

Six Thousand Miles from Home: Mongolians in San Francisco and their Pursuit of Happiness

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The American Dream is the pursuit that is highly coveted by not just Americans but countless others outside of the United States. It is a force that continues to attract many to the United States in hopes to live a better life. The number of Asian immigrants to the United States has increased significantly as the number of Asians immigrating to the United States saw the fastest growth compared to immigration from other groups from 2000 to 2015 (Zong & Batalova, 2016, Choi, Y., He, M., Harachi, T. W, 2008). It is estimated that by 2055, Asians will become the largest immigrant group in the U.S., overtaking the Hispanic immigrants (Radford, J., 2019).

Despite their significance in the U.S., Asian Americans are not studied in great depth compared to the other nonwhite demographic groups such as African Americans and Hispanics. The term “Asian” combines different Asian American subgroups and assumes heterogeneity (Holland AT & Palaniappan LP, 2012). This is problematic because there are multitudes of Asian American groups that are distinct and unique from one another, that each follow its distinct cultural and religious practices, and even have varying immigration patterns and sociodemographic characteristics (Zong & Batalova, 2016).

Often times, these distinctions are overlooked that result in the lack of studies that focus on subgroup Asian Americans (Choi, Y., He, M., Harachi, T. W., 2008). Asians are considered a minority group within the U.S., but within this minority, there are other minorities as well. Within the already

limited amount of literature that is available in academia, certain Asian American subgroups are studied more broadly than others. There is more literature on the lives of Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese immigrants compared to other non-mainstream Asians such as Malaysian, Indonesian and Mongolian immigrants. Despite the scarcity, studies continue to be done within the smaller Asian immigrant groups.

In 2005, a study was done among Indonesian Catholics in Chicago which took a close look at the experiences of immigrants of a less prominent Asian group in the US. This study is also unique in that the writer was able to portray the experience from a participant-observation perspective as she was living in Chicago and consistently participated within the community of Indonesian Catholics in Chicago while she wrote her thesis. The study found that “the small size of the community results in informal dynamics of the immigrant organization,” (Padawangi, R. & Wittner, Judith G., 2005).

Another lesser known Asian immigrant community similar to the Indonesians is Mongolians. According to the US Census, in 2017, it was estimated that among the survey participants, 21,606 reported themselves as Mongolians (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The largest metropolitan Mongolian population concentrations are found in Chicago, Washington DC, San Francisco and Los Angeles (“Mongolians in the U.S. Fact Sheet”). There is very little literature written on the lives of Mongolian immigrants in the US. Without studies done that

are focused on the group, these twenty some thousand Mongolians go unnoticed and unrepresented in the US academia and society as a whole. Therefore, in order to bring awareness to the lives of Mongolian immigrants in the United States, this study was done in order to showcase the experience of Mongolians living in San Francisco Bay Area with additional information from participant observation.

The United States is unique in that it is made up of immigrants, people who have chosen to leave their home countries in the pursuit of a better life. Although, there are similarities and familiarity within certain immigrant groups, there are distinctions and uniqueness that are only found in certain immigrant groups as well. Based on these differences, the needs and desires of these groups vary as well. Research and studies are required to inquire these needs and desires that play crucial role in decision and policy making. As a member of a small immigrant group, Mongolians, I have come to realize that representation is extremely important to thrive and succeed in the United States. Representation allows visibility and recognition. I have been an active member of the Mongolian community in the San Francisco Bay Area for the last six years and I have witnessed that Mongolians are a fast-growing group of immigrants in the US. I have also found that there is close to no literature on the experience of Mongolians in the US. This has led me to question what I could do to contribute to my community.

Through my research, I hoped to make the Mongolian

community visible to not just the world of academia but to the American society as well. This research also aimed to dive into the struggles and issues that the Mongolian community is facing in the US. In addition, it is also important to refer to similar studies. While doing my research, I came across a study that focused on a minority group of Asians, Indonesians, in a large metropolitan city in America. It is also important to note that Asians are considered a minority group in the U.S. but there are groups within Asians who are considered a minority. I found that Padawangi's study was successful in showcasing how a minority group like the Indonesians within the Asians in the U.S., lived and thrived in Chicago, one of the metropolitan cities in the U.S. In addition, I found the study extremely insightful as Padawangi was also a member of the group so she gave a perspective that no other American researcher could. Based on the similarity that Mongolians are a minority within a minority group of Asians just like the Indonesians, and that this research is also located in San Francisco, another metropolitan city in the U.S., topped with my personal experience as a member of the community just like Padawangi, I felt that following closely to Padawangi's paper would be appropriate. Padawangi's research was the example that closely guided me to complete this research.

