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Periphery matters : a cultural biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong
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Citation

Joshua, C. (2017, September 12). *Periphery matters : a cultural biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/54688>

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Title: Periphery matters : a cultural biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong

Date: 2017-09-12

Chapter One / Introduction

1.1 Building a house

In her discussion about the structure of stylish academic writing, Helen Sword borrows essayist Annie Dillard's metaphor to describe writing as an "architectural endeavor".⁷ Certainly this building metaphor is also applicable to conducting research projects, and I am sure that I am not the first to see it this way. Although not innovative, it is a powerful metaphor. Doing a research project is much like building a house.

I am going to build a house in an interesting place: a place where things meet that had appeared unlikely to encounter each other; a place where things interact that had appeared unlikely to do so. Borrowing from Daphne Lei (2006), I am going to build a house in a "contact zone."

Peking Opera, or *jingju* 京劇, is one of the over three hundred genres in traditional theater (*xiqu* 戲曲) now existing in China. It first emerged in the late eighteenth century as a hybrid form, which absorbed elements from several other regional genres. It then developed into a sophisticated, independent genre in Beijing (with *Peking* remaining part of the conventional transcription). Until the end of Qing dynasty, its popularity remained in northeastern cities such as Beijing and Tainjin, but it also established itself in late nineteenth-century Shanghai. The genre became widely known in the Republican period (1912-1949), when the nation-building agenda of the Chinese Republican Government from the 1910s onward facilitated its exposure abroad, and the efforts of some dedicated intellectuals and practitioners gave it the status of a national art form. Since then it has often been viewed internationally as representative of traditional Chinese culture. Nevertheless, despite its national status, "hot spots" of Peking Opera within the Chinese mainland are still located mostly in the northern part of the nation, with Shanghai and Hubei province as roughly the southernmost area of major popularity.

Hong Kong, a coastal city located in Guangdong Province in southeastern China, became a British colony after the First Opium War (1839-1842). In 1997 the city's sovereignty was transferred back to what had by then become the People's Republic of China (PRC, founded 1949), and Hong Kong became a so-called Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). Its geographical location and colonial history gave the city a wide cultural spectrum, which researchers have often framed into an "East, West, Local" discourse. Within this trinity, the "east" refers mainly to the Lingnan 嶺南 culture, which is a regional culture that covers the modern Chinese provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan. It also refers to culture originating in the coastal areas of Guangdong and Fujian provinces. The "west", in turn, refers to cultural imports by the British colonizers, which were popularized through means such as official promotion and inclusion in the public school curriculum. Thirdly, there is the "local", defined by Wu Junxiong and Zhang Zhiwei as "products or lifestyles which are

⁷ Sword 2012: 122.

spread widely in the community and well appreciated by the general public,”⁸ and more or less identifiable as belonging to Hong Kong “itself.” Examples include local movie productions and Canto-pop.

The cultural connection with China is manifest, among many other features, in the existence of certain traditional Chinese theatrical genres in Hong Kong. According to Chan Sau-yan and Barbara Ward, three popular genres exist in Hong Kong. First there is Cantonese Opera, which is a regional genre in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and other Cantonese-speaking communities. It is noteworthy that Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong and on the Chinese mainland developed diversely, especially since 1949, in terms of artistic style and, more notably, performing practice. For example, while Hong Kong practitioners still use *gongchi* 工尺 musical notation⁹ widely in addition to the numbered musical notation (a.k.a. Ziffersystem), the former has been largely abandoned by mainland practitioners.¹⁰ Also, Cantonese Opera performances in the PRC are strongly scripted in terms of both text and music, while a far greater degree of improvisation by performers and musicians is seen in Hong Kong. The second popular genre in Hong Kong is Teochew, or Chaozhou, Opera. This is a genre in the Teochew dialect that is popular in the Chaoshan 潮汕 region of eastern Guangdong. Third is Hoklo 福佬 Drama, which is performed in both the mid-land dialect¹¹ and Hoklo, which is a dialect spoken by people in eastern Guangdong and southern Fujian (with the Haifeng 海豐 and Lufeng 陸豐 counties as cores). The popularity of these two genres in Hong Kong can be traced in large part to migration from these regions to Hong Kong, and they are mostly performed in a ritual context.¹²

Generally speaking, cultural forms in Hong Kong, wherever they stand within the cultural spectrum, are allowed to pursue their own courses. This is because of the British colonial philosophy that consciously avoided political interference in the culture of the colonized. In the 1970s a cultural policy was first developed by the colonial government, which continued through the SAR period until the present day. However, the policy was never prescriptive in nature, nor did it ever prohibit the practice of any cultural form. Despite this, the authorities strategically promoted public access to certain forms. For example, the colonial government in the twentieth century promoted European art forms through school education and administrative measures, while the SAR government after 1997 stimulated the public reception of traditional Chinese art forms.

