Cultural Sustainability and Loss in Sydney's Chinese Community

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Introduction

It is often supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.¹

There are many challenges for those who move from one country to settle in another. Since 2001, I have investigated the issue of gain from loss in the Chinese community of Sydney. Noting the wealth of musical genres at both community and professional levels, I decided to focus on three groups that have responded to the issue of cultural loss in diverse, yet similar ways. These groups are the Australian Catholic Chinese Community (ACCC), the Buddha's Light International Association, Sydney (BLIA SYD), and the Australian Chinese Teo Chew Association (ACTCA), three collectivities within the larger Australian Chinese community of Sydney. These ethno-specific organisations comprise Chinese immigrants and their descendents with diverse migration histories and settlement patterns. Countries of origin range from Mainland China, Taiwan and the Hong Kong Semi-Autonomous Region (SAR) to Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia and Timor-Leste. Drawing inspiration from Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and criticism, 1981–1991*, this paper will show that where there might be considerable loss through the migratory process, there is also much that can be gained. My study applies to Chinese Australians who have chosen to create a new home in Australia, rather than diasporans who might be classed as 'cosmopolitans' in their constant movement from country to country.

Migration Blues

It is a well-known fact that migration is often accompanied by feelings of loss at various levels. There is, for instance, financial loss due to an acute change in

¹ Rushdie, Salman 1991, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and criticism, 1981–1991*, Viking and Granta, New York, p. 5.

employment and environment.² Further contestation of traditional values might follow with wives and teenage children finding employment to help support the family.³ There is also an overriding sense of cultural loss experienced by many from different age groups⁴ who may give up on their home culture in a process that sociologist Chan Kwok-Bun terms 'passing'.⁵ The various efforts to cope with this and other complex issues of migration help locate and maintain the identity of diasporans in the process of assimilation and adaptation.⁶ Recreational places where music is performed indeed aid with maintaining a sense of home in the new country. This is revealed in the work of Casey Man Kong Lum⁷ and Frederick Lau,⁸ who have studied with great detail the function of the Chinese karaoke scene in California and Bangkok respectively.

In Chinese communities everywhere, social networks have been established to facilitate a range of religious and voluntary socio-cultural organisations such as schools, religious institutions and the age-old clan system of Chinese societies; much scholarly research has been conducted in this area.⁹ Kuah-Pearce found that this type of social network construction assists migrants in dealing with homesickness and residual feelings of loss in several dimensions.¹⁰

2 Mak, A. S. and Chan, H. 1995, 'Chinese family values in Australia', in R. Hartley (ed.), *Families and Cultural Diversity in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, in association with the Australian Institute of Family Studies, St Leonards, NSW, pp. 70–95.

3 Ibid. Considerable study has been conducted on the viridity of loss experienced by female migrants; see Halfacree and Boyle 1999; Silvey and Lawson 1999. As wives, sisters, aunts and housebound grandmothers, female migrants suffer from the loss of the support network of family and friends (Creese, Dyck and McLaren 1999; Man 1993), and a personal sense of financial security in employment (Bonney and Love 1991; Halfacree 1995).

4 Eng, D. 1999, 'Melancholia/postcoloniality: loss in The Floating Life (sic)', *Qui Parle*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 137–50, 161–4; Stein, B. 1981, 'The refugee experience: defining the parameters of a field study', *International Migration Review*, vol. 15, nos 1–2, pp. 320–30.

5 Chan, Kwok-Bun 2005, *Chinese Identities, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism*, Routledge, London.

6 Kuah-Pearce, K. E. 2006, 'Locating the self in the Chinese diaspora: introductory remarks', *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 30, pp. 217–21, at p. 219.

7 Lum, Casey Man Kong 1996, *In Search of a Voice: Karaoke and the construction of identity in Chinese America*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ.

8 Lau, Frederick 2005, 'Entertaining "Chineseness": Chinese singing clubs in contemporary Bangkok', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 18, pp. 143–66.