To provide insight into the quality of the experience, qualitative analysis research methods were used which included conducting interviews with Mongolians of different lifestyles and age group as well. Data from the US Census Bureau for the number of Mongolians in the United States was used for a better spatial understanding. As a member of the Mongolian community, I also conducted participant observations in hopes to provide a more accurate description of the

experience of a Mongolian immigrant in the US.

Research Design

The overall method that I have sought to follow for my research was a qualitative method. The reason that I chose this method compared to a quantitative method is that I was more interested to show the quality of the experience of Mongolians in San Francisco Bay Area in more detail and in varying perspectives and experiences than quantifying and conducting statistical analysis of the experiences. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to dive deeper and in more detail in the topic of the study (Patton, 1990). I conducted open-ended interviews and also conducted participant observation. In addition, to be more accurate in my research, I focused on more ethnographic type of research where my focus was on culture. "Ethnography is appropriate when you intend to spend a sustained amount of time with a particular group of people or sub-culture or society," (Ward, 2013, p.65). I believe that ethnography is appropriate as it allowed me to dive deep specifically into the richness of the experience of Mongolians in San Francisco as opposed to the entire Mongolian population in the United States. Due to the lack of quantifiable data and information about Mongolians in San Francisco, quantitative analysis was not appropriate for the purpose of this research.

Open-ended interviews

Compared to close-ended interviews where choices are presented to the participants, open-ended interviews provide the perspectives of the participants in their own words. "Open-ended interviews add depth, detail, and meaning at a very personal level of experience," (Patton, 1990, p. 18). My main focus was to show the experience of Mongolians in San Francisco

and open-ended interviews helped me to study that. In addition, I believe open-ended interviews helped Mongolians in San Francisco to "allow (and even encourage) them to justify themselves, and express their own understanding of their role, their social position as well as their personal feelings," (Ward, 2013, p.41). I conducted 10 interviews with people of different age groups so I can show how experiences may vary in different ages. I also tried to choose people who have lived in San Francisco for different duration and show how the duration of the stay may affect the experiences of Mongolians. I have chosen participants from the community of Mongolians I interact with who are also members of the Mongolian church I attend as well. I was hopeful that the participants would feel comfortable to answer the questions because we have a prior connection before doing the interview.

Participant observation

I conducted a participant observation as I am a member of the Mongolian community in San Francisco. Participant observation allows the researcher to "develop an insider's view of what is happening," (Patton, 1990, p. 207). Through participant observation, I was able to provide a detailed description of the Mongolian community in San Francisco. That being said, the observation is subjective and based on personal experience.

Limits and Potential weakness of the study

As I am a Mongolian immigrant who has lived in San Francisco for the last six years, there is a possibility that my input for the study to be difficult to replicate for a person who may not be a member of the community. Biases may arise in analysis and evaluation as well because I am also a member of the community. I have tried my best to

be as objective as I can to minimize biases and personal opinions.

Based on limited data available and the lack of quantitative study, the results did not provide enough quantifiable data to be used to generalize due to answers from only 10 participants that were detailed and different from one another.

Research Instrument

I conducted an hour-long interview with each participant that I chose based on their age, background and availability. The questions aimed to inquire the participants about their experience as a Mongolian, a member of a minority group, living in San Francisco. The answers showed specific challenges and issues that only Mongolians may be experiencing compared to other immigrant groups. I conducted my interviews mostly in Mongolia, but when necessary, I also conversed in English if the participant felt that it would help them to answer more accurately. In order to protect the identity of the participants, I have changed the names of the participants to other Mongolian names.