On the other hand, a stronger political intervention on cultural forms was seen on the Chinese mainland, especially since the establishment of PRC in 1949. For example, Peking Opera was subjected to Drama Reform in the 1950s. This was a movement led by the PRC government to control the form and ideology of the genre through prescriptive policies, so

⁸ Wu and Zhang 2002: xvii.

⁹ In short, *gongche* musical notation is a notation system that uses Chinese characters to indicate the scale degrees of notes. For a more detailed description of the system, see Yung 1989: 14-15.

¹⁰ Chen 2010: 125.

¹¹ “Mid-land” (*zhongzhou* 中州) refers to the central region of ancient China, which covers the modern Chinese province of Henan.

¹² Chan 1996: 28-34; Ward 1985: 161-187.

that it would serve the political agenda of the regime.¹³ Then from 1965 to 1978, traditional plays of the genre were banned because of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During that period only a handful of Revolutionary Opera plays, or “model operas” (*yangban xi* 樣板戲), were allowed to be performed. Even since its privatization and marketization in the late 1970s, the development of Peking Opera in contemporary China is still strongly shaped by the prescriptive cultural policies of the PRC government.

Having outlined the apparent irrelevance of the northern Peking Opera and the southern city of Hong Kong, I ask: what happened when Peking Opera travelled to Hong Kong? What happened when what had been positioned as a national theatrical genre appeared in the periphery – in the geographical, cultural, and political sense – of the nation it represents? Who were involved in this process, how did the result relate to local genres and to local cultural production at large, and how did it evolve over time? I attempt to answer these questions by writing a cultural biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong. It investigates how various social agents have identified Peking Opera, contributed to multiple valuation regimes of Peking Opera, and shaped the development of Peking Opera in Hong Kong since the early twentieth century.

In addition to a review of Peking Opera’s development in Hong Kong, I also aim to investigate how this development addresses long-standing questions surrounding “Hong Kong identity”. This is no simple matter. As Ackbar Abbas says, “The difficulty with the local, therefore, is in locating [local culture], and this is particularly tricky in a place like Hong Kong with its significant proportion of refugees, migrants, and transients, all of whom could claim local status.”¹⁴ The relative social stability of the city under colonial governance (the Japanese occupation in the 1940s notwithstanding) may also have kept these questions from taking centre stage until the mid 1980s, when the prospect of the 1997 sovereignty handover from the British to the mainland-Chinese authorities began to loom large. Since then, an “identity crisis” has occurred in Hong Kong society, which has led to scholarly discussions of the heterogeneous cultural manifestations of “Hong Kong identity”. These discussions have regained momentum in recent years, when politically inflected voices emerged that call for an attention to local identity.

The search for local identity as embodied in cultural forms such as cinema and popular music has resulted in rich scholarship. For example, Stephen Teo writes extensively about martial arts movies and action movies in Hong Kong, examining in particular how they articulate locality via filming techniques and cinematic languages. Scholars like Wong Chi-wah and Chu Yiu-wai have produced a series of books that discuss the “local-ness” in Canto-pop lyrics. But relatively little work has been devoted to studying local identity as this manifests itself in the realm of traditional art forms, such as Chinese theatre.

To be sure, it is not the case that traditional Chinese theatre in Hong Kong has not received scholarly attention. There is a range of works that focus on the field (mostly on Cantonese Opera) from artistic, cultural and social perspectives. However, the study of

¹³ For more details about the Drama Reform, see Fu 2007: 149-195 and Guan 2012: 83-88.

¹⁴ Abbas 1997: 12.

identity remains marginal in these works. As traditional Chinese theatre is still an important component of the Hong Kong cultural spectrum, this leaves an incomplete picture of identity-building in the cultural realm. Therefore, I aim to help remedy this issue by investigating how “Hong Kong identity” is invented, interpreted, maintained, and challenged by practices of Peking Opera in Hong Kong across time.

1.2 The blueprint

To return to the house-building metaphor, in terms of theory my blueprint is derived from Cultural Biography and Social Network Analysis.

