

“BESIDES THE BREAD, EVERYONE SPEAKS TIBETAN”: A PORTRAIT OF THE TIBETAN OCCUPATIONAL LINK TO FARMERS MARKETS IN NEW YORK CITY

NINA HALBERSTADTER

Abstract

This paper explores farmers markets as significant sites of employment, language use, and cultural expression for Tibetan speakers living in New York City. Farmers markets serve as an employment niche for the substantial Tibetan speaking immigrant community in the city. However, this niche has been largely unnamed in discussions of Himalayan New York and in discussions of immigrant labor patterns in general. Guided by ethnographic research and first-hand interviews, this paper seeks to investigate the occupational link between farmers markets and Tibetan speakers in NYC – how this niche developed and is sustained, how Tibetan workers’ individual values align with the market environment to aid this employment connection, and how Tibetan language and culture manifest within the farmers market sphere. Ultimately, this paper conceptualizes farmers markets as spaces of community beyond labor. A seemingly simple employment pattern is in fact an extensive microcosm of Tibetan community spanning five boroughs and over fifty farmers markets, facilitating linguistic and cultural preservation as well as exchange for Tibetan speakers across New York City.

Introduction

New York City is home to the largest Tibetan speaking community in the United States (Brudzińska et al., 2008). While the exact size of this population is difficult to determine, it is estimated that there are between 5,000 and 8,000 Tibetan speakers from the Himalayan region living in the city, and this number has been steadily growing since the passage of the Immigration Act of 1990 (Brudzińska et al., 2008; Poudel, 2012). Tibetan speakers have migrated from all over the Himalayan region and from nations as varied as India, Nepal, Bhutan, and China. Notably, however, Tibetan immigrants in New York City are typically concentrated within a few neighborhoods including Jackson Heights and Woodside, Queens (Brudzińska et al., 2008; Gurung et al., 2018). These neighborhoods serve as prominent sites of Tibetan community and facilitate the continuous exchange of language, food, tradition, and economic opportunity (Gurung et al., 2018; Craig, 2002).

The Tibetan speaking population in New York City, like many recent immigrant groups living in urban hubs, has tendencies towards certain realms of employment – occupational niches – based upon job availability and accessibility as well as aligned needs and skill sets (DiNapoli & Bleiwas, 2010; Eckstein & Peri, 2018; Craig, 2002). While many of these labor niches are common across immigrant groups within New York City, the Tibetan speaking community in particular occupies a unique corner of the employment market: New York City farmers markets. The Tibetan speaking occupational niche at farmers markets has been largely unnamed in discussions of Himalayan New York and in discussions of immigrant labor patterns in

general (Craig, 2002; All Peoples Initiative, 2009; Gurung et al., 2018, Eckstein & Peri, 2018). In this paper, I explore the connection between farmers markets and Tibetan speakers in NYC – how this niche developed and is sustained, how Tibetan workers' individual values align with the market environment to aid this employment connection, and how Tibetan language and culture manifest within the farmers market sphere. I begin with a brief overview of immigrant occupational niches and, specifically, Tibetan speaking immigrant occupational niches in the city. I follow with a description of the various aspects of Tibetan daily work at farmers markets, guided by first-hand interviews conducted with Tibetan speaking market employees and one non-Tibetan administrator for a market vendor. Ultimately, I conceptualize farmers markets as sites of community beyond labor, serving as significant spaces of linguistic and cultural preservation as well as exchange for Tibetan speakers in New York City.

Method

This paper relies on qualitative data obtained through participant observation as well as in-person and telephonic interviews. Initial research questions were inspired by my personal experience working as a salesperson at New York City farmers markets for one year prior to conducting this study. This position provided me with internal knowledge of the New York City farmers market system and the daily operations of vendors and sales staff. As I began the data collection and interview process, my employment experience facilitated preliminary conversations held with Tibetan speaking market salespeople.

A total of six interviews informed this study, collected using convenience sampling. I made visits to three New York City farmers markets on five separate occasions to observe and converse with Tibetan speaking staff at market stands. During this series of visits, I conducted verbal, semi-structured interviews with three market salespeople. Through relationships established while carrying out my research, I was provided with contact information for two additional Tibetan speaking market workers whom I interviewed via phone and video call.

