhattan's Lower East Side, where these new immigrants utilize kinship, village, and religious connections to begin their U.S. journey and survive in an unfamiliar environment. The street corners where East Broadway passes below the Manhattan Bridge are crowded with young Fuzhounese waiting for jobs to be posted in the myriad employment agencies. The jobs may take them temporarily across the United States to work in "all-you-can-eat" Chinese buffets or place them in garment sweatshops or on construction sites in the New York area. But for most recent Fuzhounese immigrants, New York's Chinatown is home base, the place they return to recuperate, reconnect with family and friends, and find their next job.

Over the past fifteen years, Fuzhounese immigrants have transformed dramatically the face of New York's Chinatown, supplanting the Cantonese as Chinatown's largest ethnic Chinese community and vying for leadership in the area's economics, politics, social life, and even language use. In many ways the Fuzhounese are to today's Chinatown what the Cantonese were before 1985. Cantonese first arrived in California in the 1840s, brought as low-wage laborers in farms, gold mines, and railroad construction before expanding to the East Coast after the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. They have so predominated among Chinese in New York and

in America in general that up until 1960 more than 50 percent of all Chinese in the United States originated in one single county of Canton—Taishan—on the province's southernmost coast (Hsu 2000). But since the 1980s the largest single source of Chinese migration to New York and the United States as a whole has been Fuzhou, making it essential to understand the Fuzhounese if one wants to understand New York's Chinatown today.

Like the Cantonese who migrated to Chinatown before them, the Fuzhounese have brought with them their religious beliefs, practices, and local deities. Over the past fifteen years, Fuzhounese have established a number of their own religious communities, fourteen by the end of 2002. These include Protestant and Catholic churches as well as Buddhist, Daoist, and Chinese popular-religion temples. In the complex economic, political, and social environment of Chinatown's ethnic enclave, these religious organizations have become central locations for a transient Fuzhounese population, where they can build a community, activate networks of support built on kinship, region, and faith, and establish links to their home churches, temples, and communities in China.

In this book we will examine the role of local New York religious communities in the Fuzhounese immigrant experience. What is their place in the immigrant incorporation process? How significant are the transnational religious networks being established between New York and Fuzhou in building boundary-crossing relationships and identities? How do these religious communities, despite their institutional fragility and the factionalizing conflicts in China and the United States, enable immigrants to construct systems of meaning?

In particular, we will explore the influence of Fuzhounese immigrant religious communities in the following spheres:

- Replicating and mitigating hierarchies of class stratification in Chinatown
- Shaping how Fuzhounese immigrants mobilize social capital necessary for survival
- Building active transnational religious networks between New York and Fuzhou
- Constructing alternative identities that resist the definitions of employers, smugglers, and the state
- Encouraging the search for meaning within the immigrant experience, reinforcing immigration as a process of self-understanding.

We will look closely at two Protestant congregations in New York's Chinatown.

The Church of Grace, independently established in 1988, now has a membership of over one thousand, a mailing list of two thousand, and activities that overflow its space in a renovated 1904 public bath house on Allen Street. Comprised exclusively of immigrants from the Fuzhou area and conducting its services and many activities in the local Fuzhou dialect of Chinese, this Protestant Christian congregation is a first stopping point for many new arrivals, a center for mutual aid and information exchange about New York and Fuzhou, and an access point for connections to home churches and communities in China.

The New York House Church split from the Church of Grace in 1998 over theological, political, and regional differences rooted in the dynamics of their home communities in China. The one-hundred-member congregation, led by a revered senior minister who suffered greatly for his faith during China's Cultural Revolution, locates its origins in the anti-Communist underground house-church network in China and, in particular, an indigenous Fuzhounese denomination commonly called the Little Flock.

We will also consider four additional Fuzhounese congregations—a Buddhist temple, a Daoist temple, and two Catholic parishes—which are included to reveal the diversity and complexity of religious practice in the Fuzhounese immigrant community, to reflect the common experience of religious practitioners in New York and China, regardless of their particular tradition, and to provide a broad gauge for examining the patterns by which Fuzhounese religious communities engage Chinatown's ethnic enclave and the global flows of labor and capital that swirl around them.