1.2.1. Cultural Biography

As my dissertation title suggests, this project is very much inspired by Igor Kopytoff’s idea of Cultural Biography. First suggested in 1986 as a contribution to Arjun Appadurai’s study of material as commodity, the core of this idea lies in the exploration of a continual, and possibly repetitive, process of commoditization, decommoditization and recommoditization of an object, defined by Kopytoff as the (re)acquisition and (re)configuration of the object’s social identity and value.¹⁵ As Gosden and Marshall put it, “[objects] often have the capability of accumulating histories, so that the present significance of an object derives from the persons and events to which it is connected.”¹⁶ In other words, the meanings of an object are constructed by its social interactions with people, events, and probably other objects. These meanings are accumulated and transformed over time, throughout the object’s “life”. Also, one has to study an object in a multi-faceted manner, which includes its physical attributes, production, consumption and exchange, in order to understand it more thoroughly.

The Cultural Biography approach has been growing in popularity in historical studies of objects. In an extensive literature review, Gosden and Marshall (1999) show that objects can be studied by a biographical approach in various manners. My review of relevant scholarship also shows that a wide range of objects have been studied with this approach, from a war memorial in Katanning, West Australia (Stephens 2012) to the terracotta statues from the temple at Ayia Irini on the Greek island of Kea (Gorogianni 2011); and from a World War I German 150mm gun (Pearson 2013) to the city of Chacabuco in northern Chile (Vilches 2011). In addition, Cultural Biography is also applied as an anthropological approach. For example, David Griffith (2013) uses this approach to investigate the fishing industry in Puerto Rico. By looking at the Cultural Biography of fish in that region from various perspectives – “as a biological organism, as a species targeted and processed by fishers, as a commodity, as a food, as a gift, and so forth”¹⁷ – he outlines an ethnography of his topic.

Tellingly, the above list may give the impression that the Cultural Biography approach can only deal with discrete, physical objects, and raise doubts regarding its applicability to intangible performing arts. Indeed, even the closest art-related example Kopytoff has given in his foundational essay in 1986 is an objectified art work – a painting of Pierre-Auguste

¹⁵ Kopytoff 1986: 64-91.

¹⁶ Gosden & Marshall 1999: 170.

¹⁷ Griffith 2013: 19.

Renoir.¹⁸ However, I submit that this does not preclude the Cultural Biography approach from being a useful perspective in looking at Peking Opera in Hong Kong – or, for that matter, at other intangible objects. Firstly, I employ this approach in a manner that emphasizes its focus on the dynamic of value transformations embodied in an art form. Secondly, I propose that art forms can also be seen as composite objects, as entities. Borrowing Kopytoff's terminology in defining the four angles of construction of a Cultural Biography, I view the components that together constitute an art form – music, actions, scripts, etc. – as technical facts, which people and events in a society can connect to, and interact with. It is produced by, for instance, playwrights, performers, composers and artists. It is consumed by spectators and, in some cases, political authorities, to serve their respective agendas. Last but not least, it can move, or be moved: not only between physical spaces, but also between cultural spaces. For example, in my case, Peking Opera moves from the Chinese mainland to Hong Kong, and then back to the mainland. It also moves between different genres within the family of traditional Chinese theatre, and further between theatre and other art forms.

With reference to W.H.R. Rivers, Kopytoff also suggests an important cultural inquiry that a biographical approach can profitably achieve: to reveal cultural-specific knowledge about an object through comparison with its “ideal”, or expected, biography. In the aforesaid Renoir example, Kopytoff articulates his argument by putting together scenarios of a Renoir painting ending up in different countries (hence, different cultures) in parallel with its “ideal” life of being in France all the time.¹⁹ This comparative capacity of Cultural Biography in revealing heterogeneous cultural values is intriguing, and potentially relevant to my research. By exploring how Peking Opera has been culturally redefined and put to use in Hong Kong, against the backdrop of a mainstream – if not an “ideal” – discourse of the genre on the Chinese mainland, the unique cultural responses of Hong Kong to Peking Opera are highlighted. This further consolidates my inquiry into the theatrical articulation of Hong Kong identity.

Under the main arc of Cultural Biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong, there is a second level at which I consider the life stories of selected individuals, each of which I use as a “lens” to take a closer look at particular periods and/or aspects of Peking Opera in Hong Kong. This is similar to the way in which, for example, Janet Hoskins' *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives* (1998) shows how a person's biography can be constructed through accumulated meanings in one object or several objects. In other words, the biography of an object, or of several, can build up the biography of an individual. Conversely, I intend to look at how people's life stories can tell the story of a thing – in this case, of particular genres within a rich art form.

1.2.2. Social Network Analysis

In addition to Cultural Biography, I also adopt a network approach. The rationale lies in the fact that the social outcome of an individual – the causation of one's behavior – cannot be sufficiently explained by particular attributes that are inherently contained within her/him.

