

You Will Look Cute and Earn Lots of Money:

Examining Variable Authenticities of Lion Dance

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This paper explores how performers of southern Chinese lion dance in Singapore construct lion dance as being an authentic, socially essential aspect of Singaporean Chinese culture to different audiences. The ability of lion dance performers to generate value in their performances which lets them be accepted by different groups of people is significant given social stigma against lion dance from its associations with gang violence which would otherwise delegitimize their performances. Referring to Peirce's definition of signs as signals referring to objects which interpreters assign to different concepts, I argue that performers communicate authenticity to viewers by manipulating the display of signs recognized as signifiers of authentic lion dance to varying degrees by different audiences. Such signs include gestures by performers in the lion costume, the sequence of accompanying percussion music, and the symbolic arrangement of props.

Fieldwork was conducted during three performances by the Kong Chow Wui Koon Martial Arts and Lion Dance Troupe held on 21 February 2018 to see how each sign was emphasized or downplayed to communicate authenticity to different viewers. The organization was chosen for the strong association with traditional Cantonese martial arts and heritage preservation, which gives troupe members a stronger vested interest in expressing the authenticity of their performances. Martial, ritual and performative characteristics are identified in not just aspects of the performance but also the embodied habitus cultivated by performers. How these characteristics are evoked in different signs is understood differently by different audiences, letting performers communicate the legitimacy of their performance in the convergence of different perspectives of authenticity. Simultaneously, the conscious performance of signs others recognized as authentic bolstered performers' self-concept of their authenticity as traditional Cantonese.

Introduction

The clamor of lion dances during Chinese New Year celebrations is considered an iconic element of Chinese culture in Singapore. However, representations of lion dance as an innocuous cultural icon in national discourse on cultural heritage contrast with public knowledge of its historical associations with gang violence.¹ Given this lingering stigma, this paper aims to investigate how performers construct lion dance as a socially acceptable, essential element of Chinese culture. In this paper, I argue that performers use different signs to appear authentic to audiences with different expectations of what an authentic lion dance should look like.

I will define ‘authenticity’ as the perception of essentialized cultural characteristics in an object. I will also use Charles Peirce’s definition of ‘signs’ as signals referring to objects which evoke in an interpreter a certain concept.² In lion dance, these signs consist of props, costumes, and dance movements which convey authenticity to performers and audiences through martial, ritual and performative characteristics. Performers also cultivate an embodied martial habitus which shapes their perception of their own authenticity. However, different audiences have varying expectations of an authentic lion dance and different extents of knowledge of the signs used in performances. The gap between audience’s and performers’ knowledge allows the latter to use different signs to achieve ritual efficacy and performative functions recognized by the audience while cementing their self-concept of authenticity. As different audiences recognize authenticity in different ways, constructions of authenticity within a given performance vary depending on its viewers.

To demonstrate this point, I will use fieldnotes and informal conversations with interlocutors gained from my experience as a performer for the Kong Chow Wui Koon (henceforth “KCWK”) Martial Arts and Lion Dance Troupe from March 2017 to May 2018. Three of the troupe’s performances during Chinese New Year on 21 February 2018 will be analyzed. First, I will provide some background on lion dance. Then I will elaborate on the troupe’s background and activities to give context to performers’ activities and goals. The martial, ritual and performative elements in the troupe’s practices will then be identified and analyzed to see how they signify authenticity. The interaction between audience’s and performers’ ideas of authentic lion dance let performers not only fulfil expectations of lion dance as something distinctively Chinese, but also validate the troupe’s identification as traditional Cantonese.

¹ Rachel Lau, “Two Brothers Fight to Save Lion Dance From Its Checkered Past.” *Rice Media*, 17 February 2018, <http://ricemedia.co/two-brothers-save-lion-dance-checkered-past/>.

² Charles Peirce, *The Essential Peirce, vol. 2: Selected Philosophical Writings (1883-1913)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 478.

Background on Lion Dance

A lion dance consists of two people in a paper-mâché costume dancing in response to musical patterns played by a drum, gong and cymbals. Additional characters like a ‘big-head Buddha’ occasionally guide the lion during complex performances. For this paper I will focus on southern Chinese, also known as Cantonese, lion dance as that is the main form of lion dance practiced in Singapore.

