



Performing Chineseness

The Lion Dance in Newfoundland

This article attempts to explore how individuals of Chinese descent maintain, negotiate, and re-create their multiple and often competing ethnicity of being “Chinese” through the Chinese lion dance as a cultural performance in the multicultural context of Newfoundland, Canada. My findings suggest that individuals of Chinese descent in Newfoundland, due to their regional, generational, and other categorical differences, perceive of the role of lion dance as a cultural marker in various ways, so that the cultural performance often serves as an open and multivocal forum for the discussion of ethnicity. During this intensive negotiation, a new diasporic identity and culture emerge.

KEYWORDS: lion dance—cultural performance—Chinese diaspora—ethnicity

THE LION DANCE is a popular Chinese drama-like folk dance that often involves two players, one positioned in front as the lion's head and the other in the back as its body. Wearing a stylized lion-like costume, two performers move like a lion by following rhythmic music with a changeable melody to the accompaniment of some Chinese instruments, such as a drum, gongs, and cymbals. Overseas, the lion dance is brought along by Chinese immigrants to their new settlements, where the tradition is kept, performed, reshaped, or even rejected.

Newfoundland and Labrador, the easternmost province of Canada, is one of those places where lion dancing occurs at the juncture of the social and the performative. With less than 2000 members, the Chinese community of Newfoundland and Labrador represents the province's largest non-aboriginal visible minority¹ (LI 2014). The Chinese have had a commercial presence since 1895, but their cultural impact has been less visible. According to the findings of my fieldwork (2009–2015), the local lion dance is a key aspect of Chinese Newfoundlanders' multiple and often competing constructions of identity.

This article is an ethnographic examination of Chinese lion dancing, which illustrates cultural processes of retention, adaptation, and invention within Newfoundland's Chinese community. In this article, I explore how the performative practices of lion dancers and the perceptions of audience members of Chinese descent conceptualize the ideas of historical authenticity (recovering the details of the original/traditional performance of specific historical periods) and personal authenticity (presenting performers' own internal feelings and understanding when performing), and reflect their various and sometimes competing understandings of their cultural identities, which are emergent in the various sociocultural occasions when the lion dance is performed. In particular, I adopt Andriy Nahachewsky's concept of "New Ethnicity," which refers to "later generational persons and groups who consciously choose to claim this ethnicity and both privately and publicly incorporate ethnically defined cultural practices" (NAHACHEWSKY 2002, 177), to look at generational differences in understanding how the lion dance shapes later generations' various senses of Chineseness.

In Newfoundland, Chinese diasporic identity and culture are constructed, presented, negotiated, and renegotiated through multiple folkloric practices, such as lion dancing, in various sociocultural circumstances and through the multivocal interpretations of individual participants. In many ways, the lion dance serves as

an open forum for individuals of Chinese descent to strengthen or challenge their preset esoterically and/or exoterically defined notion of being Chinese and the “authentic” Chinese culture, and to develop their own version of Chineseness. Due to its role as a base for negotiating and (re)constructing identities of individuals of Chinese descent, the lion dance, even if it is sometimes not accepted as a cultural marker by some individuals, becomes an inseparable part of individual perceptions of diasporic Chineseness in Newfoundland. In this sense, Newfoundland’s Chinese community is woven together through various webs through which individuals relate themselves to the lion dancing, which is neither simply remote (Chinese) nor vernacular (Canadian), but a new form of cultural performance both in between and beyond. The Newfoundland case echoes Juwen Zhang’s observation of the emergent and creolized Chinese diasporic identity and culture, which cannot be seen “as a simple combination of the group’s home country culture and so-called American culture,” but develops “its own tradition and cultural traits, which, in turn, are expressed through new markers to reinforce the group’s new identity” (ZHANG 2015, 468).

LION DANCE AND CHINESE DIASPORIC IDENTITY

The lion dance is frequently the most explicit and important marker of Chinese culture in overseas (southern) Chinese communities (FELTHAM 2009). Because of its close association with Chinese festivals and other sociocultural events, it has not often been an independent research focus. For example, an early discussion of Chinese lion dance appears in William HOY’s (1948) article on native festivals of the California Chinese, in which the lion dance is considered as “an integral part of the New Year’s festivities.” It has only been since the 1980s that researchers began to consider this traditional performance more seriously.

Some researchers have explored the history of the lion dance and traced its origin to either the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) (LIU 1981) or Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) (MATUSKY and TAN 2004) through the Silk Road from Middle Eastern countries such as Sasanian Persia (FELTHAM 2007, 2010). In addition to its history, Wan-Yu LIU (1981) and William C. HU (1995) attempt to probe other technical and cultural aspects of the lion dance overseas as it is performed in China, such as the differences between the northern and southern styles, costumes, moving steps, and performing skills.

In terms of the transnational transmission of the lion dance, some scholars look at lion dances performed in new societies where Chinese immigrants settled as a direct cultural transplantation without significant changes, especially the performances in Chinese enclaves in Southeast Asia and in major North American cities (LIU 1981; HOE 1984). The intact transmission of performance indicates a strong cultural attachment of Chinese immigrants to their homeland. Therefore, in some countries (for example, Malaysia and Indonesia), when pro-assimilationist policies were predominant, lion dance, symbolizing “the protection of Chinese culture and identity,” was thought to be a cultural threat to the national identity (TAN 2007, 66). The cultural importance of the lion dance also explains why, when bans

against Chinese culture were removed, “the lion dance in particular was selected for revival” (TAN 2007, 66).

Other researchers highlight distinctive vernacular elements that are added to the traditional lion dance when it is performed in overseas Chinese communities. For example, based on her studies on lion dancing in New York City, Madeline Anita Slovenz-Low argues that the lion dance is a “truly popular contemporary Cantonese American performance expression that is practiced by Chinese immigrants and fully acculturated American-born Chinese” instead of “an exotic remnant from China’s feudalistic past” (SLOVENZ-LOW 1994, xiii).

Innovations and changes in the traditional Chinese lion dance in overseas Chinese communities are visible in trans-generational transmission processes. In some communities, the lion dance has been widely used as an effective approach to educate younger, mostly local-born people of Chinese descent about Chinese traditions and provide them an opportunity to experience Chinese culture in a multicultural setting (JOHNSON 2005). In a culturally diverse society, second- or later-generation Chinese dancers have various motivations. Writing of her lion dance workshops in Dallas, Texas, Mei-Hsiu Chan feels that her students are less motivated to learn the lion dance than using digital media (CHAN 2001). Even though they are interested in the dance, Feltham also finds that, “Many younger students are more concerned with the sports/martial arts aspects of lion dancing, than with cultural modes and traditional meanings” (FELTHAM 2009, 128). Therefore, Henry Johnson reminds us “how host country context can help shape cultural identity, especially a rediscovery of homeland culture” (JOHNSON 2005, 185).