THE HOPES AND THE DREAMS

The Great Mongols

Historically, the Mongol Empire was known as one of the largest empires in the world as it once ruled over 9 million square miles of territory with the leadership of Chingis Khaan (“Genghis Khan”). Since the reign of the Chingis Khaan, there is insufficient information known to the world about modern day Mongolia. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Mongolia has undergone major transformation. Democracy in Mongolia has brought freedom of religion and the openness to a capitalist economy. Mongolia is facing an uncontested arena keeping up with the development of the rest of the world. Democracy has also opened the doors to interna-

tional relations and diplomacy with foreign countries.

In Pursuit of the American Dream

In 1987, the United States established diplomatic relations with Mongolia, opening up doors to the U.S. (U.S. Relations with Mongolia) American core values of liberty and freedom of expression penetrated thousands of miles to the Mongolian borders. As some conservative Mongolians questioned the validity of this Western ideology, other younger and liberal Mongolians were able to relate to it. Soon after, the magnetic forces of America pulled many Mongolians to act on their affection as numerous Mongolians started to migrate to different parts of the United States. However, it was not just the affection that made Mongolians leave their homes, it was also the lack of economic opportunities in Mongolia that challenged them to move. Many Mongolians felt that it was impossible to live a successful life in Mongolia because of low levels of economic standing. Among those who moved to the U.S., some Mongolians moved to the Bay Area, California in hopes for better work and education opportunities. Such was the case for Baatar and Suvd.

“I came here after working in South Korea for 2 years because I wanted to work and save money. There aren’t that many opportunities back home in Mongolia.” (Baatar, 45, 16 years in the US)

“My family came here so I could attain a better education and my parents could work and earn enough money.” (Suvd, 21, 2 years in the US)

Many others share similar stories with Baatar and Suvd. Many Mongolians move to the U.S. because of the abundant economic and job op-

portunities that were not offered in Mongolia because of the unstable economy and working conditions. In addition, many Mongolians just like Suvd come to the U.S. to attain higher education as most of the Mongolian population are college students and the median age of Mongolians in the US is 31. (Lopez, Gustavo, Anthony Cilluffo, and Eileen Patten.)

Destination in the U.S.

As the economy in Mongolia continue to struggle, the U.S. continued to become an attractive destination. From 2000 to 2015, the number of Mongolians in the US has grown quite rapidly from 6,000 to 21,000. (Census Bureau) The newcomers settled in large metropolitan cities like Chicago, Washington DC, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver, New York and Seattle where Mongolian communities were growing. In 2015, it was shown that the percentage of Mongolians who had lived in the U.S. for more than ten years and those less than ten years were almost equal at 51% and 49% (Lopez, Gustavo, Anthony Cilluffo, and Eileen Patten.) This shows that Mongolians are consistently continuing to move to the U.S.

Why San Francisco?

San Francisco is one of the most welcoming cities in America with the most diverse group of people (“An Equity Profile of the San Francisco Bay Area Region.”). In addition, there are abundant opportunities to make a living in San Francisco as it is becoming a leading city in the information technology industry (“An Equity Profile of the San Francisco Bay Area Region.”). San Francisco’s tech boom and economic growth seems to be the major pull factor for Mongolians to move here. However, for Mongolians to move here, having a familiar person in San Francisco helps tremendously with getting accustomed to the U.S. Most of

the participants of the interviews I conducted answered that the reason they chose to come to San Francisco was because they had connections here whether they were relatives or friends. Having a connection provided a support system that Mongolian immigrants needed in order to find their bearings in San Francisco. Davaa moved to the U.S. when he was only nine years old and friends of his parents helped them to settle in the Bay Area. Tuya moved to San Francisco 14 years ago with the help of her brother who had settled much earlier than her.

“Friends of my parents lived here so my family moved here with their help.” (Davaa, 26, 17 years in the US)

“My brother’s family had moved here so they invited us to move here.” (Tuya, 41, 14 years in the US)

For people like Davaa and Tuya, moving to a completely different country is definitely not easy, but with the help of family and friends, they were able to embrace the challenge with courage.

THE CHALLENGES

Everything is New

For immigrants, the adjustment period may be the most challenging time when they first move to their destination. This transition requires flexibility and possibly, transformation and its impacts can vary depending on the individual. Some may experience extreme culture shock and others may get acquainted with ease (“Living in America: Challenges Facing New Immigrants and Refugees”). It was also the case for Mongolian immigrants. One of the most challenging times that Mongolians face in the U.S. is the beginning stages when they first move here. There are so many changes that happen all at

once from language, culture to the change in the physical landscape. Not only that, family and friends that were major supportive systems are no longer around. It is the tale of the lone wanderer. Language is definitely one of the most difficult aspects of moving to another country.