Cantonese lion dance was promoted during the Qing dynasty as a way for anti-government revolutionaries to spread secret messages.³ It is distinctive for its *cai qing* performances, where lettuce is shredded and thrown out towards the audience. The act is said to symbolize vanquishing oppressors in the government from the homophone of the word for ‘lettuce’ with dynasty name ‘Qing’.⁴ There are two regional variants of Cantonese lion dance, *Futsan* and *Hoksan*, which differ in the designs of lion heads used and style of dance movements.⁵ *Futsan* lion dancing emphasises low stances and aggressive movement, having originated as a way for rebels to conceal their martial arts training.⁶ *Hoksan* style, which includes influences from northern Chinese lion dance, involves lighter and more acrobatic movements.⁷

Lion dances are also believed to have an exorcistic function. In each performance, an arrangement of food items collectively known as a *qing* is rearranged by the lion into auspicious characters. The re-arrangement of the food items is believed to usher positive energy to the performance venue. As such, lion dances are frequently requested by households and businesses to invoke blessings. The different parts of a lion head are also ascribed different functions for combating evil, such as the mirror on its forehead which reflects bad energy, and its horn with which the lion attacks malevolent spirits.

Nevertheless, lion dances are sometimes infamous for being associated with violence and illegal activity. Lion dances were used by martial arts schools, ranging from schools in southern China in the 1920s⁸ to New York in the 1980s⁹, to assert their power. Physical fights would break out between rival troupes in response to one party’s encroachment on another’s territory.¹⁰ Lion dance troupes were also notorious for having members linked to illegal

³ Anita Slovenz-Low, *Lions in the Streets: A Performance Ethnography of Lion Dancing in New York City’s Chinatown* (New York: New York University, 1994), 189-191.

⁴ Colin McGuire, “Music of the Martial Arts: Rhythm, Movement and Meaning in a Chinese Canadian Kung Fu Club” (PhD diss., York University, 2014), 85-86.

⁵ McGuire, “Music of the Martial Arts”, 87-89.

⁶ McGuire, 90.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 88-90.

⁸ Benjamin Judkins and Jon Nielson, *The Creation of Wing Chun: A Social History of Southern Chinese Martial Arts* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2015), 123.

⁹ Anita Slovenz, ““The Year is A Wild Animal: Lion Dancing in Chinatown”, *The Drama Review*, vol. 31, 3 (1987), 78.

¹⁰ Slovenz, ““The Year is A Wild Animal: Lion Dancing in Chinatown”, 78-79.

organizations like street gangs in Manhattan¹¹ and triads in Singapore.¹² In Malaysia, performances used to occasionally be banned by state governments during the Chinese New Year for fear that they would be used by secret societies as a cover for extortion.¹³ Though lion dance troupes in Singapore no longer have ties to secret societies, lion dance performers remain persistently stereotyped as gangsters or school dropouts.¹⁴

Kong Chow Wui Koon Martial Arts & Lion Dance Troupe

Kong Chow Wui Koon is a Cantonese clan association founded in 1840 by immigrants from Xinhui district in Guangdong province.¹⁵ Its lion dance and martial arts troupe was founded in 1939 and is considered one of Singapore's oldest lion dance troupes.¹⁶ Martial arts and lion dance practices are held on Friday and Saturday nights respectively at the association headquarters' fourth floor practice area. All the troupe's members are volunteers,¹⁷, consisting mostly of Cantonese-speaking Chinese men between their 40s to 70s whose ancestors were clan association members. Younger performers are largely young Chinese males aged between 13 to 19, with three female performers (including myself) aged between 20 to 30. Most of the young men perform for other lion dance troupes and seldom appear at Saturday practices except for the weeks preceding large-scale performances. Most of the younger male performers volunteer because they have older male family members already involved with troupe activities.

The KCWK troupe's website cites the "Cantonese Foshan [*Futsan*] Lion [as] the representative of all Southern Lions".¹⁸ Nevertheless, *Hoksan* lion heads are the most commonly-used for performances, followed by a hybrid known as *Fut-hok* which blends physical characteristics of both types. Emphasis is placed by lion dance instructors on low stances and powerful movements explicitly linked to martial arts. The troupe's website explicitly states that "Cantonese lion dancing attaches importance to horse stances and various martial arts techniques as its foundations",¹⁹ and that "performing a traditional lion dance for more than thirty-minutes is a true test of a practitioner's kungfu".²⁰ Older members described how in the

¹¹ Slovenz, 78.