I ultimately interviewed five Tibetan speaking individuals who live and work in New York City as salespeople at farmers markets. Additionally, I led a telephonic interview with an administrative staff member for a prominent market vendor that employs two of the salespeople I interviewed. This individual is a non-Tibetan speaking employee who lives in upstate New York and, among other responsibilities, oversees the city-based staff that serve at markets.

Interviewees are employed by a total of three market vendors. These vendors include Samascott Orchards (based in Kinderhook, New York), Bread Alone Bakery (based in Lake Katrine, New York), and one additional vegetable and produce farm whose name could not be included in this paper. This selection of vendors is by no means exhaustive – there are numerous other farms and producers not featured in this paper that also regularly employ Tibetan speakers at markets.

The individuals I interviewed were selected based on their willingness to engage with me and to set aside time to participate in the project; while I tried to feature individuals of diverse ages with varied experience working in different market settings, there are certainly many more Tibetan speaking market workers whose perspectives were not included in this paper. In order to preserve confidentiality, all

names used to refer to interviewees are pseudonyms, and any personal information that could be used to identify subjects has been removed.

A Brief Note on Language Labels

The language referred to throughout this paper as “Tibetan” is in itself a broad linguistic grouping – classified by linguists as Tibetic – that includes more than fifty diverse, often mutually unintelligible language varieties spoken across the Himalayan region (Perlin et al., 2021). These language varieties include three major groups labeled as U-tsang, Amdo, and Khan, whose names align with the three regions of greater Tibet, as well as sub-varieties including a Diaspora Standard Tibetan and numerous other varieties that may be spoken in geographic areas as small as a single village cluster (Ward, 2015).

When conducting interviews with members of the Himalayan community who work at farmers markets, I noticed an intentional generalization of their spoken language as simply “Tibetan.” I tried to prompt individuals with questions such as: “Do you ever call your language by another name?” or “Do you use any other words or labels to describe your language?” but the consistent response from interviewees was: “Just Tibetan” or “We call it Tibetan.”

I cannot be certain which Tibetic variety – or potentially, assortment of varieties – different individuals at the markets actually speak to each other on a day-to-day basis. And I am not sure why those I interviewed chose to employ the broader term “Tibetan.” Perhaps the individuals I spoke with were simplifying their description of their language for my sake, or perhaps the use of the term “Tibetan” was a conscious choice reflecting a desire not to disclose a more personal language identity or a desire to portray Tibetan as a unified, standardized language. For the purposes of this paper, I will adopt the linguistic terminology utilized by interviewees and refer to the language spoken by farmers market workers as “Tibetan.” However, it is important to note the diversity of the Tibetic language branch that, while absent from the content discussed in this paper, plays an important role in Tibetan linguistic and cultural identity.

Current Conceptions of the Immigrant Occupational Niche in NYC

There are more than 40 million immigrants currently living in the United States, and, of this substantial number, there are approximately 3.1 million immigrants living in New York City; these figures are both likely underestimates due to issues with the Census Bureau’s attempts to accurately survey and count immigrant populations (Eckstein & Peri, 2018; NYC Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, 2018). Nevertheless, immigrants in New York City are estimated to make up around 45% of the city’s labor force, and much of the labor in which they participate is concentrated in a few specific sectors of the economy (NYC Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity, 2017; DiNapoli & Bleiwas, 2010).

Occupational niches develop within immigrant communities for a variety of reasons. Recent immigrants may have varying levels of educational attainment or comfort with the English language, which can influence the types of jobs they qualify for and pursue (Eckstein & Peri, 2018; Hum, 2005). Additionally, a significant number of immigrants – an estimated 560,000 in New York City – are not in the country legally

and are thus limited to jobs that pay in cash or otherwise accommodate their undocumented status (NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, 2018; Eckstein & Peri, 2018; Craig, 2002). Immigrant niches tend to grow through social connections and strong community ties; migrants from the same area living together in dense urban neighborhoods exchange resources, and more established immigrants often support newcomers by connecting them with an employer or job prospect (Hum, 2005; Siegel, 2012). In some cases, communities have skill sets that align with and contribute to high concentrations in certain employment fields. For example, a large number of Filipino women immigrated to the United States specifically to fill a shortage in registered nurses, creating a skill-based niche that led to increased immigration and an increased prevalence of Filipino women trained to work in the nursing sector (Hum, 2005; Eckstein & Peri, 2018). In addition to variation based on skills and language ability, labor niches tend to differ based on gender even within one immigrant group (Hum, 2005).