¹⁸ Kopytoff 1986: 67.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Rather, it is better understood by her/his network position in a particular social structure. Furthermore, that network position is not static, but is affected by other actors. In this sense, the abilities of the network model – “its capacity to illuminate entire social structures and to comprehend particular elements with the structure”²⁰ – make it a “more realistic model of causation”.²¹ Moreover, I have to consider a plurality of interactions in my study: various technical facts interact with various people and various events, in various different ways, at various moments in the subject’s “life.” For the sake of a better narrative – a better way to tell a story – I believe a network approach is the most suitable way to manage this plurality.

In practice, I formulate the main issue of discussion in each of the six subsequent chapters as if they are independent networks. In each network, I suggest that various social actors influence the “lens” individual’s valuation of Peking Opera in Hong Kong in the course of her/his life. In other words, “what she/he thinks Peking Opera in Hong Kong is?” The valuation results in her/his particular social outcome, by which I mean their stance toward, or practice of, Peking Opera. In some cases, that outcome further impacts other social actors. In the words of Marin and Wellman on the applications of network approach, I look at “network causes” and “network effects” of the phenomena in question across time.²² These six networks are then arranged in a chronological order, and in this way the main Cultural Biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong is formed. Some social actors will appear in more than one network, and actors on the two ends of the model may overlap as well. See Figure 1.1 for a visualization of my network model.

Here, I return to Kopytoff and apply the four angles suggested by his Cultural Biography to identify different social actors within these networks. Firstly, I look at *production*, meaning practitioners of Peking Opera in various periods and settings. Secondly, I look at *consumption*. I identify and study different audience groups of various ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds. Thirdly, I examine *technical facts*, such as scripts, music, and performing venues. In other words, I also look at material actors when considering the networks. Fourthly, I look at *exchange* on two levels. On a local level, this means interactions between Peking Opera and other traditional Chinese theatrical genres and art forms in Hong Kong, such as Cantonese Opera and martial arts movies. On a national level, it means interactions between Peking Opera in Hong Kong and Peking Opera on the Chinese mainland.

Nevertheless, I must make a disclaimer at this point, namely that this dissertation is not a pure network analysis project. In other words, I do not intend to generate network graphs displaying ties of, for example, kinship, friendship, professional and financial relations, etc, between actors. Rather, I take the network approach as a perspective, a point of departure, to think about my research topic, summed up thus: “It takes as its starting point the premise that social life is created primarily and most importantly by relations and the patterns they form.”²³

²⁰ Knoke & Kuklinski 1982: 10.

²¹ Marin & Wellman 2011: 13.

²² *ibid.* 17-19.

²³ *ibid.* 22.

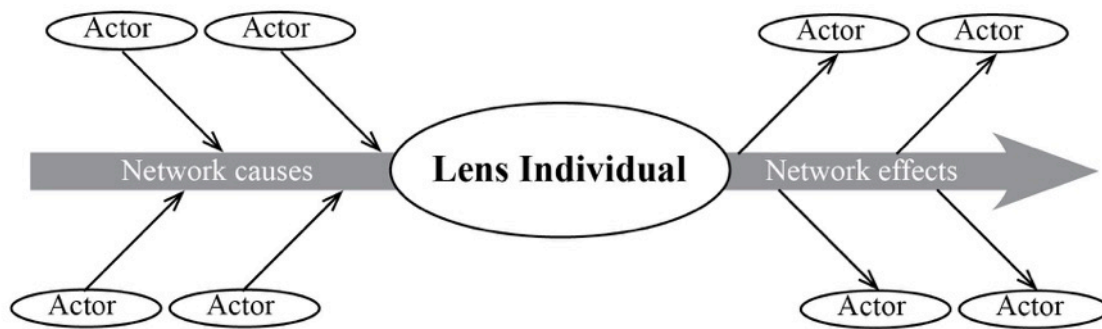


Figure 1.1. The network model I adopt for my discussion.

1.3 Why this house?

Peking Opera has never been a local favorite in Hong Kong. Academically speaking, it is also a far less popular topic compared to the absolute dominance of Cantonese Opera studies in Hong Kong. In other words, it is a relatively untouched piece of the story of the Hong Kong cultural scene. So why bother writing about a less popular topic? Frankly I do not know why this topic is relatively untouched. However, there is no reason to doubt that it will offer important insights into the understanding of Hong Kong's cultural field. In fact, the story of Peking Opera in Hong Kong is salient not only in itself, but also because it helps us to have a more complete understanding toward some better-received genres and art forms in the city. Examples include Cantonese Opera and martial arts movies, which I discuss in later chapters. In addition, after the significant political change in 1997, Peking Opera was ascribed an extra layer of meaning, in which it became a tool of cultural homogenization for the new regime, and also a negotiation space of cultural politics between the “local” Hong Kong and the “national” PRC. By filling in this scholarly gap with this project, I hope to contribute to addressing these phenomena that happened, and are still happening, in Hong Kong.