Language

Language is one of the most important skills for immigrants to acquire in order to attain a social and economic standing when moving to a foreign country (Isphording, Ingo, and Sebastian Otten. 2014.) “The degree of difficulty in learning a new language depends on the degree of dissimilarity of the mother tongue of immigrants to the language of the destination country.” Mongolian and English are very different from each other. Tones and pronunciation are distinctly different. Mongolian is one of the three groups in the Altaic language family (Svantesson, Jan-Olof, Anna Tsendina, Anastasia Karlsson, and Vivan Franzén.). English on the other hand is part of the Indo-European language group (Renfrew. 1989). It is thus, challenging for Mongolians to pick up English and understandably so due to the dissimilarity of the mother language to English. For Tuul and Taivan who came to the United States at a young age, they expressed that they had difficulty fitting in at school because of language barriers.

“The most difficult time for me was the transitional period when I moved here. I did not have any friends and had zero English skills. I was not fluent in both English and Mongolian. I was teased by kids at school a lot. Language was a big problem for me.” (Tuul, 18, 6 years in the US)

“Being a young boy who was already going through puberty and

many insecurities, I faced difficulties because I didn’t know English. It makes you feel stupid. I couldn’t do well in school because of my lack of English. I felt very lonely.” (Taivan, 23, 11 years in the US)

Many young Mongolians have no choice but to follow their parents when moving to the U.S. This often times means that they have to be introduced to the American education system with little to no English skills which could put in a position where they could end up being bullied and teased by their American peers. It is the reality of many other immigrants as well (Jones, Michelle E. 2015.). Unfortunately, the inability to speak English can have negative impacts on the quality of the lives of Mongolians living in the United States. It causes lack of self-esteem and ability to assimilate into the society.

Who are you?

Immigrants go through a difficulty in keeping to their identity when they move to another country. “Identity is made visible and intelligible to others through cultural signs, symbols, and practices” (Weedon. 2004, 5). Immigrants may feel that their identity is at risk if there is a lack of outlets to express and experience their culture in their migrant countries. Mongolian immigrants also experience the struggle of maintaining their identity in the U.S.. Mongolians pride themselves in their rich history and traditions and customs that are only unique to Mongolians. However, due to the small number of Mongolians in the U.S., Mongolians are often mistaken for other major Asian ethnic groups such as Chinese, Korean or Japanese. Being mistaken for another ethnic group adds another layer of complication when you are an immigrant.

“People usually think I am Chi-

nese or Korean. Even when I tell them I am from Mongolia, they think it is part of China. I have to indicate that we are an independent country. But it is getting better nowadays because people ask instead of just assuming that I am a certain Asian background like Chinese or Korean.” (Tuul, 18, 6 years in the US)

“Some people don’t even know where Mongolia is. Those who know about Mongolia only knows about Chinggis Khaan.” (Taivan, 23, 11 years in the US)

Americans cannot be blamed for mistaking Mongolians for other major Asian ethnic groups because Mongolian as a race is not well known in the U.S. so it is understandable and almost expected that there is a misjudgment of their race. Mongolians are used to being mistaken for the major Asian ethnic groups. However, this does not mean that they want to continue to be labeled as a Chinese or Koreans, especially, considering the hostile history Mongolians has had with the Chinese. For Mongolians who are experiencing many other challenges that come with being immigrants, the lack of knowledge from the members of the host country about their whereabouts can be disappointing. It can make them feel inferior about their standing in America.