In New York City, immigrant occupational niches typically fall within the sectors of personal services (nail salons or dry cleaning, for example), repair services and community organizations, construction, leisure and hospitality, manufacturing, and health and social services (DiNapoli & Bleiwas, 2010). More specifically, immigrants in NYC represent a high percentage of the workforce in jobs including taxi drivers and chauffeurs, maids and housekeepers, food preparation workers, cooks, and personal and home health care aides (DiNapoli & Bleiwas, 2010). While the most prevalent occupations for each distinct immigrant community may differ – for example, a large number of recent Latin American immigrants work as cashiers or construction laborers while many Korean immigrants own or are employed at nail salons and grocery stores – immigrant employment niches in New York City follow general patterns and tend to be concentrated within an identifiable sphere of jobs and job sectors (Hum, 2005; Smith, 2006; Pribilsky, 2007; Siegel, 2012).

The Tibetan speaking labor force in New York City aligns for the most part with established trends in immigrant employment niches. Many men work in construction, on assembly lines in factories, or in the food service industry as waiters or cooks (Craig, 2002; All Peoples Initiative, 2009; Gurung et al., 2018; Wangmo, 2016). Women tend to serve as housekeepers, nannies, or babysitters (Craig, 2002; All Peoples Initiative, 2009; Gurung et al., 2018). Additionally, a significant number of Tibetan speaking immigrants are employed as nurses or other healthcare workers, as indicated by the presence of an active Tibetan Nurses Association based in Queens that aims to “unite all Tibetan nurses in the state of New York,” according to their Facebook page (Tibetan Nurses Association of New York).

There is very little recorded information depicting farmers markets as a prominent means of employment for the Tibetan speaking community. A few sources allude to this connection in passing, such as a *The New York Times* profile of a notable Tibetan restaurant whose chef “used to circumambulate the city, delivering homemade lunch boxes to Tibetans working at farmers’ markets” (Mishan, 2016). One brief article in the immigrant-centric magazine *Feet in 2 Worlds* observes the Tibetan occupational niche at NYC farmers markets and features interviews with a few market salespeople, but this source does not deeply investigate the context behind or broader implications of this labor association (Poudel, 2012). The linguistic and cultural significance of the farmers market space as it relates to the Tibetan speaking community is largely overlooked. However, one only needs to stroll through the busy

Union Square Greenmarket on a Saturday – or even walk past a smaller neighborhood market such as the one right outside Columbia University in Morningside Heights – to notice voices calling out in Tibetan and to recognize the unique role this group plays within the NYC farmers market economy and community.

Tibetan Speakers and the Farmers Market Niche

Background: A Portrait of the Markets

New York City enjoys an extensive network of seasonal and year-round farmers markets and farm stands. While a select number of markets operate as independent enterprises, the vast majority of New York City farmers markets are run by GrowNYC (NYCgo, 2021). GrowNYC is the largest environmental organization in New York City, managing more than fifty farmers markets – or, as the organization labels them, Greenmarkets – at designated sites across all five city boroughs (GrowNYC). The Union Square Greenmarket in Manhattan is GrowNYC’s flagship market, featuring up to one hundred forty vendors and attracting waves of locals and tourists alike, but the organization additionally runs smaller markets in quaint neighborhoods such as Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, or on the street outside the Museum of Natural History (GrowNYC). Many markets operate year-round, on one or two days weekly, with a rotating selection of seasonal produce (GrowNYC).

Vendors that participate in GrowNYC Greenmarkets typically run stands at multiple markets throughout the city, selling products that can vary from fresh fruits to fishes to raw milk cheeses (GrowNYC). Greenmarket farms and producers are all local, based in New York State or nearby rural areas in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New England (GrowNYC). All farms adhere to GrowNYC’s strict “grow your own” standard, which means everything sold comes directly from the producer or grower, and many farms are family owned (GrowNYC). While some producers operate market stands themselves, sending a commuting staff of farm workers down to the city each morning with a truck full of supplies, a number of farms instead choose to establish warehouses in the city and hire outside, NYC-based employees to work solely in the market sector. When this is the case, many times the hired staff is Tibetan speaking. The following section, drawn from the interviews conducted for this study, details the lived experiences of five Tibetan speaking farmers market employees.

