

Ng, Wing Chung, University of Texas at San Antonio, United States

Transnational Theater and its Local Niche: Cantonese Opera in Early 20th Century North America

In the 1920s, as the United States and Canadian governments took their exclusion policies against Chinese immigration to a new level, Chinatown theater entered a period of unprecedented growth. The extensive travel of Cantonese opera troupes and actors across the continent was demonstrative of a vibrant and defiant transnationalism that wove together myriad business, social and personal networks among Chinese communities in both countries - both with one another and with their counterparts back in South China. Equally instrumental to the vitality of Chinatown theater was its success in acquiring a local niche by embedding itself as a cultural institution within the migrant communities in alignment with various established "ethnic" organizations. The theater further afforded the migrants a vital social space to express and cultivate solidarity and to negotiate issues of power and identity.