LIFE IN THE LAND OF DREAMS

Not the American Dream Hoped for

The cost of living in San Francisco Bay Area has become increasingly expensive in recent years. Rent prices are at an all time high causing even the local San Franciscans to move out of the city (“United States: Living with the Dot.Com People.”). This entails in it Mongolian immigrants to work harder than ever before to make ends

meet. A significant number of Mongolians who have a driver’s license and a car in recent years, have been employed by taxi services such as Uber and Lyft and other food delivery services such as Instacart and Doordash. The flexibility in working hours and the lack of English requirement seem to be attractive to Mongolian immigrants. However, there are risks involved with these unspecialized services. New job opportunities provided by Uber and Lyft were not designed for a full time job. However, many Mongolians work in these services full time and often times, much longer than a normal full time job because of bonuses provided by Uber and Lyft. It is easy money compared to other hard labor jobs like construction that many Mongolians used to work at. At the same time, these easy money jobs, because they require no specialized skills, there is no opportunity to develop other skills. One wonders what would happen if these jobs are no longer available. What would Mongolians do then?

On the other hand, there are those who got a head start from the others that started small to medium businesses such as restaurants, dry cleaning services and daycare. There are two Mongolian restaurants in San Francisco that are located in downtown and outer Richmond where Mongolians can get a taste of home. In addition, those who are college age students work part time in service industries as waiters, hosts and dishwashers as well. A big chunk of Mongolians in Bay Area are college students who study at community colleges and universities and other English Language institutes. Graduates are employed in different sectors with their Optional Practical Training (OPT) permits that are given for 1-3 year duration. Despite the competitiveness and pressure of the high living costs in the Bay Area, Mongolians are aware and appreciative of the

benefits of living here. They take comfort in knowing that they will reap the fruits of their hard work.

“Hard work is acknowledged here. If you work hard, you can live a successful life.” (A community member, 45, 16 years in the US)

“There are many well-paying jobs here.” (A community member, 27, 16 years in the US)

It is evident that Mongolians are optimistic about the payoff of their labor in the Bay Area and this attitude help them to continue to live satisfied.

Networking and Community Gathering

There are only a few places that help to ease the longing for home for Mongolians in the Bay Area. Mongolians congregate during major National holidays such as Lunar New Year and Naadam festival. Naadam festival is the largest annual event which takes place in early July where the most number of Mongolians congregate in the Bay Area. The locations change every year. There are selective screenings of Mongolian new films in the Presidio theater where Mongolians have mini reunions. Christian Mongolians congregate in churches in the Bay Area as well. There are three Mongolian churches located in Oakland, Alameda and San Francisco where weekly services, bible studies and fellowships are held. Mongolians are traditionally Buddhists as well and there are Buddhists temples in Sacramento where Mongolians visit to pray and receive blessings from monks.

As a member of the Immanuel Mongolian church in San Francisco (IMCC), I attend weekly small group meetings, bible studies and Sunday services where I conducted participant observations. During Sunday services, at IMCC,

the local Mongolian Church, 30-40 regular attendees congregate and worship, listen to sermons and fellowship in Mongolian. In addition, at the end of services, traditional meals are prepared by the ladies of the congregation that feed everyone and provides a piece of home for the college students who do not get to enjoy Mongolians meals on a day to day basis.

I was able to attend a movie screening at the Presidio theater where I observed that the Mongolians in the Bay Area have a mini reunion and get a little escape from the busyness of their lives. Due to the small number of Mongolians in San Francisco, events like movie screenings allow Mongolians to experience a Mongolian film in their language and scenes from their home country. It is a luxury and a special event that is not enjoyed on a typical day.

There are also interest based groups such as hiking, book clubs, college student conferences that are run by volunteers that meet regularly and conduct their respective activities.

Home is Unreachable

Mongolians, just like other immigrants, miss their home country very much. Due to financial difficulties and changes in immigration policies, it is risky and quite impossible to visit Mongolia whenever they want. An average round trip flight ticket to Ulaanbaatar (the capital city of Mongolia) can cost up to \$1500. A trip to Mongolia is one that many cannot afford. Not to mention, there is always fear and risk of being detained at the airport when returning to the U.S. As immigrants, losing their status to live in the U.S. is one of the biggest fears. The case is the same for the Mongolians. Despite their satisfaction in the U.S. government, the fear of deportation is real.

In addition, many Mongolians are unable to visit their family

and relatives while waiting to get their permanent residency approval. Green Card approval processing time can take from 7 months up to 33 months and a lot can happen in those years. (Johnson, Tory. 2019) When asked about the most challenging time they faced while living in the U.S., participants voiced that the time waiting to receive their residency was the hardest.