9 Fong, E. and Lee, L. [c. 2006], 'Ethnic church attendance and social participation of immigrants in Canada,' in K. E. Kuah-Pearce and E. Hu-Dehart (eds), *Voluntary Organizations in the Chinese Diaspora*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, pp. 253–68; Zhou, M. and Kim, R. Y. [c. 2006], 'The paradox of ethnicization and assimilation: the development of ethnic organizations in the Chinese immigrant community in the United States', in Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart, *Voluntary Organizations in the Chinese Diaspora*, pp. 231–52; Lim, P. P. H. [c. 2006], 'Between tradition and modernity: the Chinese association of Johor Bahru, Malaysia', in Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart, *Voluntary Organizations in the Chinese Diaspora*, pp. 29–52; Low, A. [c. 2006], 'The roles and contributions of Chinese women entrepreneurs in community organizations in Sydney', in Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart, *Voluntary Organizations in the Chinese Diaspora*, pp. 201–30; Lu, X. 2001, 'Bicultural identity development and Chinese community formation: an ethnographic study of Chinese schools in Chicago', *The Howard Journal of Communications*, vol. 12, pp. 203–20; Wang, T. P. 1994, *The Origins of Chinese Kongsis*, Pelanduk Publications, Selangor, Malaysia; Warner, S. R. 1998, 'Immigration and religious communities in the United States', in R. S. Warner and J. G. Wittner (eds), *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious communities and the new immigration*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, pp. 3–36; Yang, F. 1998, 'Tenacious unity in a contentious community: cultural and religious dynamics in a Chinese Christian church', in Warner and Wittner, *Gatherings in Diaspora*, pp. 333–64; Yang, F. 1999, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, assimilation, and adhesive identities*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pa.

10 Kuah-Pearce, 'Locating the self in the Chinese diaspora', p. 217.

Religion and the 'Ethnic Event'

In this paper, I propose that religious centres help instil a similar sense of belonging and future in the minds of migrants as a direct response to cultural loss. As the investigator and a member of the Sydney Chinese community (or one who has come from the same cultural zone), I began my research with the premise that the ethno-specific religious centres of a city are where one is best able to observe diasporans, and analyse ways in which they have come to approach their post-migratory experiences of cultural assimilation or preservation, or both. This perspective is inspired by Herberg's¹¹ study of Judeo-Christian, white (non-Anglophone) immigrants in the United States. Herberg found that, as part of their adjustment process in the pre-1960 period, immigrants would cling to religion while surrendering everything else connected to the mother country. The transmission of religion into later generations remained heavily significant for the purpose of ethnic identification, while languages were often lost within the second generation.¹² Non-white immigrant groups that followed continued to portray the same tendency for preservation of homeland culture in their respective religious communities.¹³

Similarly, religion and recreation, or 'religious recreation' (a term of my own invention), are arenas in which Chinese migrants in Sydney meet to resuscitate their otherwise stagnating cultural selves as part of the renegotiation process in their adopted homelands.¹⁴ Realising that 'where you're at' might be intimately connected to 'where you worship', my conceptual framework lies largely in religion (or religious recreation) as a lens or substrate for examining the Chinese immigrant sense of identity, as it is reflected by religious and musical practices. In order to best understand the notion of identity through music, language and the immigrant experience from this perspective, I will explicate religious gatherings as ethnic events.

Religious activities in migrant communities especially facilitate a number of ethno-specific interactions through which we may view the expression of

11 Herberg, Will 1960, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An essay in American religious sociology*, Doubleday, Garden City, NY.

12 Ibid., pp. 27–9. Language shifts continue to be quite common in many migrant communities where the language of the vernacular is adopted in favour of the mother tongue. See Edwards 1984, 1987; Sebba and Tate 2002; Starks et al 2005.

13 Ebaugh, H. R. F. and Chafetz, J. S. (eds) 2000, *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and adaptations in immigrant congregations*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, Calif., p. 18; Warner, R. S. and Wittner, J. G. (eds) 1998, *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious communities and the new immigration*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia.

14 Amanda Scott (1994, Chinese written language in Hawai'i: the linguistic, social, and cultural significance for immigrant families, PhD thesis, University of Hawai'i, Hawai'i) observed that not all attendees at a Chinese church in Hawai'i attended for the sake of worship. Several in the congregation attended church to meet people of the same ethnicity and to take part in the social activities organised by the church community.

culture, self and identity. Such meetings help migrants deal with feelings of post-migratory loss. Chan Kwok-Bun combines the anthropological theories of Rosaldo,¹⁵ and De Vos and Romanucci-Ross¹⁶ with those of various other theorists to explain that ethnic events involve the thickening of ethnic identity during which traditions are not simply repeated but selectively re-enacted.¹⁷ In the ACCC and BLIA SYD, one can witness both instrumental and expressive ethnicities—terms used by Rosaldo.¹⁸