Background: A Portrait of the Market Workers

Lobsang was born in Tibet and moved to Nepal at a very young age. Eighteen years ago, he came to New York City, where he now lives in Woodside, Queens within a substantial Tibetan speaking community. Lobsang works for Samascott Orchards at the Inwood Hill Greenmarket in Manhattan every Saturday, selling apples and apple-themed baked goods alongside a staff of entirely Tibetan speaking individuals. Another woman on staff, Dolma, gave him the job. Dolma, Lobsang insists, is in charge. She has been working at this market for seventeen years; she knows the owners of the farm, the daily operations of the farm, and is responsible for connecting many other Tibetan speaking individuals in her community to sales jobs for the farm. Dolma herself got this job through “aunts,” as she describes, who were working for Samascott when she first arrived in New York City. Dolma now works beside her husband and other friends and community members at Samascott Orchards market stands full-time, selling at different market locations throughout the week.

Tenzin, unlike Dolma, only works for his farm one day a week, selling fruits and vegetables at the Union Square Greenmarket most Saturdays. He has only been working at the farmers market for about four months – “I’m a newbie there” – but he has been in New York City for much longer, since 2012. Tenzin is very busy during the week. He runs a nonprofit called Yulha Fund dedicated to increasing access to sustainable education for his community back in Nepal, works on projects aiming to document the languages and cultures of the Himalayan community in NYC, and sometimes moonlights as a server at fine dining restaurants. But when Tenzin finds some extra time on Saturday mornings, he calls up his friends down at the Union Square Greenmarket. Many of Tenzin’s colleagues and neighbors in his Queens community work at the Union Square vegetable stand or other nearby stands, and, if a spot opens up, Tenzin hurries to the market to pick up an extra day of work.

Tsering and Yeshi both work for Bread Alone Bakery. Tsering was born in India, lives in Queens and, like Tenzin, works at farmers markets only once a week. On Saturdays, Tsering sells breads and baked goods at the Inwood Hill Greenmarket, although he has worked for different vendors at other NYC markets in the past. During the week, Tsering is employed at a factory. Yeshi works for Bread Alone full time and has been employed there since emigrating from Dharamshala, India to Jackson Heights, Queens about thirteen years ago. He works at the Union Square Greenmarket four days a week, and he also manages the Bread Alone market stand at the Grand Army Plaza Greenmarket in Brooklyn. Both Tsering and Yeshi found their farmers market jobs through friends and other social connections in the New York City Tibetan speaking community. Yeshi explains: “In India, we have only around two hundred thousand Tibetans, and we all live together. We are all very much connected, by parents, by brothers and sisters, by the school network. When I came here to New York, [my classmates] had moved here maybe four years before me. I came to them, and, through them, I got the job.”

The Tibetan occupational niche at farmers markets is fostered by a self-sustaining cycle of social connections and word-of-mouth recommendations within the tight-knit Tibetan speaking migrant population. Carrie, who manages the farmers market operations for Bread Alone Bakery, affirms the crucial community component of her market staff. Carrie has been working for over a year at the Bread Alone headquarters in upstate New York, overseeing a team of thirty employees that run nineteen different Greenmarket stands in the city year-round. According to Carrie, Bread Alone Bakery was one of the first farmers market vendors to hire Tibetan speakers. She explains: “Our founder made a connection with Ngawang, who’s our NYC Market Manager, and he’s been with us for thirteen years. They made a connection, and it snowballed from there just networking within the Tibetan community. Ngawang had a friend, and he asked someone, and they asked someone... After we started hiring, I guess the word spread around within the Tibetan community in the city.” The presence of a central reference figure – a community liaison that navigates between Tibetan speakers and the farm and cultivates employment connections – seems to be an essential aspect of this niche. Carrie explains that almost all employee recommendations come directly from Ngawang or are filtered through him before reaching the Bread Alone hiring team. Dolma serves a similar role for Samascott Orchards, engaging significantly with the farm owners through monthly meetings and frequently bringing in those she knows and trusts from the community to fill open positions. These individuals appear to facilitate the Tibetan

labor link to farmers markets, merging their deep social ties together with their established employment ties.

