

BRIDGING CULTURAL IDENTITIES THROUGH CANTONESE OPERA IN CANADA

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This article discusses cultural performances, mainly Cantonese opera, in a Canadian context from an intercultural studies perspective. Drawing on cultural activities primarily organized by and for Chinese Canadian communities, this article illustrates the struggles and dynamics of Chinese Canadians bridging their cultural identities between their hometowns and Canada in the cases of immigrants, between generations among Chinese Canadians, and between cultural subgroups of Chinese diasporas. I argue that these opera performances and their related activities, such as demonstrations and seminars, illustrate and consolidate the manifestation of transcultural identity and acculturation of Chinese Canadians. The introduction and adaptation of these cultural activities in Canada, enabled by transcultural identities of Chinese Canadian communities, symbolize the transcendence of borders, linguistic boundaries, and geographic remoteness.

My investigation concerns Cantonese opera because it seems to be the primary cultural activity among Chinese Canadians before the 1960s, and it has had a significant influence on Chinese Canadian community in terms of their collective and intercultural identities. Cantonese opera has been a popular cultural entertainment both in the hometowns of first-generation immigrants and in their adopted home in Canada. Most of these immigrants came from Hong Kong or from Guangdong, which is also known as Canton. The opera is a hometown form of entertainment with familiar themes and atmosphere, which brings forth both individual and collective memories of Chinese Canadians, “giving voices to Chinese Canadian migrants’ former selves and experiences” prior to their arrival in Canada (J. Li 6). As Nancy Rao argues in her recent study of Chinatown Opera Theatre in North America, opera activities generate social memory, both “transmitted and reshaped beliefs, values and cultural symbols” (6). In the storytelling, cultural imagining, and lyrical reciting of

Cantonese opera, generations of Chinese Canadians participate in the dynamic processes that “produce, convey, sustain, and reconstruct collective memory” (Beiner 28). In my research and in the seminars that I organized and discuss in this article, I show that Cantonese “opera lyrics are performative, affording the opportunity to enact an identity, to take on a musical persona, and to be oneself, free from society’s rigidities” (Rao 3-4). In performing or imitating the performance, the identity of the performers and audience can be “ascribed, resisted, or embraced” and can cross borders (Scott 792).

1858-1922: GOLD RUSH, CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILROAD, AND HEAD TAX

88 To understand the cultural space and significance of Cantonese opera for Chinese Canadian communities, it is necessary to examine the history and characteristics of Chinese immigration to Canada. The first wave of Chinese immigrants came to Canada when the Fraser River Gold Rush began in 1858. The gold miners, railroad workers, and other labourers who came to Canada in the decades that followed were mostly single young men from Taishan, Enping, and Kaiping in Guangdong (Canton) Province near Hong Kong (Leong, “Hong Kong Connection” 3). They spoke little English and did not understand Western culture, leading their own lives and practicing their own customs in parallel with those of Westerners.

Although the head tax had been imposed on Chinese immigrants since 1885, young men from rural Guangdong still tried to borrow money from relatives and friends to pay the tax. The poor situation in China, the higher income for labourers in Canada, and the robust migration network ensured an increasing number of Chinese immigrants to Canada until the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1923. In the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the factors that pushed these young men to leave their hometowns included the lack of arable farm land, the uncertain, disrupted, and violent atmosphere created by civil wars and social uprisings, and a series of natural disasters resulting in famines (Leong, “Hong Kong Connection” 3). On the other hand, the prosperous image of Gold Mountain, the Chinese name broadly referring to the west of North America, brought back by returning migrants with their stories of gold and newfound wealth, provided enough incentive to outweigh the burden of the head tax (Leong, “Hong Kong Connection” 4).

Largely due to the push and pull factors for Chinese immigration to Canada discussed above, the population of Chinese labourers continued to increase in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Meanwhile, a small merchant class emerged among the Chinese in Canada, providing network and business support for visiting troupes to perform Cantonese opera, perhaps the most popu-

lar cultural entertainment form for Chinese emigrants from Guangdong Province. Cantonese opera was often a source of cultural pride for emigrant Chinese, and merchants took the opportunity to translate “their economic success into cultural capital and psychological satisfaction” (Lei 118-19). As Nancy Rao notes, “Cantonese opera provided the most iconic public face of the Chinatown community—a splendid and ideal version of Chinese culture” (14).