Marcelo Suárez-Orozco defines expressive ethnicity as involving subjective feelings of common origin and destiny.¹⁹ This is related to shared histories, language, religion and, of course, music. Instrumental ethnicity refers to ethnicity tactically used in identity politics to express self-affirmation and self-advancement. Here, diverse groups use ethnic categories, often with political intervention, for individual strategic purposes.²⁰ In most multicultural settings, we are able to find both instrumental and expressive ethnicities in private and public places such as homes, community centres and halls, or clan associations during festivals, special times of worship and ritualistic holidays.²¹ In such settings, one may often encounter interpersonal relationships with more expressive than instrumental ethnicity at work in order to meet the emotional need in migrants for ‘appreciation, affiliation, harmony and pleasure’.²² This brings to mind the singing of sacred songs in the ACCC and BLIA SYD—re-enacted ritualistic events that have been transformed by conscious choices made in the compositional and performative processes. In the words of Chan Kwok-Bun, ‘[r]ituals not only explain but also affirm group, and therefore personal origin’.²³

Rituals help us understand ‘where we are from’²⁴ and, just as importantly, ‘where we’re at’.²⁵ That is, they help solve the perpetual human inquiry into our origins, our actions and what makes us different.²⁶ A religious ritual in

15 Rosaldo, R. 1988, ‘Ethnic concentrations: the Ilongots in Upland Luzon’, in *Ethnic diversity and the control of natural resources in Southeast Asia*, Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asia No. 32, Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, Edited by A. T. Rambo, K. Gillogly and K. L. Hutterer, Published in cooperation with the East-West Center, Environment and Policy Institute, Honolulu, pp. 161–71.

16 De Vos, G. and Romanucci-Ross, L. 1982, ‘Ethnicity: vessel of meaning and emblem of contrast’, in G. De Vos and L. Romanucci-Ross (eds), *Ethnic Identity: Cultural continuities and change*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, pp. 363–90.

17 See Chan, *Chinese Identities, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism*, p. 18.

18 Rosaldo, ‘Ethnic concentrations’.

19 Suárez-Orozco, M. M. 2000, ‘Everything you ever wanted to know about assimilation but were afraid to ask’, *Daedalus*, vol. 129, no. 4 (Fall), pp. 1–30, at p. 6.

20 Ibid.

21 Chan, *Chinese Identities, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism*, p. 18.

22 Rosaldo, ‘Ethnic concentrations’, p. 161.

23 Chan, *Chinese Identities, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism*, p. 18.

24 De Vos and Romanucci-Ross, ‘Ethnicity’.

25 Ang, I. 2003, ‘Together-in-difference: beyond diaspora, into hybridity’, *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 141–54.

26 Chan, *Chinese Identities, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism*, p. 18.

ethno-specific communities is an exclusive event involving people of the same ethnicity. Religion helps assuage the pain of disassociation in immigrant communities while combating the stressful feeling of loss and a confused sense of identity—a common side effect of the relocation process.²⁷ Whereas religion as an expressive and instrumental ethnic marker has often been thought to bind people of all faiths, in this case it labels Chinese Catholics in Sydney as separate from other communities; however, it is a unifying force in that the people of the ACCC and BLIA SYD are indeed of vastly different histories; each respective religion is capable of bringing people together through ritual and sacred songs. This certainly helps combat the feelings of loss associated with migration.

As noted in my fieldwork observations, the music performed in the two community groups is largely affected by outsiders. De Vos and Romanucci-Ross,²⁸ and Rosaldo²⁹ claim that outsiders, who may be present at ethnic events, have a negative impact on the otherwise enjoyable gathering. Here, outsiders are seen as a threat to individual identities, and a potential hazard to the long-term survival of the community. Contrary to this theory, I find that outsiders do not threaten group survival in the ACCC and BLIA SYD. Rather than viewing outsiders as a threat, these two Chinese religious groups have opened their doors to non-Chinese participants and observers, and extended a general invitation to all those who are interested in attending what are normally ethno-specific events.

The presence of non-Chinese visitors helps sustain a certain local pride in community identity and culture in reaction to feelings of loss from having left the home country. Currently non-Chinese membership is still a minority in BLIA SYD and is practically non-existent in the ACCC; it would be interesting to witness the outcome of this openness towards outsiders in later decades. If the constituency of non-Chinese members grows, it may impact on the changing Chinese identity of this group, but perhaps not in a severe or negative way due to the higher, altruistic aim of both religious organisations, which is to worship as one people regardless of nationality and ethnicity.