Moreover, my work moves beyond mainstream discourse on the relationship between performing arts in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. Comparative studies on performing arts in Hong Kong focus on one-sided transculturation, fixing the gaze on the mainland influence on local art forms, but neglecting what I call a “reverse impact” of the local on the national. Thus, this project will contribute by creating new perspectives on Hong Kong as an actor in the network of Chinese cultural transmission. This perspective is not limited to Peking Opera, but can also apply to other art forms. As such, it will refine our understanding of the position of Hong Kong in a greater cultural-Chinese frame of reference, and indeed transregional and global cultural networks.

In terms of theoretical implications, my research introduces a new dimension to the Cultural Biography approach. Treating Peking Opera as a composite entity and studying its ascription of social meanings from various angles, I hope to stimulate discussion on the applicability of the Cultural Biography approach to other intangible performing arts. At the same time, my approach introduces new tools to the field of Peking Opera studies, moving away from primarily or exclusively performer-oriented paradigms.

1.4 A review

Peking Opera happens around the world, thanks to touring performers as well as migrating Chinese communities. It also happens across disciplines, as its numerous dimensions – historical, cultural, social, political, and of course performative – have attracted the attention of scholars in different fields.

1.4.1. Peking Opera around the world

Inevitably the majority of scholarly and critical literature is devoted to Peking Opera on the Chinese mainland as its cultural core. While a massive body of scholarship, both in Chinese and in other languages, writes about the general history and performance of the genre, some works provide insightful, cross-disciplinary discussions on Peking Opera. For example, the numerous socio-historical works by Colin Mackerras cover a large period from the 1840s to 1990s; Andrea Goldman (2012) goes back further, focusing on the cultural-political environment of Beijing between 1770 and 1900 and its relationship with Peking Opera; Joshua Goldstein also writes extensively about the history of Peking Opera from the late Qing to the early Republican period. His argument (1999 and 2003) about the national status of Peking Opera as an invented cultural symbol serves as a cornerstone of this project.

Meanwhile, some works focus on contemporary accounts of Peking Opera on the mainland. For example, Elizabeth Wichmann, who is also an experienced performer and producer, starts from a study of the aural dimension of Peking Opera (1991) and gradually shifts her focus to the study of its innovative authority. She extensively touches on topics such as the creative process and the changing roles of directors in the genre. Li Ruru, whose mother is the renowned female role performer Li Yuru 李玉茹, also works on the issue of how Peking Opera on the Chinese mainland has negotiated changing political and social contexts from the 1920s to the 2000s (2010). In recent years, some mainland scholars have advocated the establishment of the academic field of Peking Opera Studies as a multidisciplinary field that pays attention to subjects such as history, theatre theories, literature, performance studies, education, and music. Fu Jin, as a devoted advocator of this movement, writes extensively on the aforementioned subjects.

Taiwan is another place with a rich culture of Peking Opera, especially after 1949 when the Chinese Nationalist Party moved to the island. Among academic devotees to this subject, Wang Anqi is undoubtedly the central figure, with her extensive works from historical, gender, and political perspectives. Nancy Guy (2005) has also contributed a detailed investigation on the close relationship between Peking Opera and politics in Taiwan. Moreover, Peking Opera in overseas Chinese communities is getting more attention after the turn of the twenty-first century, with exemplary literature like Goldstein's discussion (1999) about Mei Lanfang's tour to the U.S. in 1930, Ashley Thorpe's works (2011 and 2016) on traditional Chinese theatre in various diaspora and intercultural settings in the UK, and similar analyses across the Pacific by Daphne Lei (2006 and 2011).

Furthermore, I consult scholarship on other traditional Chinese theatrical genres in order to have a more holistic understanding of theatre, from different perspectives. For example, I draw on Wilt Idema's work on traditional Chinese theatre from a literary viewpoint. I also

draw on ethnomusicological studies on Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong by Bell Yung, Chan Sau-yan and Ng Wing-chung, and that on Shanghai Opera (*Huju* 滬劇) by Jonathan Stock, which provide theoretical and comparative insights on studying traditional Chinese theatre in Hong Kong.

1.4.2. Primary sources

In addition to a review of secondary literature, I also work extensively with a wide variety of primary sources in order to gather raw materials for my own contribution. Firstly, as a starting point, I consult Chinese-language literature that is at once “primary” material and commentarial in nature. This includes works by Qi Rushan on the theorization of Peking Opera, as well as the numerous commentaries and historical accounts on Peking Opera by Ouyang Yuqian.