The lion dance as a cultural marker of Chinese ethnicity reflects the idea of “cultural performance,” coined by Milton Singer. As Singer writes, cultural performances are “taken as the most concrete observable units of the cultural structure” of outsiders and cultural insiders (SINGER 1959, xiii). Richard Bauman further explains that cultural performances “are cultural forms about culture, social forms about society, in which the central meanings and values of a group are embodied, acted out, and laid open to examination and interpretation in symbolic form, both by members of that group and by the ethnographer” (BAUMAN 1986, 133).

In addition, Victor Turner explores the reflective and reflexive aspects of cultural performances and looks at how cultural meanings are created and transmitted. As reflective, Turner argues that all senses, including vision, taste, smell, and touch, are employed in cultural performances to communicate the content of culture (TURNER 1981, 158). Turner explains reflexivity as what “a sociocultural group turns, bends, reflects back on itself upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other components that make up their public selves”; therefore, cultural performances function reflexively as “active agencies of change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting “designs for living” (TURNER 1988, 24).

Turner’s theory of reflexivity indicates that cultural performances are capable of embracing changes, new creations, and even conflicting perceptions of cultural meanings. Building on Turner’s insights as well as other scholars’ ideas in the

same vein (CONQUERGOOD 1989; GUSS 2000; HOLLING and CALAFELL 2007), this article explores how lion dancing participants (both dancers and audience) in Newfoundland present their multiple viewpoints of being Chinese through performances and interpretations.

HISTORICAL AUTHENTICITY: CULTURAL ROOTS AND EARLY LION DANCERS

The Pearl River Delta in China's Canton Province was the hometown of a majority of early Chinese settlers in Newfoundland.² It is also the birthplace of southern Chinese martial arts and the Cantonese lion dance.³ Outside of Canton, the lion dance, as a traditional and ceremonial folk dance, is also popular in Hong Kong and some overseas communities with a large Cantonese population. Feltham notes that lion dance is "at the heart of the traditional Cantonese speaking villages of Southern China" (FELTHAM 2009, 117). Feltham's observation is strongly supported by my interviewees. Kim Hong, who came to Newfoundland in 1950 from Toisan, Canton, observed the admiration of lion dancing in southern China before his arrival in Canada:

Many Chinese who immigrated here [Newfoundland] were from the southern part of China, and they came from small towns or villages, where the lion dance was a popular event all year round. There were lessons given in those villages to teach people the lion dance and kung fu. (Kim Hong, personal interview, 18 April 2011)

Chan Chau Tam, a Hong Kong immigrant who arrived in Newfoundland in 1972, and Joseph Mo, a Cantonese newcomer who came in 2007, also report the popularity of lion dancing in the same region of southern China (Chan Chau Tam, personal interview, 26 February 2012; Joseph Mo, personal interview, 8 July 2013).

After the foundation of the Chinese Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (CANL) in 1976, the southern lion dance was immediately introduced to the community upon the request of many Cantonese-speaking members (Kim Hong, personal interview, 18 April 2011). The first lion puppet and corresponding musical instruments were bought in Hong Kong. The drum, gong, and cymbals currently used in lion dancing are still the same set of instruments bought in the 1970s. The whole set of equipment arrived in Newfoundland in May 1977 and it was first displayed in public at the post-Flower Service garden party in August of the same year (FIGURES 1 and 2).⁴

The first lion costume in Newfoundland was a rainbow lion with a variety of colors (FIGURE 3). Many scholars associate the color difference of lion costumes with the warriors in a popular Chinese historical novel named *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, which was first printed in the sixteenth century (CHAN 2001; HOE 1984; MATUSKY and TAN 2004; SLOVENZ-LOW 1994). For instance, MATUSKY and TAN explain the symbolism of the costumes as follows:



FIGURE 1: Lion Puppet at the 1977 CANL Garden Party at the Beaconsfield High School's gym (Kim Hong holding megaphone). Courtesy of Kim Hong.



FIGURE 2: Instruments at the 1977 CANL Garden Party at the Beaconsfield High School's play ground (Ming Hong—Drum, Yin Hai Gin—Gong, Jim Mah—Cymbals). Courtesy of Kim Hong.

A head colored yellow and black with a white beard depicts Liu Bei, who is remembered as a kind and generous person, while a head colored red and black with a black beard depicts Guan Ti who is known for his honesty. The black and white lion head with a black beard is associated with Zhang Fei, a general who is famous because of his braveness, and a multi-colored lion head with a white beard is associated with Zhao Zi Lung, famous for his cleverness and wisdom. (MATUSKY and TAN 2004, 152–53)

It seems that the first lion puppet in Newfoundland represents the image of Zhao Zi Lung. To decode the symbolism of the rainbow costume, I also consulted a Toronto lion dancing master, Lat Yip, who challenged the above system and



FIGURE 3: The CANL's rainbow lion. Courtesy of Kim Hong.

considered the connections between historical characters and the colors of lion costumes as flexible and sometimes arbitrary (Lat Yip, personal interview, 20 September 2012). In my fieldwork, I realized that many lion dancers have little knowledge of the symbolism of the lions.

The basic frame of the lion's head was made of bamboo and the surface was made of materials like cloth, satin, and paper-mache. The lion's head was round-shaped with a big mouth and big eyes. In terms of the shape, traditionally there are two major types of mask in Cantonese lions: Buddha mountain style and crane mountain style. The Buddha mountain style features "its round-shaped head, big mouth, big eyes and pointed horn root"; the crane mountain style is characterized by "its oval-shaped head, small mouth, long eyes and fat-rounded horn root" (LIU 1981, 61). My observations indicate that Newfoundland's lion masks can be categorized as the Buddha mountain style. The lion's body looked like a satin cloak with the same patterned design as the head in color and texture. In addition to the lion puppet, a mask of a teaser was also purchased, which is a human character with a big Buddha head, used in lion dancing to "play" with the lion.⁵ The mask was an oversized roundish paper-mache head that was able to completely cover the dancer's head. It was designed as a smiley obese face with a big nose, large black eyes, and blue hair (FIGURE 4).

The introduction of the lion dance is intended to "show people, especially those who were born and raised here, what Chinese culture is about" (Kim Hong, personal interview, 18 April 2011). The availability of costumes and accompanying musical instruments called for experienced dancers and musicians to perform. In the 1970s, dancers were mostly involved in the restaurant business, such as David Chiu and Chung Lem, with a few exceptions such as Daniel Wong (engineer) and Jim Mah (student). Some of these dancers were entrenched in Cantonese tradition and had opportunities to become familiar with the cultural meanings of the lion dance. For example, Daniel Wong is the fifth-generation direct disciple of Wong Fei Hung, the most famous grand master of Chinese kung fu. Chung Lem learned



FIGURE 4: The Big Head Buddha (left). Courtesy of Kim Hong.

his kung fu in Hong Kong in his earlier years. However, other performers who were not professionally trained, such as Chan Chau Tam, had limited knowledge of the performance.

