

Preservation of Chinese Heritage through Cantonese Opera in Canada

Jack Hang-tat Leong, PhD

14 February 2024

York University

Outline & introduction

1. Discuss the preservation and transformation of Chinese heritage
2. Demonstrate the struggles and dynamics of Chinese Canadian identity
3. Illustrate the manifestation of transcultural identity of Chinese Canadian communities
4. Symbolize the transcendence of borders, linguistics boundaries, and geographic distance.

Cantonese Opera

- Hometown entertainment that brings forth both individual and collective memory, identity and culture
- [A Gold Ingot \[一錠金\]](#)
- The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea [八仙過海]
- The Prime Minister of the Six Kingdoms [六國大封相]



Opera lyrics & musical tones

“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, 2017, p. 3).

1858-1922 – Gold Rush, Canadian Pacific Railroad and Head Tax



Source: Library and Archives Canada, PA-125990



Source: *Beyond the golden mountain : Chinese cultural traditions in Canada*

Part 1 - Segregated community and Cantonese Opera activities



Source: UBC Library



Source: Canadian Museum of Immigration

Cantonese opera in 1880s



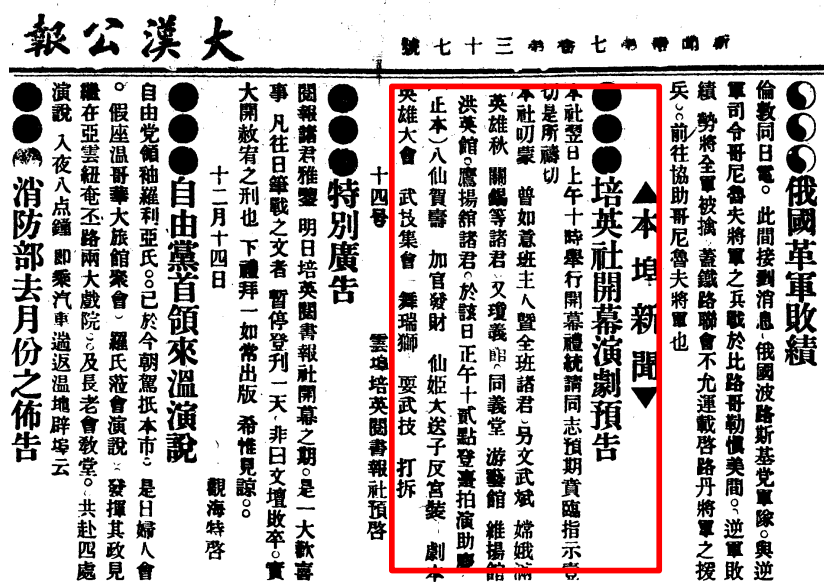
Source: City of Victoria Archives, 1959

- *The Daily Colonist*, August 4, 1885 - “The new Chinese Theatre situated at the back of Cormorant Street, will be opened tonight when special attractions will be offered.”

Cantonese opera activities in 1880s

November 4, 1882, *Daily Colonist*:
“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.”

The Chinese Times, 大漢公報, (1907-1992)



1917-12- 4 & 1987-07-29

Source: Simon Fraser University Library

Ching Won Music Society, 1940s

Source: Beatrice &
Raymond Jai
Collection, Richard
Charles Lee Canada-
Hong Kong Library,
University of Toronto
(RCL CHKL, UofT)



Earliest Cantonese Opera activities in Toronto

- April 27, 1916 - Chinese Times reported Guomin Zhong 國民鐘 Theatrical Association's plan to perform in Eastern cities of Canada.
- Shijie Jing 世界鏡 (The World's Mirror), formed in 1918 in Toronto.

▲▲國民鐘劇社啓事

嘗聞戲劇一道感人最深現身說法當爲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爲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爲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爲用酌古宜今行見元音發揚風氣丕變矣是非本社之任而孰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歐美之聲格格不入諒必以一睹此爲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埠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