Secondly, I look at life stories of three of my six lens individuals, namely Mei Lanfang, Chen Feinong and Jackie Chan, through their autobiographies, memoirs and interview scripts by previous interlocutors. I have also done extensive research in local newspapers from the first half of the twentieth century, and used many articles that report or discuss local Peking Opera events in the past. Since it was once a common practice for local theatres to advertise their daily programmes in newspapers, I have collected these advertisements, which provide valuable information about the day-to-day operation of local Peking Opera troupes. For example, I have compiled a list of programmes for the daily performance by the China Drama Academy in a local theatre, which proved to be extremely informative. In addition to local newspapers, I have also studied *Dacheng Zazhi* 大成雜誌 (The Great Achievement Magazine, 1973-1995), which is an especially valuable source. Probably due to the keen interest in Peking Opera of its chief editor, Shen Jicheng, the magazine contains many articles, written by Shen and others, that discuss in depth the history of Peking Opera in Hong Kong and on the Chinese mainland. I have also thoroughly examined *Xiqu Pinwei* 戲曲品味 (Opera Review, first published in 2000), a journal magazine dedicated to traditional Chinese theatre in Hong Kong.

Thirdly, I analyse government documents produced by official cultural institutions in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. Examples of these institutions include the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department of the HKSAR Government, and the PRC Ministry of Culture. These official documents provide records of cultural policies toward traditional Chinese theatre over time, and financial data that testify to, or against, relevant cultural policy statements.

1.5 Building tools

While these [ethnographic] methods are used on their own as well, what marks their ethnographic application is that they are used to study a people in a naturally occurring setting or “field”, in which the researcher participates directly, and in which there is an intent to explore the meanings

of this setting and its behaviour and activities from the inside.²⁴

As John Brewer argues, the rationale behind a researcher's choice of method(s) in a research project lies in her/his assumptions about the nature of our society (ontological) and knowledge (epistemological). This creates a philosophical framework, and from there, a methodology, that justifies such assumptions. This framework at the same time certifies certain means – methods – to approach, collect, and process valid knowledge. In other words, our choice of method(s) is governed by our commitment to a certain methodological framework. It is from this argument that Brewer discusses the methodological base of ethnography: it comes from the humanistic model of social research, which acknowledges the existence of a real “world” (that Brewer refers as “naturalism”) and believes that a good way to study this “world” is to get closer to it.²⁵ To put it bluntly, researchers who stand on the ethnographic side share a “motto”: go inside, and tell what is actually going on.

Both my personal views and my disciplinary affiliation, since I position this research project as inclined toward the anthropological, oblige me to stand on this side. I am particularly fond of Sierk Ybema et al.'s characterization of ethnographic methods as “the combined field research ‘tools’ of observing, conversing, and the close reading of documentary sources”,²⁶ for it essentially captures the significance of the human senses in perceiving our worlds when doing ethnography.

My toolbox, which includes interviews, participant observation and archival research, is in line with the above characterization. My acquaintance with the topic began in 2008, when I wrote my Master's dissertation about it. Since then I have been looking at it from close up. For the current project, in addition to expanding in scope and depth in multiple ways in terms of conceptualizations and questions as well as material, I have done additional fieldwork in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

1.5.1. Conversing

Interviewing is not just a defining method in ethnography, but especially significant for my work, as it is structured in a biographical fashion. It is clearly a legitimate and effective type of data collection tool for my discussion of several of my lens subjects, who are still active Peking Opera performers in present-day Hong Kong. In addition, oral accounts by insiders continue to be regarded as an abundant and powerful source of information. Although this may risk the problem of insiders' bias and a lack of reliability in their stories, this is overcome by complementing these oral accounts with other sources.

I have interviewed Liang Hanyong, Tang Yuen-ha and Yeung Ming, in order to add what was known about them already, toward constructing their life stories. I have also interviewed several other figures in the field whose experience is relevant to my discussion of Peking Opera in Hong Kong in the past and in the present, in order to collect complementary data. I have further connected with a number of other people, not only as

²⁴ Brewer 2000: 27.

²⁵ *ibid.* 28-38.

²⁶ Ybema 2009: 6.

informants but also as friends. I have maintained constant face-to-face and email conversations with them. In this way I have been able to keep myself updated about the current state of the field.