Daniel Wong says, the lion dance in Canton is not only a set of choreographic movements, but it is also a form of art, highlighting some basic principles in relation to the traditional Cantonese society (Daniel Wong, personal interview, 29 August 2013). Joseph Mo agrees:

I learned that things like respect, intelligence, and loyalty to your village and neighborhood are the core of lion dance....It tells us the boundaries between “us” and “others,” it requires people to follow social order, and it encourages us to improve ourselves. That is the culture of lion dancing in my hometown. (Joseph Mo, personal interview, 8 July 2013)

Lion dancing is also a form of storytelling because all the movements are based on the story of a lion’s daily life:

At first, the lion in the story wakes up but it does not just jump up. Just like human beings, it opens its eyes slowly, yawns, rubs its eyes, and touches its hair and ears....After the lion gets up, it starts to get ready to go out of its cave for food. But it is always cautious, so it checks if any traps or other kinds of dangers are around its cave. When it feels safe, it begins to seek food. On its way, it might pass bridges or go through some other challenging places so it has to figure out how to overcome those difficulties. When it sees food, again, it has to find out if there are any traps or dangers, so it checks carefully to make sure that everything is okay. Then it starts to eat its food. When it finishes, it might burp and touch its belly. Then, it might feel tired and go back to sleep again. In some cases, there is a teaser or Buddha involved in the dance. The story is that the food is owned by a person [mostly a Buddha] but is stolen by the lion. Therefore, the Buddha has to chase the lion to get his food back. When he finds that the food has been eaten up by the lion, he sets various difficult tasks as revenge. As you

can see, the whole dance is a terrific story. (Daniel Wong, personal interview, 29 August 2013)

During the dance, movements are all guided by the music, which is provided by three percussion instruments: a drum, cymbals, and gongs. Among them, Daniel Wong looks at “drumming” as “the spirit of the dance” (ibid.). In my interview with Wong, he used his desk as a mock drum to explain the drum beats:

In the lion dance, there is only one drum. All parts of the drum—the drumhead, the edges of the drum, and even the drumsticks—are used to make melodic and tonal changes. We have some basic beats in lion dancing. They are three-star beat, five-star beat, and seven-star beat⁶....The three-star beat is basically two beats, but the first beat is divided evenly into two shorter beats. The five-star beat is three beats, but the first two beats are divided evenly into four shorter beats, and the seven-star beat is four beats, but the first three beats are all divided evenly into six shorter beats. (ibid.)

Wong continues:

To match these beats, there are three basic steps called three-star step, five-star step, and seven-star step. Three-star steps are used when the lion is checking stuff, waking up, and doing things around the original spot it stands. Seven-star steps are used when the lion is doing a long walk. Five-star steps are the most commonly used in lion dancing, and they are used in all other occasions. Of course, there are more variations other than these three steps, but all other steps are based on these three basics. (ibid.)

Wong comments, “If you don’t know all these basics, you can’t do the lion dance and you can’t understand it” (ibid.).

To improve dancers’ skills and enhance their understanding of the culture, in February 1984 Wong drew on his personal connections and invited Luk Gan Wing, who was a third-generation direct disciple of Wong Fei Hung and then lived in Toronto, to come to Newfoundland to train local dancers (FIGURE 5). According to Wong, thirty to forty people attended the series of workshops and a majority of them were Cantonese-speaking restaurant workers. In this two-week workshop, as Wong says,

He [Luk] taught everything about lion dance starting from basic martial arts drills to basic lion dance steps and the meaning of each step. He also tried to explain the culture of lion dancing as much as possible in this series of intensive workshops. He trained different people in different roles based on their talents. Some people were trained in drumming and some others were learning how to dance. (ibid.)

Many participants noticed the substantial improvement of their skills after the intensive training. Chan Chau Tam comments,

Luk was a terrific teacher and a lot of misunderstandings about the lion dance in my mind were completely corrected. I was learning drumming with him. In Hong Kong, I had a lot of opportunities to listen to the beats but couldn’t



FIGURE 5: The group photo of Luk's workshop in 1984. Courtesy of Chan Chau Tam.

understand. He explained to me and taught me the real drumming techniques. (Chan Chau Tam, personal interview, 26 February 2012)

Wong adds,

He taught us the right way of performing the traditional Chinese lion dance. After the workshops, our performance was much better than earlier. We could do the whole set of the dance including waking up the lion, lion's jumps, walking through bridges, picking/eating greens, and stacking at the height of three times as tall as a person. We can play more than an hour without any breaks. (Daniel Wong, personal interview, 29 August 2013)

"The right way" in Wong's words refers to the way that people who are affiliated with Wong Fei Hung's kung fu school in Cantonese-speaking areas learn and perform the lion dance, which has been transmitted for generations without major changes. However, Wong's school is only one of many kung fu styles in southern China. Luk's visit was crucial to Newfoundland's Chinese lion dancing group, which therefore was able to claim their lineage in the lion dancing tradition. In that tradition, lineage "is important in martial arts, where every performance refers back to one's teacher" (SLOVENZ-LOW 1994, xi). While in Newfoundland, this martial arts tradition is not strictly carried on and the absence of this conservative restriction encourages any individual interested in the lion dance to practice and perform, whereas in other places, people's affiliations often determine if they are allowed to perform the lion dance.

In addition to lineage, individually, many people reconnected to the Cantonese culture and traditions and some of them refreshed their earlier memories of the old world's heritage by attending Luk's workshop. Because of the workshop, lion dancing as a living tradition returned to their community, Daniel Wong says:

I was born in the culture of the lion dance and I was so happy to see that the association brought *Sifu* [Master] Luk to Newfoundland. He was the one who made me feel that I had never left the culture. (Daniel Wong, personal interview, 29 August 2013)

More importantly, Luk's workshop attempted to recover every performative detail and recreate the lost culture behind the performance including the tradition of kung fu linkage; as a result, it allowed Chinese lion dance in Newfoundland to regain some of its "historical authenticity." The quest of "historical authenticity," which is thought to be substantial to various kinds of performances, echoes the debate in the Early Music Revival movement, in which performers are encouraged to restore the original performances of masters like Bach and others in specific periods on period instruments, which are instruments corresponding to the periods that those pieces of music were first played (HASKELL 1988; KENYON 1988). Likewise, Luk's workshop also attempted to lead the lion dancing in Newfoundland to return to the original Wong Fei Hung style.

Daniel Wong observes that after Luk's workshop, the period from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s was the peak time of lion dancing in Newfoundland. He says,

At that time, all people [Cantonese-speaking individuals] wanted to participate in lion dancing, especially those people who were working in Chinese restaurants. Many of them were in their 30s or early 40s. It was quite easy to get thirty to forty people to do regular practice. (ibid.)