¹² Lau, "Two Brothers Fight to Save Lion Dance From Its Checkered Past."

¹³ "LION DANCE: NO BAN IN CAPITAL", *The Straits Times*, 7 February 1959, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19590207-1.2.105?ST=1&AT=search&k=lion%20dance&P=2&Display=0&filterS=0&QT=lion,dance&oref=artic>.

¹⁴ Lau, "Two Brothers Fight to Save Lion Dance From Its Checkered Past."

¹⁵ Kong Chow Wui Koon, *Xin jia po jian guo 50 ji gang zhou hui guan 175 zhou nian* (n.p., 2015), 30.

¹⁶ Victor Loh, "The endangered lion in the Lion City," *AsiaOne*, January 23 2017. <http://www.asiaone.com/singapore/endangered-lion-lion-city>.

¹⁷ Loh, "The endangered lion in the Lion City."

¹⁸ Kungfu-Longshi, "Lion & Dragon Dance Curriculum". Accessed 5 May 2018. <https://www.kungfu-longshi.com/longshi-curriculum>

¹⁹ Kungfu-Longshi, "Lion & Dragon Dance Curriculum".

²⁰ Ibid.

past they were only allowed to begin practicing lion dance after several years of martial arts training. While this restriction has been relaxed in the 21st century the head lion dance coach, Mr. Leong, makes novices attend at least one Friday martial arts practice. Performers are taught Cantonese kung fu styles like Hung Gar, which also originated in Guangdong²¹ and had been taught in the clan association since the early 20th century.²² Currently only two performers attend both Friday and Saturday practices.

Some of the instructors and older troupe members referenced an essential connection between martial arts and lion dance. Mr. Leong even claims that lion dance “is a type of martial art”. While no other performer I spoke to characterized lion dance as a martial art, middle-aged and elderly performers refer to each other as “comrades in the *wulin*” (*wulin tongbei*), even when few of them continue to regularly practice the martial arts they learned at the clan association in their youth. The *wulin* is a term used in martial arts fiction to refer to an exclusive community of martial artists. A female performer who had trained with the troupe for 15 years stated “the [performers’] martial arts foundation” is what distinguishes the quality of “traditional” lion dance groups like the KCWK troupe from the more common for-profit “commercial” groups.



Figure 1: (from left to right) *Futsan*, *Fut-hok* and *Hoksan* lion heads used for the clan association’s 177th anniversary performance in June 2017. The year is incorrectly cited as ‘117’ in the picture’s original subtitle.

Source: Chit Wei Keith Tan, 2018. Digital image. Available from: Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/pg/KCWKSingapore/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1650572351728770 (accessed 3 May 2018).

Lion dance performances are commissioned by clan members for events like shop openings, clan anniversaries, and folk religion ceremonies. Mr. Leong will meet the host to decide on the cost, props involved and sequence of the performance. Before leaving the

²¹ Judkins and Nielson, *The Creation of Wing Chun: A Social History of Southern Chinese Martial Arts*, 80-81.

²² Singapore Kong Chow Wui Koon, “Our Lineage”. Accessed 5 May 2018. <http://www.kongchow.org/index.php/en/lineage>

headquarters on most performance days, the lion will perform ceremonial bows before the altar on the fourth floor and ancestral tablets on the floor below. Weapons typically used for martial arts demonstrations are loaded onto the back of the lorry which performers travel in and occasionally used to decorate the sides of the hand-pulled cart used to carry the percussions. When the troupe is approaching or leaving a performance venue, members will play the percussions loudly from the back of the lorry to signal their arrival or departure.



Figure 2: A hand-pulled cart for the percussions used in lion dance performances featuring weapons inserted into notches along its side outside the clan association headquarters. 2 April 2017.