Beyond their visibility as front-facing salespeople at markets, Tibetan speakers are employed in a number of different jobs related to farmers market daily operations. At Bread Alone, Tibetan speakers staff the New York City-based warehouse and work as drivers, loading and unloading needed equipment for the markets each morning. Tibetan speaking individuals hold positions of varying responsibility, with some serving as market supervisors or managers who oversee other salespeople beneath them. And while some individuals are employed in a full-time capacity and others may only work one market a week, Carrie notes that, in general, the hired Tibetan speakers tend to stay for significantly longer than is typical with this kind of seasonal, intensely physical work. Tibetan speaking employees eliminate the need for constant rehiring by remaining in their roles often for five or ten years at a time. The Tibetan speaking community seems to be, for many vendors, an essential source of willing and stable labor. Carrie praises the work ethic, consistency, and loyalty of her staff. Dolma asserts that she chooses to recommend her fellow community members because she knows they are honest and trustworthy, and Yeshi proudly highlights that the Tibetan people are hard-working by nature. While this Tibetan occupational niche appears to have developed organically – or even coincidentally – based on well-matched employer and employee needs, it has persisted in part due to the specific values and labor practices often exhibited by members of the Tibetan speaking community.

Is there something that draws the Tibetan speaking population to work at farmers markets, or motivates members of this community to continue in this line of work for so long? Interviewee responses to this question vary greatly. Neither Tsering at Bread Alone nor Lobsang at Samascott Orchards express a deeper connection to the farmers market sector outside of the employment and wages it provides. From an economic standpoint, market labor is appealing to the Tibetan speaking community due to its flexible payment methods and schedule that accommodate undocumented workers and participants in a more impermanent gig economy. Yeshi, however, explains that he finds a particular comfort and enjoyment in farmers market work because it allows him to be surrounded by friends and neighbors. Tenzin further emphasizes the social aspect of farmers market labor as a major reason he chooses to spend his free Saturdays at Union Square. More important than the extra money he earns, Tenzin has time to meet new friends and catch up with old ones when staffing the markets each week. Additionally, Tenzin highlights the nutritional and health benefits of farmers markets work; he brings home free, fresh vegetables to his family and young daughter, and he gets a chance to clear his head and interact with nature in a way that he longs for since leaving Nepal. The Tibetan speaking community in New York is not monolithic, and the diverse features that incentivize their employment at markets reflect the diverse individual values and experiences that comprise this population as a whole. Yet regardless of personal motivations, Tibetan speakers continue to be concentrated within the farmers market employment sector in high numbers. This occupational niche inherently encourages expressions of language and culture, creating a microcosm of Tibetan community that is rooted in Queens and scatters each morning to market sites across the five boroughs of the city.

Farmers Markets as Sites of Language Promotion and Exchange

The significant number of Tibetan speaking people working at farmers markets, oftentimes comprising the entirety of staff at stands as well as in produce warehouses, contributes to a unique economic utility of the Tibetan language. The majority of the work conducted within the farmers market domain is conducted in Tibetan. Tenzin explains that many of the individuals he works with speak very little English. Nevertheless, these workers easily navigate and succeed in their roles at the markets because they only need to memorize the names and prices of produce. While front-facing salespeople at the stands typically speak English to customers, almost all communication beyond this – joking around with coworkers, asking for clarification from a supervisor, coordinating with drivers and warehouse staff – is in Tibetan. Yeshe describes quite clearly the linguistic atmosphere at Bread Alone: “Besides the bread, everyone speaks Tibetan. And if the bread could speak, it would speak Tibetan too.”