In addition to those names mentioned earlier, regular lion dancers also included "Sing Lang Au, Anthony Tam, Wing Yuen Au, Jim Lam, Wing Hui Hong, Rennies So, and many others" (Kim Hong, personal interview, 18 April 2011). It seems that Luk's visit not only reconnected Chinese individuals to their homeland by the restoration of "historical authenticity" in lion dancing, but also reconnected them as a culturally united Chinese community, which was loosely bound by shared ethnicity in earlier days.

PERSONAL AUTHENTICITY: NEW-GENERATION LION DANCERS

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, some dancers moved out of St. John's to smaller communities to open businesses or to bigger metropolitan areas after their retirement. For example, Chung Lem relocated to Harbour Grace (a community in Eastern Newfoundland), Sing Lang Au and Wing Yuen Au moved to Toronto, and Jim Mah left for Ottawa. In addition to relocation, many active lion dancers such as David Chiu and Rennies So, who were getting into their 50s, were reluctant to take part in the actual performance.

These changes called for a new generation of lion dancers to take over the tradition and keep it going. Peter Wong recalls,

Before us, there were also twin sisters, Ni Chu-Chen and Ling Chu-Chen, and their brother Ping performing lion dance and they were taught by Jim Mah. They carried on performing through 8 or 10 years....After their graduation from here, they all left for Toronto. (Peter Wong, personal interview, 7 April 2011)

The current leader of the CANL lion dancing team, Justin So, was also trained by Jim Mah (Justin So, personal interview, 3 February 2014). However, without professional lion dancing masters, the training of the younger dancers was slow and limited.

In 2006, upon the request of some local Chinese in Newfoundland and with funding from Canadian Heritage to celebrate the Canadian Government's apology to Chinese head tax and the CANL's thirtieth anniversary, Lat Yip, a Cantonese-speaking Vietnamese Chinese, was invited by then CANL president Betty Wong to Newfoundland from Toronto. For the workshop, two new lions were purchased: one of them was flaming red and the other golden yellow (FIGURE 6). Different from the older lions owned by the association, "these two lions have tails and pants which come with the lions' heads, matching the patterns of the other parts of the costumes in the same fabric and design to symbolize lions' legs" (Daniel Wong, personal interview, 29 August 2013). In traditional Cantonese lion dancing, the players' pants were either plain martial arts pants or gym pants (*ibid.*). The differences in the older and newer costumes somewhat reflect the generational differences in lion dancing.

Yip's one-week workshop was attended by nine people, who were trained two hours per day (FIGURE 7) (Peter Wong, personal interview, 7 April 2011). After Yip's workshop the current lion dance group formed with fourteen regular dancers under the leadership of Justin So (FIGURE 8). Different from the older-generation lion dancers, who were mostly first-generation Cantonese, members of this new lion dance team are from more diverse cultural backgrounds. A majority of them, such as Peter Wong, Teresa Wong, Joshua Lau, Gabriel Lau, Justin So, Matthew So, Joshua Wong, and Catherine Shek, are still from Cantonese-speaking families. Among them, Joshua Wong was born and raised in Hong Kong, and Catherine



FIGURE 6: Lions at the 2008 CANL Family Fun Day, Gower Street United Church, St. John's. Courtesy of Alick Tsui.



FIGURE 7: The workshop of Lat Yip. Courtesy of Lat Yip.



FIGURE 8: Some Members of the CANL Lion Dance Troupe at 2011's CANL Family Fun Day, Gower Street United Church, St. John's (left to right: William Ping Jr., Matthew So, Teresa Wong, Justin So, Jerry Xie, Andrew Leung, Joshua Lau, and Gabriel Lau). Courtesy of Alick Tsui.

Shek is a third-generation Chinese born in Calgary, Alberta. Some members have strong associations with non-Cantonese Mainland China. Jerry Xie was born to a northern Chinese couple and Emma Cole was born in western China but adopted by the Newfoundland Cole family. Some were born and raised in intermarriage families between individuals of Chinese descent and British Newfoundlanders, such as Andrew Leung, William Ping Jr., and Cerith Wong. In addition, Tzu-Hao

Hsu was born in Taiwan but raised in Newfoundland. All the current members of this team are fully acculturated into local culture and, except Joshua Wong, have had little exposure to the Cantonese version of Chinese culture, even though many of them have Cantonese parents. They come together under a united identity of “second-/later-generation Chinese in Newfoundland.” Sometimes people with “new ethnicity” confront difficulties as they try to balance loyalty to their ancestral heritage and to the mainstream values. Therefore, because participants are drawn to the lion dance for diverse reasons, it may be misleading to emphasize the second- or later-generation Chinese dancers’ motivation to reconnect with their heritage. People in the lion dance group actually have different perceptions and visions of their involvement in the performance.

Justin So has participated in the lion dance group for a long time, since he was eight years old, and is a very self-motivated lion dancer (Justin So, personal interview, 3 February 2014). He takes on much of the responsibility for locating educational materials from various sources, encouraging members to share their own information and dancing experience, and organizing regular practices and pre-event rehearsals. So says, “I feel responsible to educate other people about my culture” (Justin So, personal interview, 3 February 2014).

Nevertheless, other dancers in the group do not usually attempt to research aspects of either the lion dance performance or its history. Jerry Xie, whose parents had no cultural attachment to Cantonese lion dance before their immigration, commented that “I joined the lion dance when I was younger because I thought it was going to be really fun, which it still is, and because of how amazing a lion dance looked” (Jerry Xie, personal interview, 7 September 2012). A secondary consideration was “the history behind it” (*ibid.*). Like Xie, most members do not share So’s deep commitment to exploring the lion dance’s historical and cultural meanings. Peter Wong was recruited by the CANL executives to the lion dancing team because of the low enrolment of Lat Yip’s workshop (Peter Wong, personal interview, 7 April 2011). Because of his lesser interest in the cultural part of lion dance, Wong admits,

I am one of the type who reads technical books and manuals, but those fictions don’t really interest me. I am not really motivated to read those cultural things. They are low on the list. (*ibid.*)

William Ping Jr. joined the team because he was invited by some members (Peter Wong) in the lion dancing group when he was watching the performance at an international show, and was encouraged by his parents to maintain at least some aspects of his Chinese heritage (Violet Ryan-Ping and William Ping Jr., personal interview, 16 April 2011).

Partially because of the lesser interest of members in the cultural part of lion dancing, the improvement of skills is often the main focus of the members in their occasional practice or pre-performance rehearsals. Joshua Lau says, “when we practice we don’t usually talk about the culture unless someone asks. It’s more about different routines for different occasions. That’s about it” (Joshua Lau, personal interview, 6 October 2012). In many cases, the understanding of culture in lion dance performing is more optional than “critical” because, like other activi-

ties, the lion dance is only a recreational hobby, which “everybody can pick up” (Justin So, personal interview, 3 February 2014).