He Xian Jun Buddhist Temple is a small storefront temple that serves as a religious and community center for the 2,500 immigrants from Fuqi village (total population 4,000), a coastal village on the outskirts of Fuzhou that now features one of the most developed temple complexes in the region, thanks to nearly one million U.S. dollars raised by villagers in New York and sent home to honor religious sentiments and build community influence.

The Daoist Temple of Heavenly Thanksgiving, also a storefront, serves as a central religious, social, and economic coordination site for compatriots from Chang'an Village and neighboring Dongqi Village who now have a network of U.S. restaurants that solely employ fellow villagers, mostly undocumented workers. Members of this temple have also built a new temple

in Chang'an and facilitate a transnational ritual process linking their home village deities, a spirit medium now living in the American Midwest, and their fellow villagers across the country.

Transfiguration Roman Catholic Church, one of the oldest religious institutions in Chinatown, is currently home to three generations of immigrants: Italian, Cantonese Chinese, and Fuzhounese Chinese. Transfiguration's Fuzhounese community struggles to integrate its primarily rural, pre-Vatican II Catholic traditions and beliefs into a modern multiethnic congregation in which it often feels marginalized by language, theology, politics, and class.

St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, located only a few blocks from Transfiguration, now houses a small but growing group of Fuzhounese immigrants who split from Transfiguration over theological and political issues related to the chasm between public and underground Catholics in China. Much of the energy of this ardently anti-Communist and pro-Vatican community is focused on addressing the persecution of Chinese Catholics in the Fuzhou area.

Religion and Immigration in Context

New York City has long been America's preeminent immigrant city—a title now shared with Los Angeles. Today the city's foreign-born population has reached 40 percent, a level unequaled since the last great wave of immigration peaked in 1910. Today's immigrants, however, are significantly different in a number of key respects. While newcomers from Ireland, Germany, Italy, and eastern Europe predominated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, today's immigrants are much more ethnically diverse. In New York between 1990 and 1996, the top ten sending countries were the Dominican Republic, the former Soviet Union, China, Jamaica, Guyana, Poland, Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, and India (Foner 2001). This revival of immigration, which added 1.2 million people to New York City between 1960 and 1990 and another 1.1 million between 1990 and 1998, has been vital to the renewal of the city, replacing an almost equivalent exodus of established residents.

Today's newcomers are also significantly more diverse religiously than the predominantly Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish immigrants of one hundred years ago. While government census data do not track religious affiliation or preference, contemporary studies reveal dramatic growth among

Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Jains, as well as practitioners of Haitian Voodou, Cuban Santeria, Chinese Falun Gong, and other Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean religions. This growth noticeably expands and reinforces the fabric of religious pluralism that historically has been a key component of American life and central to the vibrancy of New York City.

Despite a wealth of material on Chinese immigration and the Asian American experience, only limited research has been published to date specifically addressing Chinese religious communities in the United States. Most of it focuses primarily on Chinese Christians in earlier immigrant generations (Cayton and Lively 1955; Palinkas 1989; Woo 1991; Chen 1992; Tseng 1999; Yung 1995; Yang 1999; Yoo 1999). Even less has been published about non-Christian Chinese religious expression.

While a number of studies have been conducted in New York's Chinatown (Wong 1982, 1988; Kwong 1996 [1987]; Yu 1992; Zhou 1992; Lin 1998; Tchen 1999), religion has received only passing mention or has been completely neglected. Even in Kuo's (1977) book on Chinatown's voluntary associations, the role of churches is covered in little more than one paragraph. In all, little attention has been given to the rich history and contemporary reality of Chinese religious communities and expressions in New York.