1922-1967: SEGREGATED COMMUNITIES AND CANTONESE OPERA ACTIVITIES

Until the 1960s, the Chinese in Canada formed segregated communities, usually centred on Chinatowns in major cities such as Victoria, Vancouver, and Toronto (Lai and Leong). With this physical, cultural, social, and political segregation, the cultural identity of Chinese Canadians, which was primarily Chinese, remained unchallenged. Their entertainment and cultural needs were fulfilled more or less in the same way as those of most people in Guangdong and Hong Kong: by delving into the familiar world of Cantonese opera. The popularity of Cantonese opera in the Chinese community caught the attention of the media. On October 2, 1907, the *Daily British Colonist* commented that “the Chinese population seem to have great pleasure in [Cantonese Opera] for the flock to the theatre night after night and the players seldom have to perform without a full house.” In addition to entertaining them, the performance and drama presented in the repertoire also “gave voice to Chinese immigrants’ everyday stories of desires, regrets, laughter, and dreams” (Rao 3).

Cantonese opera first appeared in Canada in the nineteenth century. Evidence of the earliest Cantonese opera activity in Canada shows that by 1885, five theatres had been constructed in Victoria’s Chinatown, with capacities ranging from 250 to 800 seats. By the early twentieth century, the Chinese population had shifted to Vancouver, where three theatres with over 500 seats had been built by the 1910s (Rao 136).

Jenny Clayton’s brief introduction to Victoria’s Chinatown theatre provides a glimpse of the early history and understanding of the importance of Cantonese opera for Chinese immigrants to Canada:

Five theatres were constructed in Victoria’s Chinatown between 1858 and 1885, showing how much the local Chinese population (1,767 residents by 1884) valued opera. Cantonese opera, with roots dating back centuries in China, was performed at these theatres several times a week by travelling troupes from China. The narratives of operas were a means of teaching cultural values.

Traces of early Cantonese opera activities in Canada can be found in two major newspapers in British Columbia: *The Daily Colonist* (1858-) in Victoria and *Chinese Times* 大漢公報 (1906-92). For example, on November 4, 1882, the *Daily Colonist* reported

Yesterday the mail steamer G.W. Elder landed no less than 16 trunks of similar make and dimension, about a cubic yard in capacity, filled with the costumes for the new Chinese theatre on Cormorant Street. Besides these there were a number of packages for the same establishment. The proprietor paid \$900.00 duty on this stage property. (2)

Three years later, on August 4, 1885, the *Daily Colonist* carried a notice on the building of the fifth Chinese theatre in Victoria: "The new Chinese Theatre situated at the back of Cormorant Street will be opened tonight when special attractions will be offered" (3).

The Chinese community's support of at least five theatres in Victoria and later three more in Vancouver for such an elaborate cultural and performing-arts activity defies the common perception of early Chinese immigrants as mostly uneducated labourers who spent most of their time gambling and smoking opium. It demonstrates their collective economic power and rich global network that could bring in professional musicians, performers, costumes, and stage equipment from across the Pacific Ocean. It further suggests that the lives of early Chinese immigrants could be culturally and socially diverse and interesting after a day's hard work in Canada.

Since its launch in 1906, most Cantonese opera performances in Vancouver and Victoria would be advertised in Canada's first Chinese newspaper, the *Chinese Times*. According to these advertisements, numerous Cantonese operas were performed in these two cities during the periods of 1915-25, 1930-33, and 1935 (see Figure 1). During these years, Cantonese opera performances relied solely on visiting troupes from Hong Kong and Guangzhou; afterwards, many visiting troupes were hindered by the economic depression of the 1930s, the Chinese Exclusion Act (1923-47), and World War II (1937-45).