The religious organisation of the ACCC and BLIA SYD provides an integrated structure through which people of the same ethnicity may meet and interact. Religious venues in these communities help participants co-celebrate in a kind of nostalgic and imagined homeland.³⁰ In this sense, religion is the key to the reproduction of culture that negotiates difference from the perspective of the

27 See Mitchell, T. 2003, 'Clara Law's *Floating Life* and Hong Kong-Australian "flexible citizenship"', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2 (March), pp. 278–300.

28 De Vos and Romanucci-Ross, 'Ethnicity'.

29 Rosaldo, 'Ethnic concentrations', p. 169.

30 Anderson, B. R. O. 1991, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Second edn, Verso, London and New York.

host society; it is the source of understanding for immigrants and their children coming to terms with their relocation and residual sense of loss.³¹ Here, the following observation made by Timothy Smith on ethnic religion in America several decades ago still holds great relevance for the contemporary Chinese-Australian situation in Sydney:

[L]oneliness, the romanticizing of memories, the guilt for imagined desertion of parents and other relatives, and the search for community and identity in a world of strangers...At such moments, the concrete symbols of order or hope that the village church or priest and the annual round of religious observances had once provided seemed far away; yet the mysteries of individual existence as well as the confusing agonies of anomie cried out for religious explanation. For this reason, I shall argue, migration was often a theologizing experience.³²

Smith asserts that immigrant congregations are great loci of change and not simply transplanted traditional institutions that meet the most current and urgent needs of the community.³³ This point is illustrated by the example of religious leaders addressing the challenges of migration by reinterpreting holy texts to make them more personal and relevant, so that ancient practices may assume a new function.³⁴ Warner maintains that a certain adaptability is required of religion in order for it to survive in the host country because of the importance of religion in the immigrant group, whose cultural situation is now changed drastically and irreversibly due to migration.³⁵ As will be illustrated in the following case studies, music is part and parcel of the transformative process in Chinese religious practice as immigrants of Chinese descent adapt to fit within an Australian context.

Performing Identities

The ACCC and BLIA SYD have, since their respective years of establishment in 1954 and the mid 1980s, provided a refuge for migrants faced with loss and nostalgia for the home country. In order to instil a sense of belonging, while sharing in a common myth, narrative, history and future, members of both communities have created newer genres of devotional music performable within and outside ritual. From fieldwork conducted since 2000, I have collected many hours of sacred music—mostly vocal—that reinforce the theory that identity

31 Smith, T. 1978, 'Religion and ethnicity in America', *American Historical Review*, vol. 83 (December), pp. 155–85; Warner, 'Immigration and religious communities in the United States', p. 16.

32 Smith, 'Religion and ethnicity in America', pp. 1174–5.

33 Ibid., p. 1178.

34 Warner, 'Immigration and religious communities in the United States'.

35 Ibid., p. 20.

formation in migrants and its expression through music are intrinsically linked to religion and religious practices. This repertory of sacred singing in the two communities ranges from traditional to recently composed sacred items in English, Cantonese and Mandarin.

The ACCC reflects the secularisation of ritual music encouraged by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) through the promotion of the vernacular (or the 'vulgar tongues') and worldwide enculturation of the liturgy.³⁶ In the ACCC, children are given the catechism in English, and often sing English hymns. The Cantonese hymn 'Our Lady of China' is very popular, but of great popular interest in recent years is Eddie Ho's bilingual hymn 'Jesus Forever Reigns'. At important functions, the Mass becomes a trilingual affair, with Mass Ordinaries sung in English and a selection of readings, hymns and prayers in Mandarin, Cantonese and English to cater for non-Chinese dignitaries and visitors at important community events.

A similar situation of secularisation is found in BLIA SYD, although pop hymns and Buddhist hip-hop are not often performed within the Buddhist Mass, or 'Dharma Function', itself. 'Harmonise' and 'Stars and Clouds' are popular, newly composed English 'hymns' written in rock-ballad style with matching hand gestures. BLIA SYD is an organisation well known for its political aptitude. Public functions are always attended by local Members of Parliament, dignitaries from the police force and other influential members of society. In 2004, the NSW Police Band played the well-known 'Ode to the Triple Gem', written and arranged by the Order's Grand Master, Hsing Yun. The community, and its sister communities throughout Australia, strives to present a harmonious, environmentally concerned and Australian Chinese image. Ritual is accompanied by traditional music taken from the homeland in the native tongue, while official prayers have since the 1980s been recited in Mandarin and then English.