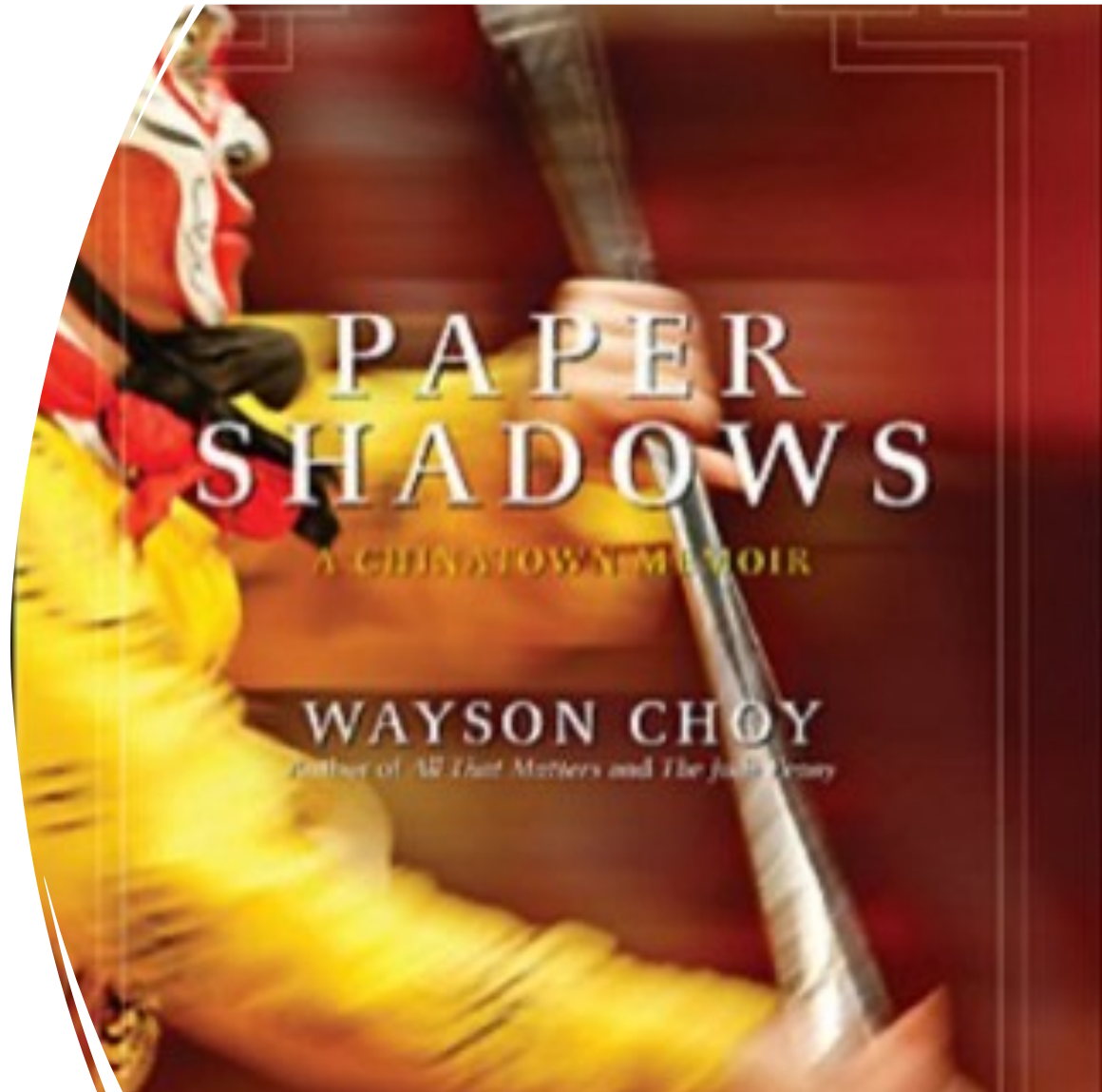
中華民國五年

四月

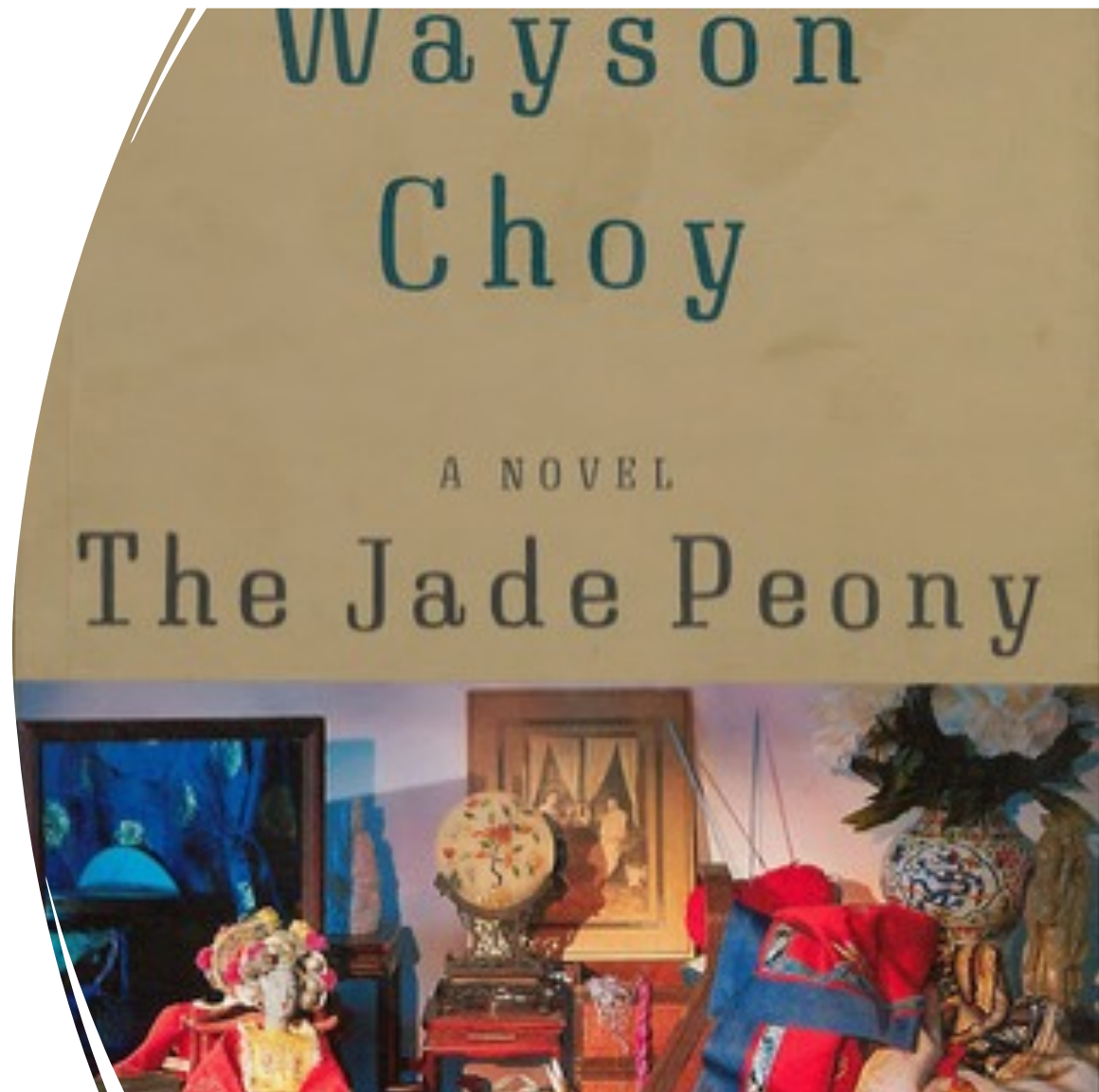
十八日

三廿五

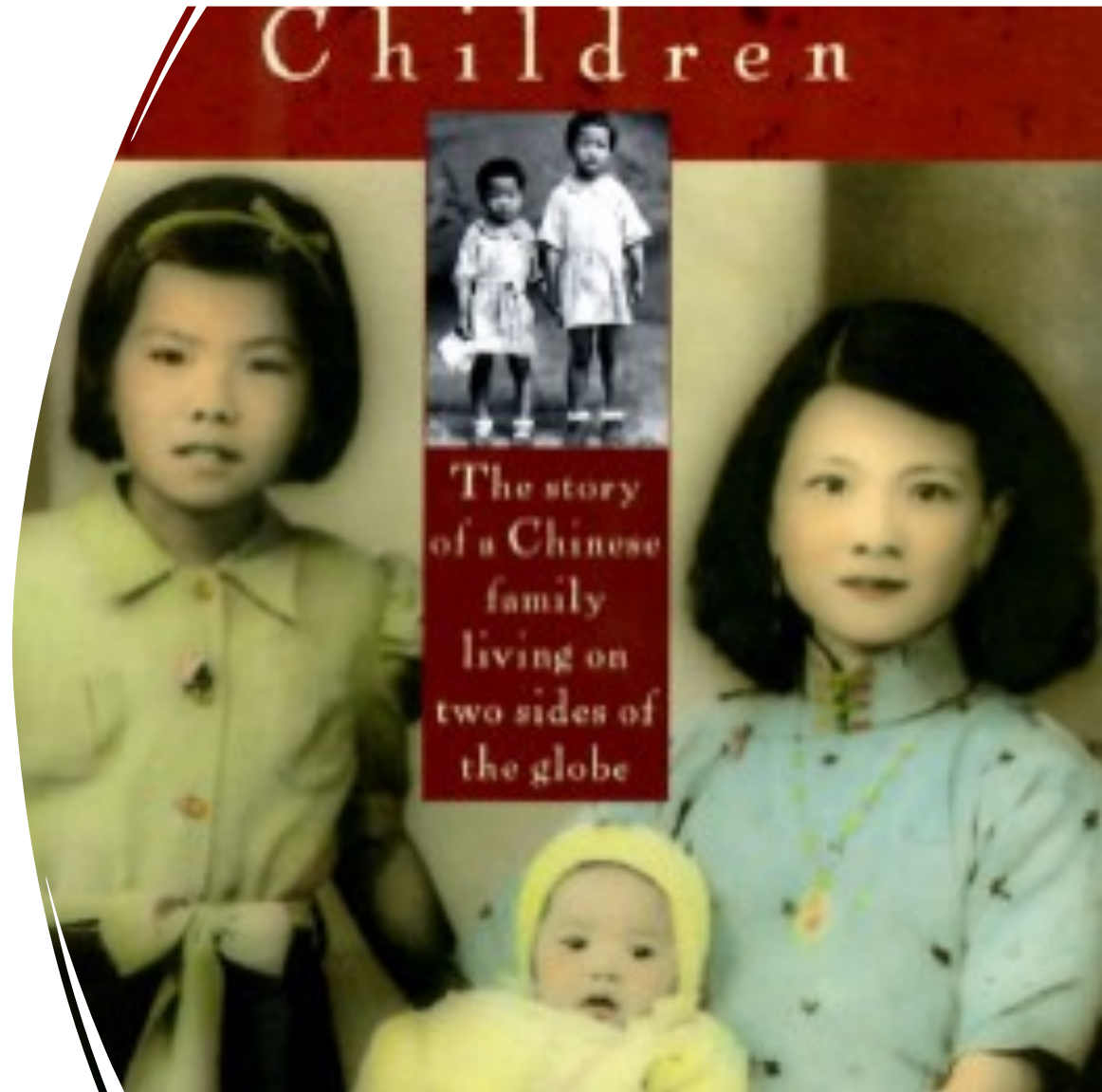
Cantonese opera in Chinatown stories and memoirs



Cantonese
opera in
Chinatown
stories and
memoirs



Cantonese opera in Chinatown stories and memoirs





Cantonese opera performance in the 1970s, Toronto

Source: Beatrice & Raymond Jai Collection – RCL CHKL, UofT



寶新聲戲曲演藝中心

STARLIGHT CHINESE OPERA PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE

Home

About Us

News

Events

Starlets

Videos

Contact Us



中文




Event / Performance Organizer

- Evening events entertainment piece



Community / Voluntary Work

- Non-profit performance such as senior home performance service
- [Workshop for the general public](#)
- Charity / donation event performance

 繁體中文

Multi-Voices One Heart: an annual trans-pacific Cantonese Opera Project.

Born from Canada's 150 as an innovative heritage project to bring together artists and community leaders across Toronto, Vancouver and Macau, Hong Kong.



Theme Song

[illegible]



萬千聲音
眾志一心



MVOH

2023 Workshops

WORKSHOP I (in English: 2-3pm): FREE

The Cultural Legacy of Cantonese & Italian Opera in Vancouver: A Conversation Open to All – a conversation based on a joint project and exhibition in 2017 bearing the same name. Dr. Angela Clarke, and Ms. Winnie L. Cheung will host a conversation to further examine the cultural legacy of Cantonese and Italian Opera and its impact on multicultural Canada. Some artifacts from both opera traditions will be on display.