1.5.2. Observing (and participating)

But here is a problem: informants may tell one what they do, but one cannot always check this. I was indeed warned, on several occasions by my contacts within Hong Kong Peking Opera circles, about the habit of giving canned answers or even incorrect information to outsiders in the field of traditional Chinese theatre, both in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. Clearly I needed to try to see beyond the surface. Here the conventional rationale of participant observation comes into play – be there and watch. I have attended Peking Opera performances by both local and mainland troupes. I have also observed classes organized by the Hong Kong Youth of Chinese Opera College and the Jingkun Theatre, two active local troupes in present-day Hong Kong. Moreover, I have followed Yeung Ming for his Peking Opera-related activities, which include lectures in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, as well as rehearsals for one of his rearranged versions of Cantonese Opera plays.

However, the challenge of transforming myself from an outside researcher to a recognised group member still remained when I was just starting to study my target groups. From their perspective, it was still *us* and *him*. I noticed that I needed to participate more in order to be accepted by those groups, toward a good relationship with my informants and more valid information. Therefore, I participated in the abovementioned classes later in my fieldwork, learned the art and performed in graduation performances. I have also assisted in the staging of the Jingkun Theatre's guided demonstrations, as well as in organizing Yeung Ming's lectures. These experiences of practically contributing to the target groups indeed deepened my insight into their organization. To a certain degree, this echoes Brian Moeran's discussion of his experience transforming from a "participant observer" to an "observant participant" during his fieldwork in a Japanese advertising agency. His contribution during an unexpected situation in the agency's business changed his status in the field and the insiders' perception of him, which in turn granted him an invitation card to what Erving Goffman (1990) refers to as "backstage".²⁷ As Moeran believes, going backstage should be the ethnographer's ideal.

1.5.3. Reading

According to Maria Tamboukou, scholarship about the relationship between archival research (whether on quantitative or qualitative data) and biographical projects is expanding in recent years.²⁸ Indeed, archives are always treasures for researchers of biographical works to look for "documents of life".²⁹ For my own biographical endeavour, I have retrieved documents that record the life of Peking Opera in Hong Kong through several local archives.

One major source of such documents is the Chinese Opera Information Centre at the

²⁷ Moeran 2009: 146-149.

²⁸ Tamboukou 2014: 617.

²⁹ Plummer 2001.

Chinese University of Hong Kong. Various kinds of information were obtained there, including historical scripts of Peking Opera and Cantonese Opera plays, and first-hand sources on Peking Opera events such as leaflets and programme booklets. At the Hong Kong government's Public Records Office, I gained access to internal documents, such as minutes and non-public reports from former and current governmental bodies for cultural administration. Thus I have collected data about the government's policies toward traditional Chinese theatre across time.

1.6 The interior

This introductory chapter is followed by six core chapters and a concluding chapter. As noted, the core chapters are built around the lives of six lens individuals who are significant to the development of Peking Opera in Hong Kong in various periods. Each chapter revolves around one individual, and issues related to my main objective are brought up for discussion through analysis of crucial events in their life stories. Needless to say, I have not allowed the larger narrative to be unduly limited by whatever happened, and did not happen, in these individual lives. Rather, they serve as productive entry points into particular periods and aspects of Peking Opera in Hong Kong.

Chapters two to four form the first part of the core content, on Peking Opera in pre-1997 Hong Kong. Echoing Kopytoff, we shall see in these chapters the birth and the life of Peking Opera throughout the twentieth century in the former British Colony. Chapter two features Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 (1894-1961), arguably the face of Peking Opera during the twentieth century, from his family background to his triumphant career in the 1920s. In particular, I focus on his contribution to the nationalist vision that emerged around Peking Opera. Together with the intellectual Qi Rushan, Mei brought enormous changes to the artistic conventions of the genre, and it gained in social status in China because of this. I will show how Mei contributed with his innovation of Ancient Costume plays, and how he was constructed as a Chinese national icon because of both his on-stage and off-stage images during his 1922 Hong Kong tour.

Chapter three concerns Chen Feinong 陳非儂 (1899-1984), a renowned Cantonese Opera performer in the early twentieth century. He is one of the pioneers to bring artistic devices of Peking Opera into Cantonese Opera, for example body movements, martial arts moves, and music. I first consider the notion of what I call the adoption of Peking Opera devices, by discussing artistic similarities between Peking Opera and Cantonese Opera with reference to their closely connected origins. Secondly, I will map a network of this first wave of adoptions: who was involved? What was being adopted? And what impact did this have on the development of Cantonese Opera in the first half of the twentieth century? I suggest that both Cantonese Opera performers and immigrant intellectuals from the Chinese mainland had agency in facilitating this adoption.