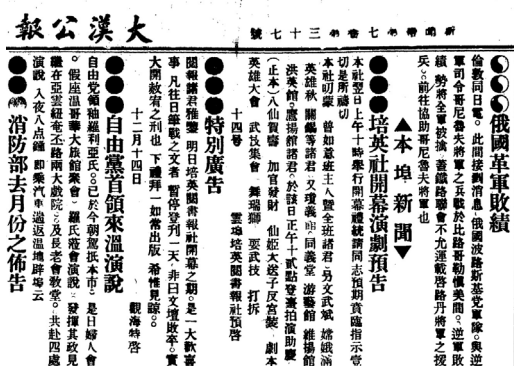


Figure 1. Notice of a Cantonese Opera performance in Vancouver, 1917.
Source: *The Chinese Times*, December 4, 1917, digitized version at
Simon Fraser University Library.

Deprived of the opportunity to watch Cantonese operas performed by professional musicians and artists, the Chinese Canadian community started to form their own musical societies to fill this void in their recreational and cultural lives, two of the most prominent of which were Jin Wah Sing (振華聲) and Ching Won (清韻) (see Figure 2). Members of these societies were primarily music fans and opera devotees who met to practice their skills. In the beginning, they gathered mainly for their own enjoyment; as the difficult situation for professional performers and musicians continued, they began to conduct public performances. These performances first appeared in April 1935, and were successful; when the flow of migration became active again, they were supported by professional performers. Nevertheless, following the establishment of local musical societies, future opera activities in Canada often featured a combination of visiting professional performers and local opera devotees (Ng 175-76).



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Figure 2. Ching Won Music Society, 1940s. Source: Beatrice & Raymond Jai Collection, Richard Charles Lee Canada-Hong Kong Library

As the Chinese population moved to Eastern Canada seeking job opportunities, the demand for Cantonese opera increased, leading opera troupes to expand their performances into major cities where significant Chinese communities were present, such as Toronto and Montreal. The earliest trace of Cantonese opera activity in Toronto dates back to April 18, 1916, when the *Chinese Times* announced the Guomin Zhong Theatrical Association's plan to perform in Eastern Canada (see Figure 3).

▲▲國民鐘劇社啓事

嘗聞戲劇一道感人最深現身說法當為改良社會之切義本社組織國民鐘以改良新舊戲劇粉墨登場說白傳神歌舞怡性出奇生新實為輔助教育之一端也蓋改良方法專取新戲之長補舊戲之短又以舊戲之善為新戲之助融合新舊兩法特別行之如此則兼收並蓄汰腐存精因時為用酌古宜今行見元音發揚風氣丕變矣是非本社之任而執任哉故其名曰國民鐘用以警醒我國民者也然僑居加拿大東方之同胞素乏觀劇之樂即有觀者亦歎美之聲格格不入諒必以一睹此為快本社因不惜車費浩大用特沿埠遊演現擬本月下旬由雲高華首途先到克架厘場開演繼沿各埠直至滿地可埠至時僑胞諸君想必加意歡迎是所祝禱

中華民國五年 四月 十八日 三井

Figure 3. Announcement of the Guomin Zhong Theatrical Association's plan to perform in Eastern Canada. Source: *The Chinese Times*, April 18, 1916, digitized version at Simon Fraser University Library.

In addition to fulfilling the cultural and entertainment needs of the Chinese community in Canada, the organization of Cantonese opera performances often involved the community's hometown politics. Part, sometimes most, of the proceeds of these performances would be devoted to supporting certain political causes in China. Occasionally, the visiting troupes and opera associations were themselves extensions of political groups. For example, The World's Mirror (Shijie Jing 世界鏡), formed in 1918 as the earliest Cantonese dramatic society in Toronto, was closely related to the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang 國民黨). The party set up many similar societies all over Canada, including The World's Warning Bell (Jingshi Zhong 警世鐘) in Edmonton, The Awakening Soul (Xinghun 醒魂) in Winnipeg, and The World's Awakening Bell (Jue Shizhong 覺世鐘) in Montreal. Their names all carry the literal implication of arousing the world to save China, which at the time was divided by the military cliques of the fallen Qing Dynasty and regional powers (S. Li 31). The original purposes of these societies were often to act as a cover for underground political activities related to the party and to help raise overseas funds. This continued into at least the 1970s, when the political conflicts in China subsided, and the societies either dissolved or shifted their focus to genuine Cantonese opera activities for the local Chinese community.