The utility of Tibetan is further emphasized by its practicality as a lingua franca among market workers. Members of the Tibetan speaking community working at farmers markets have emigrated from a number of different countries and therefore speak a wide array of languages. Lobsang at Samascott Orchards speaks Tibetan, Nepali, English, and Hindi, while Dolma who works alongside him speaks only Tibetan and English. At Bread Alone, Yeshe speaks Tibetan, English, and Hindi while Tsering speaks Tibetan, Nepali, Hindi, English, and German. The common language spoken within this diverse, multilingual, and multinational community is Tibetan. Tibetan has inherent value in the context of farmers market labor, facilitating workplace interactions and providing a stable realm of economic opportunity to its speakers regardless of their abilities in other languages.

Communal use of Tibetan at farmers markets, beyond reinforcing a conception of the language as economically beneficial, contributes to positive language attitudes and increased visibility of Tibetan. While conducting my research, walking around various markets and observing the language practices employed at market stands, I overheard Tibetan being spoken loudly and publicly. Additionally, I noticed salespeople playing music in Tibetan aloud from their phones while working, and Carrie at Bread Alone confirms this as a common practice among her staff. Coworkers often conversed in Tibetan openly in front of customers, and when I approached salespeople to inquire about their language, many declared with a smile: “We are speaking Tibetan.” In general, Tibetan speakers working at the markets exhibit a sense of pride in their language, a willingness and desire to engage publicly with and promote the use of Tibetan. According to Yeshe, knowledge of the Tibetan language is even intentionally transmitted to some non-heritage Tibetan speakers. Many regular customers who have been attending weekly farmers markets for years ask Yeshe and his staff about Tibetan, seeking to learn the words for “hello” and “thank you” in order to communicate with Bread Alone staff in their preferred language. Now, a few customers each day greet Yeshe with “བཏམ་ཞེས་བདེ་ལེགས།” (tashi delek) and thank him with “ཐུགས་རྗེ་ཅེ” (tu-chi-che). In this way, farmers markets play a role in facilitating exchange and transmission of the Tibetan language. The utility of Tibetan and its positive attitudes and associations are conveyed to new groups of language learners through the farmers market context, potentially encouraging speakerhood and fostering an increased appreciation and cultivation of Tibetan.

Farmers Markets as Sites of Cultural Promotion and Exchange

The Tibetan occupational niche at farmers markets, in addition to advancing language use, provides meaningful space for the expression of and strengthening of Tibetan cultural ties. The far-reaching Tibetan speaking diaspora, spread out across a collection of nation-states and further dispersed each year as a result of migration, has attempted to restore a sense of community in New York City through the development of Tibetan residential areas, neighborhood organizations, places of worship, and other significant sites of congregation (Craig, 2002; Sherpa, 2019). Farmer markets are one of these sites. Carrie at Bread Alone details that “We have siblings working together, fathers and daughters, people who migrated from the same towns and communities in Tibet.” Yeshe describes the joy of reconnecting with former classmates from India through his market job. After the decentralizing process of immigration, farmers markets can serve as a site of reunification for long-separated Tibetan speakers. And for some individuals, Tibetan cultural bonds in addition to social bonds are reclaimed at the city marketplace. Tenzin explains that many Tibetan speakers he works with, himself included, feel that their employment at farmers markets links them back to the agricultural work they were accustomed to in the Himalayan region. Tenzin clearly misses the abundant fresh air and nature found in Nepal, but he feels that the physical, outdoor labor at farmers markets brings him a little closer to the traditions and practices of his homeland. Tenzin depicts his time at the markets as a cultural experience – he insists that in many ways, it hardly feels like work at all.

Farmers markets are also an extension of community daily life in Tibetan speaking New York. Members of the community who are not employed as market workers frequently visit their friends and relatives at the markets when they are shopping or running errands nearby. And Tibetan prominence at farmers markets has also contributed to the development of tangential occupations run by Tibetan community members that specifically cater to the farmers market employment niche. Tenzin and Yeshe both mention a Tibetan woman who earns her living making, selling, and delivering momo – a traditional Himalayan dumpling dish – to workers at various markets across New York City. If one walks through the Union Square Greenmarket at noon, according to Tenzin, one will find stands full of Tibetan speakers taking a break from selling apples and bagels to eat their traditional Himalayan lunch. People, rituals, cuisines of the Tibetan speaking community all coincide at farmers markets; the space transcends the domain of work and serves as a center for Tibetan union, reunion, and cultural expression.