“4 family members passed away. I lost my brother and other precious people in my life. I could not be a part of their funerals because of my residency issues. I was very lonely and it was a very tough time.” (Baatar, 45, 16 years in the US)

“While waiting for our asylum case to be accepted, it was really hard. I could not get a job because I did not have any social security number. My little sister could not go to daycare because we did not have the proper documents.” (Suvd, 21, 2 years in the US)

Living without proper documents is inconvenient but also terrifying for immigrants. It is the case for Mongolians. Many necessary resources such as jobs and healthcare are inaccessible without the proper documents and result in low quality of life for immigrants.

Culture Preservation

Immigrants constantly face the conundrum between cultural preservation and assimilation in the country of destination (Joanna Diane Caytas. 2012.). “Cultural identity is formed by simple binary choice: either to identify with the dominant culture or with one’s legacy minority culture,” (Joanna Diane Caytas. 2012.) It is up to immigrants to choose which culture they would like to be associated with. However, it is not that simple. It could be a combination of

the dominant and minority culture. In the case of Mongolians, cultural identity for the majority seem to be formed with their minority culture but with an affection for the dominant American culture as well. However, when confronted with the question of the importance of culture preservation there was a consensus that the Mongolian culture should be preserved.

“It is important to define what it means to preserve [culture]. We can’t wear our traditional clothes everyday. We need to learn from others’ mindset and integrate it. However, language is one of the important aspects of our culture. It shows our uniqueness. After all, we can’t be distinguished by our face because we are Asian.” (Bold, 34, 2 years in the US)

“As a Mongolian, it is important to preserve our culture and tradition. It is essential for our survival. We would not be able to live without it. This gives a sense of pride and identity.” (Telmen, 35, 2 years in the US)

“It is important to preserve our culture because we are Mongolian. Our history is different from the U.S. Although, we live in America, our lifestyle is still Mongolian. If we lose our culture, it’s like we are losing ourselves. I’ve started asking my parents about our ancestors only recently. Now, I want to know our background so I can tell my children. If I don’t tell my children, our history ends here.” (Tuya, 41, 14 years in the US)

For people like Bold, Telmen and Tuya, cultural preservation is of great importance. It is clear that although they are living in the U.S., they feel that preserving the Mongolian culture is an important factor to maintaining the identity of Mongolians.

Is Going Back an Option?

Going back to Mongolia permanently is something that Mongolians do consider from time to time but it is not seen as an option for many. It has to be understood that the decision to come to the United States was made to last for a long time. If there were enough opportunities to thrive and succeed back home, Mongolians would not have to come to the U.S. Therefore, it would be like reopening wounds to ask whether they would like to go back to Mongolia. For Mongolians, during their time in the United States, they hope to build up their finances and only go back when they feel that they can live in Mongolia comfortably.

For Taivan, who migrated here since he was a child, he has decided that he will live in the United States permanently.

“I have decided to live here but my roots are there. That’s where my ancestors are. I want to have a stable life here. I will go back when I can help others.” (Taivan, 23, 11 years in the US)

For Baatar who is very much patriotic, he feels a sense of responsibility to protect his country. When asked about what it would take him to go back to Mongolia, his response was

“When there’s a war. When I’m ready to die.” (Baatar, 45, 16 years in the US)

It has to be understood that once Mongolians come to the United States, it is difficult to return to Mongolia mostly because of economic inequality and lack of opportunities to prosper. That is why for people like Taivan, the only time to return will be when they are successful and comfortable enough to help others.

Big Aspirations

Immigrants are believers of the American Dream. “More than nine in ten immigrants (93%) agree that people who work hard to better themselves can get ahead in this country,” (Immigrants and the American Dream.) Similar to other immigrants, Mongolians living in the U.S. are very inspirational people. Despite the difficulties they are facing, they have big dreams and goals. When asked about what they would like to accomplish during their time in the United States, the answer I received from the interview participants were filled with aspiration and passion.