The watershed 1965 Immigrant and Nationality Act dramatically increased and diversified immigration to the United States. As part of the growing literature on post-1965 immigration, attention has turned recently to the role of religion in immigrant communities. As religious pluralism in the United States increases exponentially, the contributions and complications of religious diversity in the fabric of American life deserve even closer scrutiny. Increased attention to this central aspect of immigrant communities can only advance our understanding of the immigrant experience in the United States. Notably, work by Warner and Wittner (1998) and Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) has drawn together collections of ethnographic case studies from Chicago and Houston, respectively, and begun to lay out an analytical framework for future research. Additional studies are currently underway in immigrant gateway cities including New York, Miami, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

Fieldwork among Fuzhounese religious communities has required consideration of three issues not always at the forefront of other studies and which, when taken together, offer a unique contribution to this emerging body of literature.

1. A gap in the new literature concerns class issues in the immigrant experience. Scholars have examined issues of gender, transnationalism, second generation dynamics, and organizational structure, but little attention has been paid to the economic conditions of immigrants or to the role of religious communities in challenging or replicating existing class hierarchies in the United States. Chinatown's Fuzhounese religious communities are primarily comprised of garment shop, restaurant, and construction workers, many of whom are undocumented. The choice of this subject has required a more careful exploration of issues of class and religion because of the socioeconomic context in which these communities exist. In this book I examine these dynamics particularly in light of the problematic theory of the ethnic enclave often cited in contemporary literature on immigrant incorporation. This study's focus on the religious communities of poor immigrant workers will make a significant contribution to advancing our understanding of the immigrant religious experience.

2. It is also my contention that immigrant religious communities must be examined as embedded in global processes and transnational flows that transcend established notions of space and time while linking home and host countries. Only a handful of recent studies have taken this approach seriously (Brown 1991; McAlister 1998; Levitt 2001; Ebaugh and Chavetz 2002). In this book I have placed Fuzhounese migration and Fuzhounese religious expressions in historical and global perspective, allocating chapters to the political economy of both Fuzhou and New York's Chinatown, as well as the complex religious dynamics of Fuzhou that have in turn affected New York's Fuzhounese religious communities. My experience in conducting the fieldwork for this study has revealed to me the absolute necessity of providing this kind of in-depth context in order to understand today's immigrant religious communities.

3. Fuzhounese immigrants related to these communities consistently frame their experiences in religious terms, striving to understand what these life changes mean. The transition from life in China to life in the United States is a jolting one. It requires a drastic realignment of self-identity. The Fuzhounese move from being rural to urban dwellers, from being economically limited yet unencumbered to being deeply indebted, from being legal to being illegal. They must navigate both a seemingly impenetrable U.S. environment where they are racialized as Chinese and a highly stratified Chinatown where they are ethnicized as Fuzhounese. In the midst of this rupture, religious communities serve as important lo-

cations for constructing alternative associational networks, identities, and systems of meaning that place value on their faith, responsibility, and morality. By including the voices of Fuzhounese immigrants I seek to accomplish two goals. First, I hope their voices will shed light on the personal experiences of meaning-making and break through the dehumanizing influences of global capitalism and the exploitative ethnic enclave. Second, I intend to challenge the functionalist tendencies still prevalent in the social-scientific study of religion that so often examine the social role and function of religious groups and avoid this central theme of the search for meaning.

Outline of the Book

Most Fuzhounese immigrants of the past twenty years have started their U.S. sojourn in New York City's Manhattan Chinatown. In chapter 1 I explore the contemporary realities of this ethnic enclave and its controversial role in the incorporation of these new immigrants into the U.S. economy and culture. Portes and others (Wilson and Portes 1980; Portes and Bach 1985) have introduced the concept of the ethnic enclave as an alternative to the assimilationist narrative of immigrant incorporation. Zhou (1992) suggests that social solidarity in the Chinatown enclave allows immigrants to utilize cultural capital to enhance earning potential and upward mobility. This chapter considers how dense networks of social obligations engendered in the enclave, while they enable new immigrants to survive, may actually result in certain cultural, political, and economic disadvantages for the Fuzhounese immigrant workers. What looks like social solidarity among Chinese at one level may constitute a framework for coethnic exploitation at another level.