Community is an intrinsic aspect of the Tibetan labor niche at farmers markets, creating a vibrant occupational and cultural hub that allows for the sharing of Tibetan beliefs and traditions with other groups in the farmers market sphere. Carrie’s constant engagement with Bread Alone market staff contributes to an increased understanding of Tibetan customs and religious practices. In the Bread Alone group chat, individuals often share photos of traditional meals they prepare for Losar – the Tibetan New Year – or other major celebrations, writing captions to explain to non-Tibetan staff members that, for example, “We eat this soup because it symbolizes good luck.” Because of this exchange of information, when the upstate team invites the NYC employees to visit the main bakery in Lake Katrine, they plan the trip to coincide

with Losar in order to assist Tibetan individuals in traveling to a popular nearby monastery in Woodstock, New York. And in return, Carrie most looks forward to annual Bread Alone get-togethers in New York City in which Tibetan speakers host their employers at traditional Tibetan restaurants in Jackson Heights. “The team has invited us into their community,” says Carrie, and she is honored by her employees’ generosity and openness in disclosing intimate aspects of their culture. The farmers market employment realm facilitates a respectful engagement with and transmission of beliefs and values. Tibetan cultural bonds are able to penetrate beyond the borders of Queens and further past the workplace boundaries of the marketplace. Community traditions become stronger through their presentation and practice within the diverse, expansive farmers market community.

Conclusion

Farmers markets are a significant niche for the Tibetan speaking immigrant population in New York City. Although Tibetan community sites are often conceptualized as spaces of organizing, eating, and worship inside designated ethnic neighborhoods, the farmers market space represents the growing visibility and reach of Tibetan linguistic and cultural expression within the broader New York City landscape. In addition to their crucial role in the employment and congregation of Tibetan speakers, farmers markets facilitate the continuous promotion and exchange of Tibetan language and tradition. A seemingly simple labor pattern is in fact an extensive microcosm of Tibetan community spanning the five boroughs and fifty markets of New York City.

This study contributes to a growing body of literature on the Himalayan diaspora, identifying a unique occupational connection that informs Tibetan daily life in New York City. Additional scholarship could conduct a more wide-ranging investigation into the extent of this occupational niche, exploring whether a similar link between Tibetan speakers and farmers markets manifests in other cities with large Himalayan migrant communities. There is also an opportunity for research to delve further into the relationship, touched upon briefly in this paper, between Tibetan farmers market labor and the tangential occupations that serve market workers. What does daily life look like for the woman who sells momo to salespeople at the markets, and does her business fit into a larger network of labor that operates on the periphery of the farmers market sphere? Do tangential occupations exist beyond farmers markets, catering to other Tibetan employment niches through the distribution of foods and cultural resources? Expanding upon this last question, future research could additionally undertake an examination of the Tibetan workforce within their workplace environments more broadly, asking if parallel practices of language use and cultural exchange are reflected in this community’s labor niches outside the farmers market sector.

Ultimately, this study stands at a point of intersection between economy and identity. The portrait of Tibetan speaking market employees indicates that work is not an entity separate from experiences of language, ritual, and culture. Rather, work can serve to strengthen a community, bringing their voices to new ears, their bodies into shared spaces, and their members into collaboration with other groups. The Tibetan link to farmers markets highlights ways in which labor, as an essential aspect of immigrant livelihood, is claimed as an integral component of immigrant collective life.

Immigrant occupational niches should continue to be explored as sites of linguistic and cultural cultivation and transmission, as realms that are crucial to the formation and preservation of immigrant community ties.