“I would like to ensure my personal growth reaches its fullest potential. I would like to impact everyone whom I am in communication with to my best ability. In order to do that, I need to develop myself.” (Bold, 34, 2 years in the US)

“I would like to start my own business and get really good at it. I want to help and contribute to people. There are many opportunities to start a small business here compared to Mongolia. If my business succeeds, then I would love to venture to Mongolia.” (Davaa, 26, 17 years in the US)

“As an immigrant, I want to give back and serve to my fullest potential. Our leaders in Mongolia tend to disappoint me and our news is filled with negativity. I want to be able to help those people back home. I remember when I was younger there were people freezing on the streets because things were so bad. I want to help people like that. I want to die knowing that I made a difference so I have to take advantage of all the opportunities that are available here so I can serve others.” (Taivan, 23, 11 years in the US)

It is very inspiring to learn that despite the challenges that Mongolians face while living in America, they believe that they have the power and potential to impact others. It is amazing to witness their optimism about their future. In addition, Mongolians have big hearts to help and serve others around them.

Missing Piece to the Puzzle

Padawangi found in her study that the Catholic Church in Chicago serves as a place to for Indonesians to socialize among other Indonesians in America as there are no formal organizations that help Indonesians to settle in the U.S. The Catholic Church also helps them to maintain their identity as Indonesians who are living in the United States. It was also the case for Mongolians who were interviewed. Almost every interview participant voiced their concern about the lack of formal organized Mongolian community in the Bay Area. There were a couple of participants who recommended that there should be a Mongolian community center or some other formal organizations that cater to specific needs that Mongolians have in the Bay Area. Telmen gave a detailed description of one way this could happen.

“I feel that the current Bay Area Mongolian Association (BAMA) should become a member supported organization. It could start a monthly donation program for maybe \$10 and provide a general and updated information to the Mongolians like immigration law changes or other law reforms that we need to look out for. I think many people will be supportive of it. I feel that in many of the events organized by the BAMA, there are many things that need improvement but because the organization is run by volunteers, it is difficult to expect them to lis-

ten to our concerns and see the changes happen.” (Telmén, 35, 2 years in the US)

The Bay Area Mongolian Association is one of the few leading Mongolian community organizations in the Bay Area. It is run by volunteers who value Mongolian culture and tradition and want to ensure that it is maintained in the Bay Area. However, there is a lack of funding as noted by Telmén for organizations like the BAMA to maintain their operations and serve the community to their fullest potential.

The lack of Mongolian formal community organization is seen and understood by other Mongolians as well. While I was writing this paper, I was fortunate to be a part of the organizers of the first Mongolian Open Mic event in the Bay Area. The organizers were my friends and I who were all young adults who wanted to provide Mongolians in the Bay Area a time to come together and enjoy singing Mongolian songs, dance to them and get connected to their culture. Due to lack of formal platform to connect to other Mongolians in the Bay Area, our team used social media platforms and word of mouth strategies ways to promote the event. We were expecting about a hundred attendees but to our surprise, about two hundred young adults came together and participated. There were people singing Mongolian songs, dancers performing Mongolian traditional dance and even musicians who performed with a Mongolian traditional instrument called morin khuur (horse fiddle). The attendees voiced that this event was one of the most exciting events that was held within the Mongolian community in the Bay Area.

CONCLUSION

At the end of every interview, I asked the participants what it felt

like to be interviewed about their experiences in the U.S. as Mongolians. All participants voiced their gladness and that the interview gave them the chance to look back at their experiences. They also wanted to read the paper when it is finished and they told me that they will share it with other Mongolians as well. As an interviewer and researcher, I felt a great sense of responsibility to present the readers with the most accurate information about the experience of Mongolians in the Bay Area. However, due to lack of time, I felt that there was much more that I could have improved and researched in greater detail. With the information and knowledge that I gathered, I came to the following conclusion.

Need for Formal Community Platforms

There is a lack and need of formal community platforms within the Mongolian community in the Bay Area. There needs to be more effort to connect Mongolians in the Bay Area with the resources they need in order to succeed whether it is job or educational trainings. There is a demand for Mongolians to be connected with each other and also learn about important cultural and socioeconomic aspects of the U.S. in order to live here successfully. Interview participants felt that this paper will provide an opportunity for the readers to feel a sense of unity within the Mongolians and provide relatability. I hope that this paper will help Mongolians to know that their fight and experience in the U.S. is celebrated and acknowledged. In addition, I also hope that the leaders in the Bay Area will start a discussion where Mongolians could be celebrated and represented in the community.

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