In chapter 2 I examine the historical and contemporary context of Fuzhou in an attempt to illuminate the root causes of today's massive outmigration. In addition to longtime patterns of Fuzhounese outmigration, I consider the effects of recent Chinese economic reforms and their connection to a globalizing world capitalist economy. Together, chapters 1 and 2 seek to describe the contemporary local context and global/transnational processes in which the Fuzhounese religious communities, described in chapters 3 to 6, are embedded.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of religion in Fuzhou, with particular attention paid to concepts of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in Chinese history,

the role of heterodox sects in modern Chinese history, and the contemporary conflict between Falun Gong and the Chinese state. Chapter 4 explores the post-1949 history of Protestant and Catholic religious traditions in Fuzhou, including attempts by the state to establish new definitions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy and Christian responses. Chapter 4 concludes with descriptions of three strands of Protestantism prominent in the Fuzhou area that have direct connections to New York's Chinatown and the religious communities discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

In chapter 5 we examine the religious landscape of Chinatown. After describing the overall Chinese religious scene in New York and the religious complexities of Chinatown itself, the chapter specifically considers the development of four Fuzhounese congregations: the He Xian Jun Buddhist Temple, the Daoist Temple of Heavenly Thanksgiving, and Transfiguration and St. Joseph's Catholic churches. This analysis will provide a multireligious framework for analyzing the more expansive Protestant case study that follows.

Chapter 6 is an ethnographic study of two Fuzhounese Protestant churches—the Church of Grace to the Fujianese and the New York House Church, independent congregations recently founded by Fuzhounese immigrants and serving an exclusively Fuzhounese constituency immersed in the political, economic, and cultural context of the Chinese ethnic enclave.

In chapter 7 we examine the implications of these case studies of Fuzhounese immigrant religious communities for contemporary debates on the relationship between religion and immigration. Based on the fieldwork I conducted during the course of this study in Chinatown and in Fuzhou, it is my conviction that to fully understand the dynamics of New York's Chinatown as an ethnic enclave, one must consider religion. And to fully understand the dynamics of religion in New York's Chinatown one must place its religious communities in the context of local economic and political realities as well as transnational flows and global processes.

Fieldwork Methodology and Access

I began my fieldwork in Chinatown in the fall of 1994, conducting a limited survey of mainline Protestant churches. My primary finding was that Fuzhounese immigrants were not members of these congregations, which were comprised of earlier generations of Chinese primarily from

Guangzhou (often referred to as Canton), Taiwan, and Hong Kong. In the spring and summer of 1997 I conducted a more systematic survey of Chinatown's religious communities. A street-by-street walking tour of the neighborhood quickly identified newly emerging independent religious communities exclusively serving Fuzhounese immigrants. Interviews revealed close connections between these New York groups and home communities in China. No set pattern existed. Not every group exhibited as direct an involvement in the movement of people as the Daoist temple. But all served as a node of access to the networked webs of information, employment, housing, health care, and connection to China. These webs encompassed both New York's Chinatown and Fuzhou and were built on the continuous flow of people and money, both documented and undocumented, between the two locations.

In July and August of 1997 I traveled to Fuzhou and other cities in Fujian Province to test these initial findings. Though developing access to others in China is always a delicate process and usually quite time consuming, I discovered that introductions from New York friends, relatives, and congregation members opened unexpected doors. Furthermore, discussions of religious beliefs and traditions provided an avenue for initiating conversations about other, sometimes more sensitive issues.