The cultural meanings and conventions encoded in Cantonese opera reinforced the early Chinese settlers' cultural heritage, which was passed down to later gen-

erations of Chinese Canadians. As Rao suggests, “the [Cantonese opera] theatres became important locales for cultural performances, where nightly shows retold familiar stories in endless renditions of theatrical conventions [...] The operas both transmitted and reshaped beliefs, values, and cultural symbols” (6). The impact of cultural imagination, identity, and social memory transmitted by Cantonese opera is most vividly illustrated in the works of two Chinese Canadian writers, Wayson Choy and Denise Chong, who remade and reinterpreted the stories and cultural space of Cantonese opera in their Chinatown stories and memoirs.

In *Paper Shadows: A Memoir of a Past Lost and Found* (1999), Wayson Choy devotes a whole chapter, “At the Opera,” to his opera-going experiences and the world of his fantastic cultural imagination as a child growing up in Vancouver’s Chinatown. He was brought to the Sing Kew Theatre by his mother, who often “whispered to [him the Cantonese opera stories] over and over again” (117). As perceived by Choy, the Chinese community delved into “the life that blossomed all over the auditorium, as if it were a busy village square. [...] the Sing Kew was a place to ‘be home’ as in back home in Old China—a place to pass the time, to meet friends, to gossip, and now and again to focus on the stage” (50). For Choy, the Cantonese opera was so intimate and immediate that he “no longer felt separated from the stage” (54) and developed a sense of belonging to this cultural imagination initiated by the stage performances and the stories rendered and passed down to him by his mother. In his words, “the Cantonese opera at night bestowed upon me such a wealth of high drama, of myth, that I lacked for nothing in the ordinary world. [...] I wanted to become what I saw before me: the general, the warriors, and the frightened guards who led the way to prison” (52).

Jook Liang, the protagonist of Choy’s award-winning novel *The Jade Peony* (1995), transcends her reality, achieves her desire, and imagines her own identities with the cultural figures portrayed in Cantonese opera: “[W]earing Stepmother’s old dresses, her junk costume jewellery protruding from my tied-back hair, hung about with silk scarves, I mimicked the Chinese Opera heroines: the warrior-woman, the deserted wife, the helpless princess” (38). These play acts allow her to create a world where she “belonged, dressed perfectly, behaved beyond reproach, and was loved, always loved, and was not [...] *mo yung* [useless]” (40).

Cantonese opera provided Choy with the imagination and literary sources that enable the formation of his own transcultural identity as a renowned Chinese Canadian writer, and the transnational and intercultural projection of his literary figures. Similar examples can be found in the works of another well-known Chinese Canadian writer, Denise Chong, set in Vancouver’s Chinatown in the early twentieth century. The cultural identity of Chan Hing, the protagonist of Chong’s *The Concubine’s Children*, is largely shaped by the legends and traditions of the Cantonese opera that she experienced during her childhood. As a child, Hing got a season’s pass to watch the opera at one of Vancouver’s Chinatown’s two theatres. She “loved the world of the opera” and demonstrated her deep understanding and identification

with this culture:

She understood the symbolism of the costumes and makeup. The emperor wore yellow, honest men wore black and good persons wore red; faces painted red or purple were persons of strong moral character, while faces painted predominantly white were of bad character. She identified with making something out of nothing: a table was a table in one scene, in another it became a cave, a bed, even a mountain. [...] She identified with the masking of emotion, recognized fear in a trembling arm, weeping in a palm slowly raised in front of a face. In the dark, Hing's tears of laughter or sorrow ran freely. (Chong 130-31)

Chan Hing's early childhood immersion in Cantonese opera provides her with an understanding of her Chinese self. She obtains a glimpse of where she is coming from in terms of her culture, identity, history, value system, and tradition in preparing to develop her transcultural identity, embracing her Chinese past and her Canadian presence.