The period from the late 1940s to 1960s was one in which Peking Opera began to take root in Hong Kong, and truly became part of the life of Hong Kong locals. Chapter four begins with a discussion of several mainland Peking Opera performers who were based in Hong Kong at various points in the 1940s and 1950s. I also discuss how local society

received the genre when it became a regularly available cultural form in the city. I then turn to local Peking Opera training schools that flourished in the 1950s and 1960s, with a particular focus on the early life of Jackie Chan, the internationally renowned movie actor. The story of his training in the China Drama Academy, an active Peking Opera training school at the time in question, tells us in detail how the school operated, and shows the significance of Peking Opera training schools to local students and society at large.

I also discuss the growing obstacles to being a professional Peking Opera performer in Hong Kong in this period, and the phenomenon of training school graduates entering the movie industry, with their Peking Opera skills contributing to revolutionizing the industry. On the interaction between Peking Opera and martial arts movies in Hong Kong, King Hu and Zhang Che also made significant contributions by actively drawing on Peking Opera elements in their movie productions in the 1960s. I discuss the context that inspired them to turn their gaze to Peking Opera, their evaluation of the feasibility of presenting Peking Opera in cinematic language, and the actual, multi-faceted adaptations of Peking Opera elements in their movies.

Chapters five to seven form the second part of the core content, and concern Peking Opera in post-1997 Hong Kong. I take 1997 as a watershed not only because of the significance of the sovereignty handover, but also because this is when the newly formed HKSAR Government began to strategically promote Peking Opera as a means to reinforce a Chinese national identity among Hong Kong citizens. Within this political context, I intend to present the life stories of three Peking Opera performers active in the present and, more importantly, the different paths they have travelled while practicing this traditional Chinese theatrical genre in Hong Kong.

Chapter five begins by taking a look back at the dynamics generated by various actors in the Hong Kong political arena from the turn of the twentieth century until today. Starting from the early colonial era in the 1840s, I demonstrate how these constantly changing dynamics have shaped cultural developments in Hong Kong, with special attention to Peking Opera. I then continue my narrative from the 1980s, when a revival of the genre occurred. This was signalled by the establishment of new Peking Opera troupes supported by the government, especially after the 1997 handover. I use the life story of Liang Hanyong 梁漢勇 (born 1960) and his troupe, the Hong Kong Youth of Chinese Opera College, as a case study to demonstrate how the Hong Kong government has supported Peking Opera through various institutional bodies, and how local troupes have benefited from this.

In chapter six, I look at how Tang Yuen-ha 鄧宛霞, a local-born performer, has worked toward a “Hong Kong way” to facilitate the local reception of Peking Opera with her invention of guided demonstrations (*daoshang* 導賞): an unconventional, interactive mode of stage performance. Through her career with the Jingkun Theatre, a local troupe she established in the 1980s, I discuss her long quest in localizing Peking Opera. In particular, I focus on her ideological negotiation between national and local discourses of the genre, which eventually led her down an unconventional artistic path. I also present the local innovation of guided demonstration as significant on a national level, in which a production from Hong

Kong has had a reverse impact on presentational trends in Peking Opera on the Chinese mainland – while the latter is considered the home of the genre. I discuss how some mainland practitioners became acquainted with the idea of guided demonstration, and how this idea influenced them in revisiting ways in which they tried to facilitate the reception of Peking Opera by young people in the twenty-first century, and led to changes in their presentational conventions.

Aside from its own development in present-day Hong Kong, Peking Opera's interaction with local Cantonese Opera has never stopped. In chapter seven I first present a current account of this inter-genre interaction. I have found that the interaction is still ongoing today and that it is multi-faceted. For example, some artistic devices from Peking Opera are actively canonized in formal training programs of Cantonese Opera. Also, Peking Opera performers are frequently involved in directing Cantonese Opera productions. It is in this context that I discuss Yeung Ming's 楊明 (born 1941) "repackaging approach" of the practice of Peking Opera. As an experienced Peking Opera performer who received his professional training on the mainland, Yeung has been rearranging Cantonese Opera plays with the extensive use of Peking Opera devices. In particular, his perception of the latter as artistically superior led him to pay special attention to stylistic modifications, for example the formularization of particular on-stage movements and actions. I will use a case study to illustrate the process, motivation, feasibility, and limitations of this "repackaging approach". I argue that what Yeung does is to preserve and continue Peking Opera disguised as Cantonese Opera. Meanwhile, Peking Opera also entered into the institutional training system of Cantonese Opera. The presence of Peking Opera performers as faculty members in the leading Cantonese Opera training institute, the School of Chinese Opera at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, not only legitimizes the borrowing from the "national drama", but also causes a contestation of the artistic boundary between the "national" and "local" genres.

I finish with a concluding chapter that includes a comparison of Peking Opera in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, as well as some forward-looking thoughts on the main topic.