My most intensive fieldwork was conducted between December 1998 and the spring of 2001. I initially focused on the Protestant Church of Grace, which, of all the congregations, was the most organized with regular programs and an identifiable leadership structure. Of all the congregations it was also the most welcoming to my inquiries. Over time, I expanded my contacts with the other congregations as well, conducting regular participant observation and interviews when possible. Leaders, both clergy and lay, and members have generously shared their stories of faith and migration, introduced me to their families and friends, and entrusted me with the responsibility of sharing their stories with others. I have attended rituals, festivals, religious programs, and administrative meetings. I have conducted hundreds of hours of in-depth interviews, visited people's homes—sometimes only a bed in a crowded tenement room—accompanied members to local hospitals and doctor's visits, accompanied asylum seekers to immigration court hearings, and attended weddings, funerals, Christmas parties, New Year's celebrations, and citywide evangelistic meetings. In three of the congregations I was allowed to administer written questionnaires, though only toward the end of my research after sufficient rapport had been established.

In July and August of 1999 I again returned to Fuzhou, this time even better prepared with personal introductions. I was able to visit many of the home churches and temples related to the immigrants I had been working with in New York, and the texture and vitality of Fuzhou's religious landscape began to come alive for me in ways that it had not done before. It is clear to me that the access afforded me on this trip and on a subsequent visit in March and April 2001 would have taken months if not more to develop in China without the intervention of my New York informants—if I would have been able to develop it at all.

For most Fuzhounese, the isolation of their religious groups from American culture beyond Chinatown mirrors their individual experiences and that of the Fuzhounese population as a whole. Few Fuzhounese have any meaningful ongoing contact with non-Chinese. In this context I was at first a great curiosity as a European-American who spoke Chinese, and continue to be so for newly arrived immigrants. Moving beyond curiosity, I became a source of information about the "world beyond." I was often asked to interpret events, describe people and places, and offer advice about everything from proper preparations for Y2K to how to program an overused photocopy machine's security code. At times I became a cultural broker, translating letters from the Immigration and Naturalization Service into Chinese, recording English-language practice tapes for members preparing for U.S. citizenship exams, locating a notary public, advising the board of deacons of the practices of other U.S. churches on issues from pastors' salaries to how to obtain a certificate of occupancy from the New York City Buildings Department. In the weeks after the September 11, 2001, bombing of the World Trade Center, I made numerous visits to a devastated Chinatown, riding my bicycle to circumnavigate the police blockades cutting off lower Manhattan from the rest of the city, and spending hours listening to workers' tales, translating English-language news broadcasts and interpreting events. All of these interactions built relationships of trust over time.

My visits to Fuzhou in 1997, 1999, and 2001 bridged many additional gulfs as I had the chance to visit people's hometowns, families, home churches and temples, and close associates. These experiences were never underestimated or underappreciated by the Fuzhounese in New York. The deepening of my rapport after these trips was striking.

I must also acknowledge the powerful desire of the members of these congregations to have their stories told, individually, as communities of faith and as the Fuzhounese people. The journey that they have undertaken has been arduous. Their existence in New York is often precarious. In hot,

overcrowded garment sweatshops, in the backs of busy Chinese restaurants serving inexpensive food to the U.S. middle and upper classes, in the dangerous construction trades clearing and developing our country, Fuzhounese are building the American economy and nation with the very sinews of their bodies, laboring in a land and among a people that know them not, where their presence is not recognized by the country's immigration statutes. In the midst of this, Fuzhounese long for their contributions to be recognized and affirmed.

Like Li Lin, whose story opens this introductory chapter, recent Fuzhounese *toudu* or "steal across" the sea to the United States, braving wind and weather, immigration agents, human smugglers, and border patrols. All Fuzhounese, regardless of their legal status, have chosen to leave their homes and communities in search of a better life for themselves and their families, striking out from their coastal towns and villages, crossing the sea, walking on water, this time beyond Asia to the United States of America. The following pages tell their stories. For many, their faith provides a means of making sense of their journey, and their religious communities provide a means for surviving on often rugged paths. Where they have gone, they have taken their deities with them, immigrant gods accompanying a sojourning people. And where they have gone they have constructed religious communities as safe harbors in the storm, as islands of safety on their way to an unfamiliar shore.