Sometimes, practice and rehearsal time is often too tight for the experienced members to introduce the cultural aspects of lion dance to others. Violet Ryan-Ping comments,

These guys...don't really have too much practice. If they have a performance within the next week, they would get together this Friday and go over the routine again. They don't really have time because many of them are working full-time. If they have time, they will concentrate on how to improve. They don't care about culture in that case. (Violet Ryan-Ping and William Ping Jr., personal interview, 16 April 2011)

In this sense, on the one hand, when performing the lion dance “the youth and the group” are given “a sense of cultural identity, that this is something unique to the Chinese culture and this is part of who they are” (Tzu-Hao Hsu, personal interview, 29 January 2012). As Joshua Lau says, “You would learn a little bit about your culture. I mean I suppose it's part of my roots because I grew up Chinese” (Joshua Lau, personal interview, 6 October 2012). On the other hand, they may also experience a lack of knowledge of their own ancestral culture, which they—especially those Cantonese descendants—are told is part of them.

Because the lion dance is still foreign and exotic to many dancers who have little exposure to Cantonese culture, some strategies are commonly used in the learning process, which is different from the traditional way of training based on the understanding of the culture. In some cases, in order to simplify the drumming for the lion dance, beating is divided into smaller units. For example, in a lion dance performance for CANL's 2013 Chinese New Year celebration (FIGURE 9), the drumming beats were broken down into a sequence of the following components by Justin So (TABLE 1). Corresponding to the standardized musical playing, the dance movements are also choreographed into “separate” figures.



FIGURE 9: Lion dancing at the 2013 CANL Chinese New Year Celebration.
Courtesy of Violet Ryan-Ping.

TABLE I: CANL Lion Dance Routine (17 January 2013)

Figure		Beat
Silver Lion 1	Red/Gold Lion 2	
Eye Dotting	Waiting side room	No drumming
Sleeping Lion, waking up – Flop down, snoring – Scratch ear, Flop down – Scratch eye, fall to side, kicking – Lick leg and get up	Waiting side room	Rapid rim shots – Scratches/licks (follow lion)
<i>Hai ci</i>	Enter room Run in with <i>Hai ci</i> finish	<i>Hai ci</i> beat
Running bow	Running bow	Running bow beat (x3) (Drum roll, drumstick beat, finishing beat on last bow)
Stationary cross steps	Stalking walks to center	Waiting beat
Notice other lion – Side hops with crouch	Standing side to stage area	Rapid gong beat
Greeting lions walk (half)	Greeting lions walk (half)	Greeting beat
Jump forward	Raise head and step to side with toe flick	Skin-rim drum roll to crash
Circle other lion – Quick turn to stance	Circle other lion – Quick turn to stance	Skin-rim drum roll to crash
Roll or skip to side – End in low stance	Head up, large jump on the spot	Skin-rim drum roll to crash
Greeting lions	Greeting lions	Greeting beat
Circle other lion, walk to crowd	Circle other lion, walk to crowd	High drum to walk
Walk and greetings (x3) – Rub – Lick – Eyes and ears	Walk and greetings (x3) – Rub – Lick – Eyes and ears	Walking beat and bowing beat
Smelling greens	Smelling greens	Rim shot to cymbals (x2) Waiting/searching combo
Searching for greens (x3)	Searching for greens (x3)	Searching for greens beat
Spitting greens (x3)	Spitting greens (x3)	Drum roll to crashing beat
<i>Hai ci</i>	<i>Hai ci</i>	<i>Hai ci</i>
Running bows	Running bows	Running bow beat (x3)
Ending	Ending	High drum and ending beat

Breaking down beats reduces the chance of making mistakes in a live performance, but there are also drawbacks. The music no longer needs to flow as an artistic entity and changes of rhythmic beats and smooth transitions between different chapters of music sometimes become unexpected pauses during playing. From time to time, the pauses transform the melodic stream into a mechanical combination of discrete musical segments. Music, in this sense, is directed by movements rather than leading the latter. The musical performance in the lion dance is thus transformed from an emotional expression to performative techniques for the sake of movements only. That said, these techniques make music skills easier to learn and transmit across generations.

Because they are less bound to the lion dance tradition that prioritizes cultural meanings, this new generation of lion dancers has more freedom to create their own new tradition. For example, Peter Wong recalls:

[T]here is no gender in appearance for the lions when we do the dance. So for Mary Gin's wedding,⁷ we made the red one be female and the yellow one be male. We used different actions and movements to indicate the genders. Say, when we made the routine, we made the red one more submissive, more feminine than the yellow one [FIGURE 10]. We didn't learn from anybody but we just figured it out. (Peter Wong, personal interview, 7 April 2011)

Nowadays, various online resources provide rich information on different aspects of lion dancing. Tzu-Hao Hsu says,

YouTube is an excellent teacher. It is a good visual reference material. A lot of the time, we are doing our own research on YouTube or other websites and try to incorporate elements into our practice and training. (Tzu-Hao Hsu, personal interview, 29 January 2012)

As one of the productive consequences, at the 2013 Chinese New Year Gala on local Memorial University's campus, Jerry Xie, dressed in a panda costume instead



FIGURE 10: Lion dancing at Mary Gin's Wedding, St. John's. Courtesy of Alick Tsui.

of the traditional big-head Buddha, creatively combined the traditional Chinese lion dance with a popular pop song “Gangnam Style.” Perhaps Xie’s northern Chinese background allows him to freely present his idea of lion dancing. In 2014’s Chinese New Year Celebration, the big-head Buddha was replaced by a panda (FIGURE II).

The new generation of Chinese lion dancers differs from earlier Cantonese dancers, who strictly observed the lion dancing traditions as they learned them in Canton or Hong Kong, in terms of how they performed and how they perceived their performance and the associated traditions and culture. It seems that the pursuit of historical authenticity is not seen as being as important for contemporary dancers as it was for their predecessors. These performers do not consider locally performed lion dancing as a cultural survival of the ancestral country; instead, through an interplay between “here” (Newfoundland) and “there” (China), the dance is now interpreted in a more vernacular way,⁸ so that the performance is distanced from the original practice. William Ping Jr. reports:

What I am doing now [lion dancing] is a way to reconnect with what my grandfather is about. Unlike Justin, Matthew, and Peter, they are more authentic Chinese people than me so that the culture is a bigger deal to them. (Violet Ryan-Ping and William Ping Jr., personal interview, 16 April 2011)

Self-identifying as a less authentic Chinese individual, William Ping Jr. has less attachment to the Cantonese roots of the lion dance and claims a more personal sentimental connection to the performance as a symbolic presentation of his ancestral heritage. Nevertheless, the performative/perceptive variation does not suggest that the performance of the new generation of lion dancers is not authentic. The performance by the new ethnicity like Ping may not fit into the category of “historical authenticity” but falls into the rubric of “personal authenticity,” which, as Peter Kivy puts it:



FIGURE II: Lion dancing with a Panda at Memorial University’s Chinese New Year Celebration at St. Augustine Church, St. John’s, February 9, 2014. Courtesy of Julie Zhang.