36 For more on enculturation, particularly in Chinese Catholicism, see Ng, Nicholas 2009, 'Domesticating the foreign: singing salvation through translation in the Australian Catholic Chinese community', in Amy Chan and Alistair Nelson (eds), *Sounds in Translation*, ANU E Press, Canberra, pp. 111–44.

In both communities, religion and music, in addition to language, help differentiate one's self from the multicultural milieu, and as an effective strategy for handling loss. Through the substrate of the ethnic ritual, the sacred song of the two sub-communities is a vehicle 'by which people can share emotions, intentions and meanings'.³⁷ With advances in music technology, individuals may extend the bonding process outside the sacred space of the church or temple to public places and even at home. Despite the many differences between the two subgroups, we may find in the ACCC and BLIA SYD the preservation of culture on the one hand and on the other the attempt to modernise due to the pressures of migration. There is also the conscious, or perhaps not so conscious, choice of maintaining both old and new in the hybrid combination of homeland traditions and modern practices as a means for adaptation without allowing the past to fade into obscurity. The catalyst for such culturally revitalising and what we might call a forward-moving, progressive attitude is in part the need to resolve the sense of displacement that is part of the migrant's diaspora experience.³⁸

Through religion and various socio-cultural practices including the making of music, Australian-Chinese immigrants, in a similar way to the immigrants of America, keep themselves and their offspring apart and distinct from other migrant groups and the dominant Anglo-Australian culture. Such communal bonding is expressed in certain conscious choices made in the preparation and performance of music within an ethno-specific religious framework. Religion offers solace and relief for migrants who strive to preserve old cultural ways. The divergent socio-cultural histories and multiple levels of settlement contained within the ACCC and BLIA SYD complicate this with a homogenising process that takes place with the dominant groups forming the establishment culture. There is in addition great emphasis on the revitalisation of religion, music and other cultural elements amongst the migrants I have observed. These changes help them to better adapt and even assimilate to the host country.

'Happy Hybridity' versus Cultural Stagnation

Many of the ACCC and BLIA SYD community members I have spoken to do not focus much on what they have lost apart from an occasional longing for certain aspects of old homeland life. Conversations on loss often revolve around food (such as the quality of fish balls), and on certain social conventions that migrants find unusual or outlandish in Australia. With the annual Chinese New

37 Hargreaves, D. J., Miell, D. and MacDonald, R. 2002, 'What are musical identities, and why are they important?', in R. MacDonald, D. J. Hargreaves and D. Miell (eds), *Musical Identities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 1–20, at p. 1.

38 Hall, S. 1993, 'Cultural identity and diaspora', in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A reader*, Columbia University Press, New York, pp. 392–403.

Year celebrations in Sydney becoming more and more prominent and integrated into mainstream culture, and with greater representation of the Chinese or Asian face in Australian popular and high-art culture, one might contest the notion that the Chinese in Australia are faced with any loss at all (see Figure 1). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australians claiming to have part or full Chinese ancestry form the largest migrant group after German Australians; this category numbers 866 200 people and is 4.3 per cent of the recorded overall population.³⁹ Mandarin and other Asian languages are now gaining popularity over the traditional French and German taught at primary school level.

Figure 1 Famous faces—Australian Chinese celebrities (top row, from left): Senator Penny Wong, Poh Ling Yeow, Lawrence Leung; bottom row, from right: Annette Shun Wah, William Yang, Jeff Fatt

Source: Image courtesy of author

The loss we could focus on exists in traditional elements that the ACCC and BLIA SYD might filter out in their ongoing negotiation of culture and identity. But where things are discarded, there is always the creation of something new. Here, we approach a constantly negotiated balance between parent cultures

³⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, *Reflecting a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census, 2012–2013*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, viewed 9 September 2012, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features902012-2013>>

in a kind of deliberate 'happy hybridity', wherein ethnic actors choose which cultural elements to infuse or develop and which to discard.⁴⁰ This led to many interesting results, particularly in food and popular culture: Australia may be the only country in the world where one can buy unusually large and deep-fried Chinese pork dumplings known as dim sims from suburban Lebanese-run milk bars.