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1967-PRESENT: THE RISE OF TRANSCULTURAL IDENTITY AMONG CHINESE CANADIANS THROUGH CANTONESE OPERA

After the Second World War ended and the Exclusion Act was repealed, Cantonese opera activities were revived and the visiting troupes again spread out to Montreal, Toronto, and other major cities in Eastern Canada following their performances in Vancouver and Victoria. The increasing number of Chinese immigrants from Guangdong and Hong Kong settling in these cities not only created a market for these performances, but also provided opportunities for more performers to join the profession. The cultural identity of Chinese Canadians became more diverse in the 1960s, as civil wars and ideological conflicts in the context of the Cold War in China, coupled with the changing immigration policy in Canada that allowed family reunions in a multicultural and liberal environment, led more and more Chinese in Canada to realize that Canada was their home (Leong; Poy). Along with the integration of the Chinese diaspora community into Canadian society in terms of their national and cultural identities, Cantonese opera performances in Canada were transformed and adapted into the Canadian context in many ways. Cantonese opera becomes a performing art form that facilitates transcultural and intercultural dialogues among Chinese Canadians of different generations, and with other ethnic groups who appreciate this form of art.

In addition to the participation of local Chinese Canadians in the performances, Cantonese opera in Canada appears to be less bound by conventions than its forebear in China. For example, female and male performers appeared together on stage as early as 1915 in Canada, but this did not occur in mainland China until 1930. When the audience increasingly consists of non-Chinese, the repertoires have been

more movement-based, with a more dramatic plot so that non-Chinese-speaking audiences can follow the play more easily. According to William Lau, make-up demonstrations prior to the show and post-performance discussions help the audience become more informed (qtd. in X. Li 181).

Between the Gold Rush period and the 1960s, Cantonese opera was the dominant cultural production in Chinese Canadian communities, and was popular with many Chinese people in Canada who came from Guangdong or Hong Kong. Its familiar themes and atmosphere created a refuge and a home, alleviating homesickness and lifting the spirits of a bachelor and sojourning population:

For an immigrant population that consisted predominantly of adult males, Cantonese opera could not be more welcome as a hometown entertainment. [...] The indulgence in nostalgia and fantasy offered unspeakable pleasure, and so did the opportunity for socializing among peers. It was the pleasure of amnesia, to forget the immediate drudgery, alienation, and loneliness in a land of ghosts. (Ng 173)

Beside promoting feelings of home, belonging, and cultural identity, Cantonese opera provided an important social and economic space for the Chinese population who were discriminated against by the rest of Canadian society after the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway connecting the country, particularly during the exclusion era between 1923 and 1947. Cantonese opera performances were often used as fundraising venues for supporting fellow immigrants, providing disaster relief, and building schools, libraries, and hospitals in Chinatowns and in their hometowns. Marching flatbed floats featuring performers in vibrant Cantonese opera costumes were commonly seen in festivals and celebrations.

The revival of Cantonese opera activities in Canada in the 1980s helped to meet the needs of an increasing number of Chinese immigrants, particularly from Hong Kong, which became the major hub of Cantonese opera due to the political movement and cultural revolution in Guangdong (Canton) Province. In the late 1960s, Canadian immigration policy adopted a less discriminatory universal point system that favoured educated and professional immigrants, many of whom originated in Hong Kong. In the 1980s, the Immigrant Investor Program was introduced to encourage entrepreneurs, common among Hong Kongers, to invest in and immigrate to Canada. With these favourable policy changes and the uncertainty of Hong Kong transiting from a British colony to a Chinese Special Administrative Region, Canada attracted a large number of Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong. According to Statistics Canada's 2001 immigration reports, about 450,000 Chinese immigrants entered Canada, and more than half of them were from Hong Kong (Leong, "Cultural Identity" 175). The population of Chinese Canadians surpassed 1 million in 2001 and rose to 1.35 million in 2011 (Statistics Canada).

The influx of new immigrants from Hong Kong and nearby Cantonese areas provided talent and demand for a revival of Cantonese opera activities in Canada in the 1980s and 1990s. In Toronto alone, at least six active opera associations organized weekly meetings for their members and occasionally put on large-scale public

performances: the World's Mirror (Shi Jie Jing 世界鏡), the Ship Thoy Yen Chinese Benevolent Society (Xie Cui Yuen 涉趣園), the Chinese United Dramatic Society (Lian Qiao Ju Zhe 聯僑劇社), the Jin Hung Sing Music Club (Zhan Hong Sing Yin Yue Ju Zhe 振洪聲音樂劇社), the Cantonese Music Club (Yue Hai Yin Yue Zhe 粵海音樂社), and the Scarborough Senior Chinese Dramatic Association (Shi Jia Bao Ai Jian Xi Ju Zhe 士嘉堡愛健戲劇社) (S. Li; see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Cantonese opera performance in the 1970s, Toronto.