When we talk of a...performance that is “authentic” in the sense of being “personally authentic,” we are praising it for bearing the special stamp of personality that marks it out from all others...we are making it out as a unique product of a unique individual, something with an individual style of its own—“an original.” (KIVY 1995, 123)

In the case of Chinese lion dance in Newfoundland, the new generation of locally born or raised lion dancers, managing a new definition of their ethnicity, are less motivated to pursue historical authenticity as a goal for the dance, but are more interested in incorporating their personal understandings of being Chinese descendants of various cultural and regional backgrounds into their performances in ways that highlight social and cultural changes in the local society. To some degree, the performance of the new generation, representing a new and united Chinese identity within their group members with diverse cultural backgrounds, challenges the older Cantonese version of Chineseness that was established in the performance of the first-generation Cantonese dancers.

When present at their various practices and rehearsals, summer leisure gatherings, and coffee times, from how they were interacting I realized that not only was the new generation lion dancers’ Chineseness negotiated and reconstructed in folkloric practice in the sense of Juwen ZHANG (2015), but also participation in lion dancing practice and performance also makes these local-born Chinese, who were/are suffering identity ambiguity, for the first time intensively experience Chinese culture outside of their families. They begin to meet people from the same ethnicity as friends and co-players rather than kids of parents’ Chinese friends. Henry Johnson makes a similar comment on this social role of lion dancing groups, which first bridge the distance between co-ethnics by “forming social and cultural links with other members of the group” (JOHNSON 2005, 186), and which create a common sense of Chineseness “because of the traditional ‘home’ of the Chinese lion dance” (JOHNSON 2005, 179). In this sense, the new Chinese diasporic identity and culture identified with the formation of “new ethnicity” in Newfoundland emerge from the folkloric performance and social webs established in the practice.

MANY VOICES: LION DANCING AUDIENCE

The meaning of any cultural performance is created during the interaction between performers and audience members, who are not passive receivers but active participants often negotiating and/or challenging the senders’ ideologies based on their own perceptions.

Since its inception in Newfoundland, lion dancing, a Cantonese tradition, has been long associated with the Chinese presence in special cultural contexts such as Chinese New Year celebrations, to serve as a cultural representation that delivers a pan-Chinese identity. In addition, lion dancing is not only reserved for relatively private ethnic spaces, but also is a part of ethnic educational programs, multicultural gatherings, and more community events. Kim Hong notes:

Other than the garden party after the Flower Service and our traditional Chinese New Year celebrations, the lion dance was also played for a few occasions like the opening of restaurants [FIGURE 12] and St. John's Labour Day Parade, which we attended twice in late 1970s and early 1980s...We also did it a few times for some schools like the Bishop College...We wanted to show people in St. John's a bit of Chinese culture. (Kim Hong, personal interview, 18 April 2011)

Tzu-Hao Hsu also comments:

The lion dance is the ambassador for us. We typically reserve the lion dance for pretty much Chinese Association functions, but in recent years, we perform for fundraisers, we have done it for weddings in the community, and we also started to perform for educational events to promote cultural diversity, so we have been getting ourselves in a little bit more with diversity initiatives... [FIGURE 13; Video 1 and 2] (Tzu-Hao Hsu, personal interview, 29 January 2012)

In 2013, the CANL lion dance troupe was invited to participate in the St. John's Christmas Parade (FIGURE 14).

As said, the enthusiastic participation of Cantonese immigrants in lion dancing indicates that this demographically dominant Chinese subgroup actively promotes lion dancing as a cultural representative of all individuals of Chinese descent through its festive performance both within and outside of the community. The gradually increasing involvement of lion dance in various local socio-cultural events tells that this promotion is successful and well recognized by Newfoundland's general public, who largely contribute to celebrate and, in turn, reinforce this ideology. An example is, when lion dancing was absent for some years in the early 2000s, CANL was highly encouraged by the general public to resume the tradition (Alick Tsui, personal interview, 20 January 2012).

The interest of people, especially non-Chinese, is often sparked because "the lion dance is a kind of visual performance with noise and color, which makes it



FIGURE 12: Lion dancing at the opening of Jade Garden Restaurant, St. John's. Courtesy of May Soo.



Figure 13: Lion dancing at the rooms for the event “Sharing Our Culture” in 2012, St. John’s (left to right: William Ping Jr., Jerry Xie, Catherine Shek, Justin So, Tzu-Hao Hsu and Gabriel Lau). Courtesy of Violet Ryan-Ping.



Figure 14: Lion dancing at the 2013 St. John’s Christmas Parade (Joshua Lau). Public website source: CBC NL: http://live.cbc.ca/Event/t_Johns_Santa_parade_2013?Page=0

more attractive than other Chinese performances such as singing and instruments” (Daniel Wong, personal interview, 29 August 2013). Wong’s explanation reflects Chiou-Ling Yeh’s findings in her study of Chinese New Year celebrations in San Francisco. Chiou-Ling Yeh characterizes three types of ethnic activities displayed at the Chinese New Year occasions, namely, “the first contained exotic and popular spectacles; the second was too ethnic to generate any interest; while the third was simply too foreign to be accepted” (YEH 2008, 51). Yeh categorizes the dragon dance and the lion dance in the first group because they not only embodied ethnic sentiments, but also showcased multiculturalism; on one hand, they were symbols that Chinese immigrants could relate to as they embodied good fortune, while on the other hand, they manifested a kind of American democratic practice that

encouraged ethnic expression (YEH 2008, 51–52). However, other forms of performance such as Chinese opera, folk dances, and martial arts are often preferred by Chinese immigrants, and yet Yeh notes that “mainstream newspapers publicized these activities but never discussed them at length, possibly because they only catered to Chinese immigrants” (YEH 2008, 52). Non-Chinese audience members often express a lack of interest in esoteric expressions such as songs in Chinese languages and talk shows with many confusing cultural hints and puns. The general interest of the host society encourages event organizers “to emphasize the bicultural character or exotic Chinese traditions” as part of their major goal to “generate political and economic resources” (YEH 2008, 52). In Newfoundland, according to my interviewees, because of the small size of the Chinese community, performances other than the lion dance, such as Peking Opera and Cantonese Opera, have never been as popular as in other Canadian cities, as discussed in some scholarly works (e.g., CHEUNG 2013; LI 1987; SEBRYK 1995).

In addition to catering to general interests, lion dancing is also thought by some advocates like Justin So to be an effective way to educate people of Chinese descent, especially those who are “second or later generation, kids of intermarriage families, and adopted Chinese kids,” about their Chinese cultural roots (Justin So, personal interview, 3 February 2014). As an ethnographer, I observed that at the annual “family fun day,” an event held the day after the local celebration of Chinese New Year, when performers leave the lion costumes on the stage after the performance, many children rush to the spot of the exhibition in order to touch the lion puppets and get a good position for taking pictures. According to many children and their parents, the lions are not only treated as plush toys but also a symbol of their heritage, which, for many children, especially those Chinese children adopted by non-Chinese Newfoundlanders, is often inaccessible (Video 3). Without the lion dance, as Justin’s father Peter So says, many of the younger generation of Chinese descent have limited interaction with Chinese traditions in their daily life (Peter So, personal interview with Ban Seng Hoe, 28 March 2009).