WORKS CITED

- All Peoples Initiative. "Tibetans in the New York Metro Area." *Unreached New York*, Nov. 2009, <https://unreachednewyork.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Tibetans-Profile-final.pdf>.
- Brudzińska, Kinga, Chloé Choquier, Michael Keller. "One Home One Dream: Exploring Tibetan Diaspora in New York City." *Humanity in Action*, Jan. 2008, https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge_detail/one-home-one-dream-exploring-tibetan-diaspora-in-new-york-city/.
- Craig, Sienna R. "Place, Work, and Identity Between Mustang, Nepal and New York City." *Studies in Nepali History and Society* vol. 7, no. 2, 2002, pp. 355-403, Accessed 9 Dec. 2021.
- DiNapoli, Thomas P. and Kenneth Bleiwas. "The Role of Immigrants in the New York City Economy." *Office of the New York State Comptroller*, Jan. 2010, <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/files/reports/osdc/pdf/report-17-2010.pdf>.
- Eckstein, Susan and Giovanni Peri. "Immigrant Niches and Immigrant Networks in the U.S. Labor Market." *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* vol. 4, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2018.4.1.01>.
- "Greenmarket Farmers and Producers." *GrowNYC.org*, <https://www.grownyc.org/greenmarket/farmers>. Accessed 29 Mar. 2022.
- "GrowNYC Greenmarkets." *GrowNYC.org*, <https://www.grownyc.org/greenmarket>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2021.
- Gurung, Nawang, Ross Perlin, Daniel Kaufman, Mark Turin, Sienna R. Craig. "Orality and Mobility: Documenting Himalayan Voices in New York City." *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2018, pp. 64-80, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/vergstudglobasia.4.2.0064>.
- Hum, Tarry. "Immigration Grows to Half of New York's Labor Force." *Regional Labor Review* vol. 7, no. 2, 2005, pp. 20-24, https://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/academics/colleges/hclas/cld/cld_rlr_s05_immigration.pdf. Accessed 9 Dec. 2021.
- Mishan, Ligaya. "At Dawa's in Queens, a Fusion of Earth and Sky." *The New York Times*, 21 Jul. 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/27/dining/dawas-restaurant-queens-tibetan-food.html>.
- NYC Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity. "An Economic Profile of Immigrants in New York City." *NYC.gov*, 2017, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/opportunity/reports/immigrant-economic-profile.page>.
- NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. "State of Our Immigrant City." *MOLA Annual Report*, Mar. 2018, https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/immigrants/downloads/pdf/moia_annual_report_2018_final.pdf.

- NYCgo. "The Best Farmers' Markets in Every Borough." *NYCgo.com*, Apr. 2021, <https://www.nycgo.com/articles/best-farmers-markets-new-york-city/>.
- Perlin, Ross, Daniel Kaufman, Jason Lampel, Maya Daurio, Mark Turin, Sienna Craig, editors. *Languages of New York City* (digital version), map. Endangered Language Alliance, <http://languagemap.nyc>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2021.
- Poudel, Sahadev. "Nepali and Tibetan Immigrants Thrive in the Union Square Greenmarket." *Feet in 2 Worlds*, 20 Aug. 2012, <https://fi2w.org/nepali-and-tibetan-immigrants-thrive-in-the-union-square-greenmarket/>.
- Pribilsky, Jason. "La Chulla Vida." Syracuse University Press, 2007.
- Sherpa, Pasang Yangjee. "Sustaining Sherpa Language and Culture in New York." *Book 2.0*, vol. 9, no. 1 & 2, 2019, pp. 19-29, doi: 10.1386/btwo_00003_1.
- Siegel, Robert (host). "With Hats and Umbrellas, Senegalese Fill A City Niche." *All Things Considered* from NPR, 18 Sept. 2012, <https://www.npr.org/2012/09/18/161336760/with-hats-and-umbrellas-senegalese-fill-a-city-niche>.
- Smith, Robert Courtney. *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants*. E-book, University of California Press, 2006.
- Tibetan Nurses Association of New York. "About." *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/752639918206436/>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2021.
- Wangmo, Tsering. "Big Apple, Small Business: From the Himalayas to New York." *NYU NewsDoc*, 2016, <https://projects.newsdoc.org/bigapple/from-the-himalayas-to-new-york/>.
- Ward, Shannon. "Style and Standardization: A Case Study of Tibetan Family Interaction in Greater New York." *Proceedings of the 23rd Annual Symposium About Language and Society, April 17-18, 2015, Austin, TX*. Texas Linguistics Forum 58, 2015, pp. 152-161, <http://salsa.ling.utexas.edu/proceedings/2015/Ward.pdf>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2021.
- "What's Available." *GrowNYC.org*, <https://www.grownyc.org/greenmarket/whatsavailable>. Accessed 29 Mar. 2022.
-