Source: Beatrice & Raymond Jai Collection,
Richard Charles Lee Canada-Hong Kong Library

Cantonese opera has become an important marker of cultural heritage and identity for younger generations of Chinese Canadians. In 2009, Cantonese opera won world recognition when it was enshrined in the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Chinese Canadian community has undertaken tremendous effort to preserve and transmit Cantonese opera as a performing art that promotes transcultural identity and cultural heritage and documents the history of Chinese Canadian cultural activities. According to a survey that I have conducted with my extensive Cantonese opera network, library reference tools, and online directories, there are over twenty Cantonese opera schools and associations in Toronto, such as the Starlight Chinese Opera Performing Centre, Multi Voices One Heart, the Soong Kam Wing Music and Arts Centre, and the Lau Wing Chuen

School of Chinese Opera. Many of these have organized major annual performances and recruited professionals and amateur students, including children and teenagers.

The creation of the Richard Charles Lee Canada-Hong Kong Library at the University of Toronto in 2008 provided an additional resource for documenting and presenting Cantonese opera for Canadian audiences. As the director of this library, I have developed the collection and organized activities on Cantonese opera in Toronto. I have reached out to the Chinese community in Toronto to gather playbills, newspapers, photos, anthologies of lyrics, recordings, and other archival materials. One of the highlights of the library is the Beatrice and Raymond Jai Collection, donated by the family of Beatrice Jai, who, along with her husband Raymond, played an important role in developing Cantonese opera in Toronto. The collection includes numerous photographs, documents, and audio recordings pertaining to Cantonese opera. The library is also in the process of gathering archival materials from a number of Chinese opera centres in Toronto, such as those mentioned above.

In addition to collecting resources for the study of Cantonese opera and documenting its transnational history, the library has also held seminars and performances, in partnership with community organizations, to illustrate various topics related to its heritage and cultural influence. In 2012, together with the Starlight Chinese Opera Performing Arts Centre, the library hosted an exhibition and performance demonstration, “Brilliance, Virtuosity, and Creativity on Stage: From the Golden Age of Cantonese Opera to the Contemporary Theatrical Arts in Hong Kong,” to showcase the central role of Hong Kong in the development of Cantonese opera since the 1960s and demonstrate its currency and influence on contemporary theatrical projects. It provided a context for the revival of Cantonese opera activities in Canada from the 1980s onward with the arrival of a large number of Hong Kong immigrants.

In 2016, in partnership with the Starlight Chinese Opera Performing Arts Centre and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, I organized a seminar and Cantonese opera performance, “Cantonese Opera: Development and Heritage” (see Figure 5). The event, conducted in English and tailored toward a mixed audience of Chinese- and non-Chinese-speaking Canadians, included examples of singing, basic acts, acrobatic feats, and live musical accompaniment performed by members of the Young Academy Cantonese Opera Troupe from Hong Kong and local talents from Toronto. These performances were followed by a discussion presented by Dr. Fredric Mao, a renowned theatre director and Founding Dean of School of Chinese Opera of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, and Dr. Xing Fan, a Chinese theatre professor at the University of Toronto. The event, combining visiting performing talents and academic scholars with local Chinese Canadians, appealed to a culturally diverse audience, with the seminar and discussion in English providing opportunities for the participants to share their transcultural heritage with non-Chinese-speaking Canadians.



Figure 5. Cantonese opera demonstration and seminar, 2016.
Source: Richard Charles Lee Canada-Hong Kong Library.

I have continued to organize Cantonese opera events to bolster the library's collection and to promote understanding of the transcultural influence of Cantonese opera in comparison with Western music and opera. In 2017, I invited Siu-leung Li from the School of Chinese Opera at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts in Hong Kong to deliver a seminar, "What Cantonese Opera Accompaniment Is Not: In Comparison with Classical Music." For instance, Cantonese opera accompaniment tends to be more flexible than its Western counterpart, which prefers to follow the composition more strictly; in Cantonese opera, the accompaniment can double the melody, imitate the singer, or form interludes. This English seminar was followed by another event in Cantonese on the same topic, delivered by the maestro Wing-chuen Lau, which illustrated the unique dynamics between singers and musicians in Cantonese Opera (see Figure 6). Demonstrations by Li's and Lau's students and professional performers attracted a large audience, with coverage from major Chinese



Figure 6. Cantonese opera music demonstration and seminar, 2017.