In this sense, lion dancing in Newfoundland is not only nostalgic but also educational. Consequently, memories and experiences of lion dancing at various cultural events kept in the mind of many second- or later-generation individuals of Chinese descent have a strong impact on the conceptualization of their understanding of Chineseness. Many of them, such as Chin Tan, therefore ask for lion dancing to be included at important times to represent their identity (Chin Tan, personal interview, 29 April 2012). Without lion dancing as a cultural medium in those rite-of-passage events, especially at weddings, people may feel a loss of cultural identity in the public setting. One day in early September 2010, I dropped by Bill Ping’s house to bring him some Chinese wedding paper-cuttings for his daughter’s upcoming ceremony. Although he cannot speak any Chinese due to his mother’s Irish roots, Bill Ping self-identifies as a second-generation Chinese. He feels the deep cultural influences of his father, William Ping, and he constantly reminds his own children of their Chinese heritage. Therefore, a wedding featuring traditional Chinese cultural elements was planned for his daughter Candice. When Bill looked at the red decorations with Chinese characters and symbols, he was

delighted: “At least we have these.” I immediately realized that there was some disappointment hidden under his excitement. When I asked what had happened, he replied, “Oh, the lion dance team might not be able to show up at Candice’s wedding.” I asked if having the lion dance really mattered and whether he couldn’t find some other replacement, but he responded, “The lion dance is the only thing I can think of as real Chinese stuff in Newfoundland.” To Bill and his family, the lion dance made Chineseness visible. Without it at the wedding, his daughter’s Chinese identity would not be well represented.

However, interest in lion dancing does not guarantee individuals’ full comprehension of the performance’s cultural meanings. It is unclear how many Chinese people, especially those local-born or -raised individuals, respond to the bright colors and striking movements and noise of the lion dancing, and how many have any deeper kind of knowledge of the dance so that they are able to decipher its embedded cultural symbolic codes. In this sense, Kristin Valentine argues that,

Intensive spectators do not pretend to understand the ceremony as they think a member of that culture might. Rather, spectators try to make sense of what they experience as audience members, being their comments on extensive background research and careful observation of the public parts of the ceremonies. Knowing that ethical codes of conduct are not fixed, intense spectators necessarily live with ambiguity. (VALENTINE 2002, 281)

In Newfoundland, many individuals of Chinese descent, even some Cantonese, have a vague knowledge of the cultural meaning of the Cantonese lion dance. Kim Hong says, “I was told that the lion dance is supposed to bring good luck and chase away evil, but I couldn’t go any further to explain the tradition and culture” (Kim Hong, personal interview, 18 April 2011). Many Chinese Newfoundlanders, if they are not culturally educated, are not able to interpret the traditional meanings of a performance. This does not diminish the enjoyment lion dancing can bring to audience members of all cultural backgrounds and ages and levels of Chinese cultural literacy, but these comments suggest that deep historical and cultural meanings are not accessible to all present.

At the same time, while the lion dance is well accepted as a Chinese symbol in public circumstances to reflect collective Chinese ethnicity, some individuals of Chinese descent look at it differently. Generationally speaking, almost all first-generation Chinese people recognize the Chinese cultural elements in the lion dance. However, some of them, like Shinn Jia Hwang, hesitate to accept the lion dance as a pan-Chinese cultural marker in Newfoundland because they see the local version as lacking historical authenticity. Hwang comments,

Most performers don’t know the culture and what they could do was imitating some movements and randomly hitting the instruments. That is not real Chinese lion dancing. (Shinn Jia Hwang and Ching Hsiang Lin, personal interview, 29 March 2012)

New immigrants from northern China may consider lion dance as a regional and archaic expression rather than a national and modern representation of Chi-

nese culture. They refuse to accept this designated cultural expression as representation of their sense of Chineseness. Lili Wang comments:

In Newfoundland, we have the lion dance every year, so in the minds of local people, it is an inseparable part of Chinese New Year. In my opinion, lion dancing itself represents the impression of older-generation Chinese about Chinese New Year. In fact, in China, we had never seen the lion dance in Chinese New Year celebrations....For people like me, we don't really have that kind of strong attachment to the lion dance. (Lili Wang, personal interview, 25 January 2012)

A few people reject the lion dance as a symbol of their ethnicity due to negative personal impressions. Katherine Huang says, "I often saw lion dancing performed there but I didn't like it at all because the lion's face looks scary to me" (Katherine Huang, personal interview, 22 February 2012). Peter Hing also says, "I am not interested in Chinese lion dance. It is foolish because it is repetitive all the time" (Peter Hing, personal interview, 8 April 2014).

Different from the first-generation Chinese who challenge the legality of lion dance as a pan-ethnic cultural marker but still consider it as an integral part of their heritage, second- or later-generation individuals usually make a clear decision on taking the tradition as a cultural marker to represent their sense of Chineseness. The current situation of lion dancing in Newfoundland suggests the refusal of many second- or later-generation individuals of Chinese descent to accept the role of the performance as an ethnic symbol.

In recent years, the population of regular participants of the local lion dancing team has dramatically decreased. According to my observation, almost half the members of the lion dance team, such as Inga Liu, Jerry Xie, Cerith Wong, and Peter Wong, have difficulties in attending regular practice (if any) and performances. The situation indicates that without new members, it will be unfeasible to maintain more advanced performances involving two lions. However, recruiting new dancers is always a challenge. Since the early 2000s, after the peak time of lion dancing, low enrollment has been a major problem, hindering the transmission and development of local lion dancing. Peter Wong comments,

The tradition is passed to who wants to do it, but not many people want to do it. We did ask around. We tried to get more young kids to practice and we sent out emails, but didn't get back any responses. (Peter Wong, personal interview, 7 April 2011)

The unsuccessful recruitment can be attributed to a variety of reasons such as availability of time, personality, and the relatively strict age and gender requirements of traditional lion dancing (male-preferred) (Peter Wong, personal interview, 7 April 2011; Tzu-Hao Hsu, personal interview, 29 January 2012).