There is one community I have observed showing clear signs of cultural stagnation. Sandwiched between a large mansion and the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in the Sydney suburb of Cabramatta, the Australian Chinese Teo Chew Association (ACTCA) is a meeting place for diasporic Chinese hailing from Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Mainland China and various South-East Asian countries. Their common links are the Teo Chew dialect and culture, which originate in the locality of Shantou in Guangdong Province.⁴¹ Figures 2–5 suggest a thriving traditional community with a strong political presence in wider Australian society. The karaoke club, dancing group and integrated kung-fu and lion-dancing school are attended by many, and YouTube clips⁴² reveal the online popularity of lion dancing—a cultural art form in great demand throughout the larger Chinese community, with its popular appeal to both young and old. Since the 1990s, the ACTCA lion-dance troupe has been a regular performance act booked by BLIA SYD for functions held at the mother temple of Wollongong and in Sydney.

40 Ang, 'Together-in-difference'; Lo, Jacqueline 2000, 'Beyond happy hybridity: performing Asian Australian identities', in Ien Ang, Sharon Chalmers, Lisa Law and Mandy Thomas (eds), *Alter/Asians: Asian-Australian identities in art, media and popular culture*, Pluto Press, Sydney, pp. 152–68.

41 Also known as Swatao in the Teo Chew dialect, Shantou is one of two prefecture-level cities in the Chaoshan cultural region where the Teo Chew dialect is natively spoken.

42 See, for instance, a performance in Darling Harbour during the 2010 Buddha Birthday celebrations: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dKsiraWvFc> (viewed 3 March 2011).

Figure 2 Equipment used in Chinese lion dancing

Source: Image courtesy of author

Figure 3 Community Karaoke machine

Source: Image courtesy of author

Figure 4 Chinese chess played by elderly members

Source: Image courtesy of author

Figure 5 Instruments used in *Chaoju Dasi*

Source: Image courtesy of author

Meanwhile, the ACTCA hosts and produces the annual *Chaoju Dasi* (Teo Chew operatic production), which involves local performers and specially invited guests from Shantou. An ensemble of live musicians accompanies operatic arias from epic legends and heartbreaking romances. At first glance, this genre appears to be flourishing as a traditional art form. On closer examination, the event only happens once a year, and although certain members of the community take vocal lessons and study their arias with great dedication, they are but a few such enthusiasts. The core ensemble of the instrumental music tradition consists of a small handful of elderly men who meet to play chess on Mondays with a general rehearsal on Wednesdays. These are old, tired and worn-out musicians; it is not uncommon for ill health to prevent them from rehearsing. Although their passion for music remains, the natural tuning, antiquated folk instruments and nasal vocal timbres do not resonate at all with young Teo Chew Australians. The plethora of operatic stories, although archetypal in essence, are filled with musical imagery and metaphors from an irrelevant imperial past that are of little significance and interest to those who prefer singing karaoke and listening to popular Chinese or Western music. The end of this particular tradition is almost certain.

Conclusion

In many migration stories of the present day, diasporans are often faced with considerable cultural, social and personal losses in the choice between preservation of their home culture, which may inevitably lead to cultural stagnation, and complete assimilation and surrender to the ways of the new country. As ethnic actors, however, they also have the liberty to move 'in between' these two options, thereby obtaining something new, as suggested in the opening quotation by Salman Rushdie. I find that this phenomenon relates very much to my research to date with various activities of musical composition and performance where the issue of cultural preservation versus loss is often of significant consequence.

The concomitant negotiation and renegotiation of identity, whether a conscious or a subconscious process, are intrinsically connected to the issue of loss. To combat this issue, ethno-specific religious and cultural meeting places have become important loci for ethnic events that evoke memories from the distant past. In addition, these gatherings celebrate what diasporans have gained in the new country, thereby helping them cope with loss on various levels in the renegotiation of identity. The ACCC and BLIA SYD have been highly active in the revitalisation of their culture with the production of new hymnody that is truly local and expressive of the status of community members as new Australians. This has been achieved through the adoption of modern musical genres and the

English language. Yet, traditional rites and ritual music are retained to preserve the memory of the past. In the ACTCA, popular cultural forms such as karaoke and the lion dance continue to flourish, while the traditional Teo Chew opera has been preserved as an antiquated art form that will survive only as long as its fast-ageing practitioners.

It is interesting to note that in both the ACCC and the BLIA SYD, a certain hegemony prevails in the outward elements of the dominant culture that are more emphatically experienced. In the case of the ACCC, the Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong community officiates over the slightly more repressed but growing Mandarin presence. In BLIA SYD, the cultural aesthetic of the transplanted Taiwanese reigns. Despite the highly diverse demographic constituency of both these organisations, community members are able to congregate mentally, physically and sonically in a haven of creativity and vitality where issues of loss become almost irrelevant as they celebrate what they have gained into the twenty-first century and beyond.