Source: Richard Charles Lee Canada-Hong Kong Library.

In 2018, I organized an interactive workshop to discuss the history of Chinese opera, focusing on gender roles in theatre. Sam Chan of the Chinese University of Hong Kong used relevant anecdotes to inspire the audience to contextualize the cultural phenomena and issues surrounding the form of theatre. Chan argued that Chinese opera is a constantly evolving product that influences contemporary social issues and acts as a reflection of Chinese society, whether within or outside China.

Later that year, I hosted a group of young scholars studying Cantonese opera in Canada, focusing on the Beatrice and Raymond Jai collection. Beatrice, a Cantonese opera performer, and Raymond, a music director, played significant roles in developing Cantonese opera activities in Toronto and Vancouver in the mid-twentieth century. In the capstone event of this project, “Stories, Struggles, and Songs: Cantonese Opera in Toronto,” the scholars presented their findings from archival material and interviews with members of Toronto’s Chinese opera community. The scholars noted that, thanks to this project, they understood their culture and their parents’ values and experience much better, in addition to developing a better understanding of the history of Chinese Canadians and Cantonese opera in Canada.

This event was well attended by students, researchers, and media people interested in this topic. For instance, Arlene Chan, daughter of Jean Lumb, who grew up in Toronto, recounted her memories of listening to Cantonese opera music after attending this event. She notes in her reflection:

Cantonese opera is in my genes. Whenever my mother put me and my two younger sisters down for our afternoon nap, she'd crank up the turntable and play an eclectic range of recordings. I listened to classical music, tunes from Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, and Cantonese opera. [...] My father, Doyle Lumb, arrived from China in the mid-1920s as Toronto's music clubs were being established. He worked long hours at a restaurant and spent his days off, learning to sing, act, and play instruments.

Chan's reflection illustrates another vivid example of the effects of Cantonese opera on the early identity formation and collective memory of Chinese Canadians.

I organized two more Cantonese opera events in 2019: a seminar, "Continuation of the 'Pear Garden'"; and a workshop, "Cantonese Opera Paichangxi and Paixi Tunes." These events introduced and analyzed the artistic and performance styles of a number of distinguished Cantonese opera performers who have significantly influenced Canadian opera styles. They also delved into the intricacies of improvisation, musical accompaniment, and lyrical composition techniques. These events were meant to provide conversations and opportunities for opera fans to interact and share their experiences and passions with the general public. They were well attended and received in the context of the library.

CONCLUSION

Organized for the Chinese diaspora community in Canada, Cantonese opera performances reinterpret and reinforce a transcultural identity in Chinese Canadian society. This article's discussion of the history and development of Cantonese opera in Canada illustrates the effect of this cultural phenomenon on the transcultural identity development of Chinese Canadians in relation to their personal identities, social space, and community dynamics. Cantonese opera performances not only entertain, but help retain and bridge the Chinese heritage and identity among Chinese Canadians across generations, facilitating and enabling local-born Chinese Canadians, as exemplified in the lives and works of Wayson Choy and Denise Chong, to register, recognize, and reconcile a cultural identity that is considered other to their Canadian upbringing. This acculturation, as implied in Miruse Hodza's discussion of transculturalism, allows the audience of Cantonese opera to register the other in themselves.

This examination of Cantonese opera in Canada draws attention to its contribution toward a multicultural, or better yet, a transcultural and intercultural, society in an ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse country such as Canada. The performances, seminars, and demonstrations discussed in this article not only relate to Chinese Canadians' identity formation and cultural heritage, but also help to re-create Chinese culture in an artistic, appealing, and comprehensible manner for Canadian society, enabling greater understanding of Cantonese, Chinese, and Canadian cultures. Having been transformed in new social contexts, these Cantonese opera events

encourage dialogues among Chinese Canadians and other Canadian communities, and these interactions and conversations put the ideals of multiculturalism, transculturalism, and interculturalism into action.

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