However, these reasons are considered to be secondary factors. I would suggest that the difficulty in recruiting new lion dancers first reflects the demographic change of the current Chinese community in Newfoundland. Nowadays, many newcomers come to Newfoundland as professional or students who are mostly from non-Cantonese Mainland China. They do not share the same cultural knowledge as older waves of Cantonese immigrants. Secondly, local-born Chinese pres-

ent a distinct, modern, and vernacular identity of being Chinese, which is no longer defined by the lion dance (Daniel Wong, personal interview, August 2013). Some older-generation Chinese like Kim Hong fear the death of traditional lion dancing in Newfoundland. However, Daniel Wong seems more positive about the changes in the tradition:

My point is, if people are still debating the issue of whether the lion dance can or cannot represent Chinese culture, or other similar cultural concerns, the lion dance won't disappear because it is a platform for people to discuss and negotiate their identities. (Daniel Wong, personal interview, 29 August 2013)

I agree with Daniel Wong that an effective functional tradition will not disappear if it is still used to achieve efficient communication for exchanging information and ideas, however, it can be replaced when a better channel is available and recognized. The current situation of the Chinese lion dance troupe in Newfoundland indicates that many second- and later-generation individuals of Chinese descent show less interest in connecting themselves to the Cantonese version of Chinese culture through performing the lion dance. As members of the “new ethnicity,” they are free to choose whether and how to present their Chinese heritage, which is reflective and reflexive.

FURTHER DISCUSSION

The above description and discussion suggest that, although many people worry about the loss of tradition, lion dancing in Newfoundland is still an active and strong representation of Chineseness. In Newfoundland, the lion dance performance, whether by older-generation Cantonese-speaking Chinese in the past or new local-born or -raised dancers today, represents some historical continuity with earlier dancers forming in China; they present and celebrate Chineseness in general, but that performance carries various meanings for different individuals. Nowadays, most lion dancers and audience members do not prioritize historical authenticity of the Cantonese culture. They do not claim expertise in the ancestral culture of lion dancing, nor do they attempt to promote or understand every detail of the old cultural aspects of this Cantonese tradition. Francis Tam says,

Now, what we want to tell people is “we are here and we can be different,” but we don't really push people to accept the traditional cultural perspectives as people have done in the old country, because we are in Canada. (Francis Tam, personal interview, 28 July 2013)

It is plausible that the trivialization of traditional meanings or the historical authenticity of lion dancing is influenced by the preference of both the performers and audience, who choose to understand the lion dance in a local rather than a “foreign” way.

As a cultural performance, the lion dance in Newfoundland provides its performers and audience with “a special enhancement of experience, bringing with it a heightened intensity of communicative interaction which binds the audience to the performer in a way that is specific to performance as a mode of communica-

tion” (BAUMAN 1977, 43). During the communication process, dancers and audience members who are different from each other in age, region of origin, and generation, are exchanging their perceptions on the lion dance. Because of these exchanges, some participants of Chinese descent strengthen their cultural affiliation to Chineseness, some may discover or rediscover their cultural identity, and some others might choose to distance themselves from their ancestral culture but claim their new understanding of their ethnicity not associated with the lion dance, which is no longer a taken-for-granted pan-ethnic marker. At the same time, the performance itself is continuously changed due to the variations of the personal cultural perceptions of performers and audience members in their communications with co-ethnics and non-Chinese in different sociocultural settings. The current trend, from the pursuit of historical authenticity to the presentation of personal sincerity, shows that the Chinese lion dance is reflexive, shifting from a foreign invention to a local creation, which is often used to transmit a vernacular version of ethnic identity that is not simply “Chineseness” but a complex system of multivocal definitions of “Chineseness”.

When Chineseness is negotiated in the geographic and cultural space where the ethnic performance—lion dance—is played, a sense of “united community” with identical self-awareness rises among all attendees, including performers and audience, beyond the social, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. A somewhat unique Chineseness becomes the “mainstream” identity in those events featuring Chinese diasporic culture and tradition, and the united diasporic identity therefore temporally transforms all individuals into one category—“Chinese”—socially and culturally. In this sense, Chinese communities are reorganized and reintegrated by a cultural performance that constructs a new identity to embrace people with different cultural origins into one. In this regard, Newfoundland’s Chinese lion dance, which is a Cantonese version, to a large extent not only represents Chinese who are born in the culture of southern China, but also provides a possibility to unite all individuals of Chinese descent regardless of their regional, generational, linguistic, and other differences as “one” diasporic community with its “unique” identity and culture.

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NOTES

1. According to Statistics Canada (2006), Chinese comprise only 0.26 percent of the province’s total population.

2. For a better life and more work opportunities, many Chinese came to Newfoundland through family ties or their personal connection with people from the same regions in Canton Province, such as Toisan and Hoi Ping. In 1975, families with Cantonese origins comprised more than eighty percent of the local Chinese population. But after 1967, when Canada adopted a new immigration policy to select immigrants based on factors such as profession and education instead of race and ethnicity, more professionals started to move to Newfoundland.

Along with the emergence of new generations, the Chinese demography became more diverse and the Cantonese proportion of the population declined to less than one third (LI 2014).

3. The Cantonese lion dance (southern lion dance) is the main form performed in Newfoundland. It is also widespread in Chinese diasporic communities around the world (JOHNSON 2005; LIU 1981; SLOVENZ 1987; SLOVENZ-LOW 1991, 1994). Compared to the costume of the northern style, with less fur and no mane, the costume of the southern style is more distant from the image of a real lion. However, the abstraction makes the southern lion more aggressive (MATUSKY and TAN 2004, 152). Moreover, because the body of the southern lion is bigger and longer with more and brighter colors, it is often thought to contain more “strength, agility and power of energy” (MATUSKY and TAN 2004, 152). In addition, according to my interviewees, at present performers of both traditions mutually adopt skills and costumes from each other.

4. Flower Service is a local Chinese grave decoration practice to memorialize early Chinese settlers and family members who passed away in Newfoundland. This event is held on the Sunday following St. John’s (the capital of Newfoundland and Labrador) Regatta Day, which is set on the first Wednesday in August annually. The Chinese Flower Service is often followed by a garden party with a BBQ and beverages, and sometimes includes traditional performances.

5. In the legend that Matusky and Tan’s theory is based on, it is said that the lions were tamed for entertainment by a monk upon the command of the emperor (MATUSKY and TAN 2004, 152). In addition, the story also indicates that the role of the Buddhist monk is a critical part of the lion dancing. Matusky and Tan’s legend thus reveals a close relationship between lion dancing and Buddhism. More specifically, lion masks are similar to the images of lions in ancient Buddhist decorations and paintings (FELTHAM 2007, 2009; LIU 1981), in which lions are generally portrayed as guardians or as mounts with wide-open mouths, fan-like ears, big eyes, and horns on the top center of their foreheads. Therefore, in consideration of the similarities between the lions in the dance and those in Buddhism, Liu confidently says that, “We can be quite sure that the later development of the lion dance mask has been influenced directly or indirectly by the appearance of the guardian tomb animals” (LIU 1981, 30).

6. The word “star” is “used to illustrate the beats caused by the touch of the drum sticks to the big drum” (LIU 1981, 63).

7. Mary Gin is a local-born, second-generation Chinese.

8. However, according to Justin So, local adaption of lion dance can fit into a new tradition of lion dancing, which is more popular in overseas Chinese communities (Justin So, personal interview, 3 February 2014). As he says, “It is not our invention. There are some other troupes who have been doing that. They take modern songs instead of traditional ones. It is a newer tradition and newer style” (ibid.).

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