Dr. Angela Clarke
Curator, Asian Cultural
Centre Museum



Ms. Winnie L. Cheung
Co-Founder of PCHC-Museum of
Migration Society and Co-Chair
of MVOH 2023

A online resource entitled "Common Voices: The Cultural Legacy of Cantonese & Italian Opera in Vancouver" created from the 2017 project is available for free downloading here: <https://bit.ly/1zwvnpw> (password: 0129-B846E3C6282176C75208FA933876C22466-02644648b711656848124265-CommonVoices.pdf)

WORKSHOP II (in Cantonese: 3:15pm -5pm): \$20 incl. reception

粵劇大師深度分享會——資深紅伶吳佩芬先生與粵劇曲藝大師劉永全先生的對話，由「萬千聲音眾志一心」創辦人姜張麗青女士主持，與知音者細訴如何透過聲腔、唱腔、鼓手等藝術元素演繹粵劇及劇中人物，並探討粵劇作為活化的文化藝術載體，如何在保留傳統的同時，去蕪存菁及靈活地創新。







MultiVoicesOneHeart





Search results

Current search: **Cantonese opera**

536 objects found



Trident Spear

Chinese:
Cantonese
c. 1890



Cantonese Opera Beard

Chinese:
Cantonese
1910-1940 ?



Cantonese Opera Shoes

Chinese:
Cantonese
c. 1910- 1925 ?



Cantonese Opera Robe

Gam Leuhn
Cheung
Chinese:
Cantonese



Cantonese Opera Robe

Gam Leuhn
Cheung
Chinese:
Cantonese



Cantonese Opera Robe

Gam Leuhn
Cheung
Chinese:
Cantonese



Tiger Mask

Chinese:
Cantonese
c.1910- 1920



Cantonese Opera Cape

Chinese:
Cantonese
1910 ?



Cantonese Opera Makeup...

Chinese:
Cantonese
1900- 1950



Cantonese Opera Headdress

Chinese
c. 1910- 1930



Cantonese Opera Robe

Gam Leuhn
Cheung; Gam ...
Chinese:
Cantonese



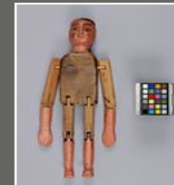
Cantonese Opera Robe

Gam Leuhn
Cheung
Chinese:
Cantonese



Cantonese Opera Robe

Gam Leuhn
Cheung
Chinese:
Cantonese



Cantonese Opera Doll

Chinese:
Cantonese
c. 1910- 1920



Tiger Costume

Chinese:
Cantonese
c.1910- 1920



Cantonese Opera Jacket

Chinese:
Cantonese
c. 1910

[Start again](#)

[Go back](#)

[Sort...](#)

[Refine search...](#)

[New search...](#)



Cantonese Opera in Canada: Cantonese Opera in Canada

This research guide provides lists of research materials on 1) general materials of Chinese opera, 2) Cantonese opera, 3) Cantonese opera in Canada and community resources, and 4) Cantonese opera in Canadian Literature

[Introduction](#)
[General Materials](#)
[Cantonese Opera](#)
[Cantonese Opera in Canada](#)
[Cantonese Opera in Canadian Literature](#)

Books



Painted Faces on the Prairies by Helen Kwan Yee Cheung

Call Number: ML 1713.8 E36 B78 2014

ISBN: 9781551953380

Publication Date: 2014-07-15

This exhibition catalogue provides context to the archival photographs and materials on Cantonese opera in Edmonton on display at the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library of the University of Alberta. These materials document close to 100 years of Cantonese opera activities in Edmonton within the changing dynamics of the Chinese community. They portray "a story of life experiences on the Prairies by highlighting the inextricable relationship between Cantonese opera and the Edmonton Chinese community as this cultural practice moves deftly through historical periods between 1890 and 2009" (xvi).



Chinatown Opera Theater in North America by Nancy Yunhwa Rao

Call Number: ML 1751 C5 R36 2017

ISBN: 9780252082030

Publication Date: 2017-01-11

One of the most acclaimed monographs dedicated to Cantonese opera in North America, this book narrates the history of Chinese theaters in North America during the 1920s, a golden age for this performing art. It offers historical contexts, discusses the practice of Cantonese opera, illustrates the Pacific Northwest connection, including Canada, introduces the history of a homegrown theater and traces the spread of theaters on the transnational network, as well as the transnational operation itself. It concludes with a reflection on Chinatown opera theaters' impact on the local community and other aspects of American music.

- Cantonese opera demonstration & seminar



- Cantonese opera demonstration & seminar



- Cantonese opera music demonstration & seminar





Conclusion

- 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, to register, recognize, and reconcile a cultural identity that is considered other to their Canadian upbringing.

Thank you

htleong@yorku.ca