The altar on the fourth floor houses several Chinese deities and was constructed on following the building's renovation in 2013 as some members desired a space for worship. The largest statue is that of Guandi, a general who lived during the Warring States who is widely revered as a martial deity by the Cantonese. Among the clan association members, Guandi is referred to affectionately as 'Grandpa Guandi' (*Guandi yeye*). Many members will offer incense to Guandi's image each time they arrive at the building. Guandi's birthday celebration, typically held between late July to early August, is one of the most important occasions commemorated by the clan association. Besides commissioning lion and dragon dance performances, a table of special offerings will be prepared for the deity and the clan association's board of directors will lead clan association members in collective worship before the altar.



Figure 3: Special offerings being prepared for Guandi's birthday celebration on the fourth floor of the Kong Chow Wui Koon headquarters. Guandi is the red-faced deity in the background. Source: Helen Tai. 5 August 2018. Digital image. Available from: Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1892092534162502&set=pcb.1892095060828916&type=3&theater> (accessed 2 December 2018).

In April and October each year, the troupe will travel to the Peck San Theng columbarium to offer performances to deities and clan members' ancestors. The dates are said to coincide with the Qingming and Chongyang festivals when one is expected to pay respect to deceased forebears. These performances exclusively use newly-made lion heads. Only the lions are permitted to approach the altars directly. When approaching a deity's altar, the lions will perform a series of kneeling 'bows' in addition to the standing 'bows' typically done to bless building entrances and shopfronts.

The troupe's activities have been framed as a means of preserving traditional culture by officials in both the clan association and the government. In a foreword in Mandarin written for the association's 175th anniversary book, the President of the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, Mr. Chua Thian Poh, raised the preservation of "folk practices" like lion dance as signs that the clan has "taken responsibility for promoting Chinese values and traditions".²³ The clan's practice of martial arts and lion dance are described as useful in "not only strengthening the body and defending oneself, [but also] promoting team spirit, protecting the country and understanding Chinese history and culture".²⁴ The clan association's third floor was converted into a lion dance gallery with the opening of the Kong Chow Wui Koon Cultural Center in 2013 to highlight the history of Cantonese migrants to Singapore and promote

²³ Kong Chow Wui Koon, *Xin jia po jian guo 50 ji gang zhou hui guan 175 zhou nian* (N.p., 2015), 4.

²⁴ Kong Chow Wui Koon, *Xin jia po jian guo 50 ji gang zhou hui guan 175 zhou nian*, 10.

traditional Chinese culture.²⁵ In addition, the troupe is frequently requested to perform for state-sponsored heritage preservation events like the Singapore Heritage Festival.

Lion Dance's Martial, Ritual and Performative Characters

Martial characteristics are emphasized in the KCWK troupe's activities through the physical skill demanded of performers, allowing lion dance to become an expression of strength and authenticity. Power is also represented in the way the troupe chooses to present itself, such as by lining the cart carrying the instruments with weapons. The power and aggression associated with martial arts is channeled into lion dance as expressiveness which legitimizes the skill of its performers. In his research with a Canadian lion dance troupe, Colin McGuire explores how practicing Chinese martial arts is used to inculcate a "kung fu habitus" that not only structures performers' movements, but also lets them physically reproduce Chinese culture.²⁶ Similarly, the martial foundation inculcated in KCWK's performers by Cantonese martial arts is seen to legitimize them in performing a traditional version of the dance that harkens to its martial roots. As performances perceive lion dance as having an essential connection to or even being synonymous with martial arts, versions of lion dance which are not based on martial arts will be seen as less authentic. To performers, their kung fu experience bolsters the dance's martial character and makes them and their performance authentic. This authentication also occurs even when the troupe appears to deviate from essential elements of southern Chinese lion dance, like by not using *Futsan* heads for most performances. The authenticity the troupe derives from their martial practice is perceived as not just present in their performances even when performers themselves might have limited martial arts experience, but also present in performers' bodies which leads them to perceive themselves and fellow performers as members of a martial community.

A ritual character is also seen in lion dance through the interaction of the lion with its props to engender spiritual efficacy. The physical change the lion produces in the props within the *qing* signals to the audience how the lion is materializing the blessings they desire and makes the dance an object of spiritual power. The lion's visible presence in religious events like ancestral worship rites also consolidates troupe members' cultural identity through their involvement in important social rituals. In her ethnography of New York lion dancers Slovenz highlighted how lion dance's ritual power "derives its force from the larger ceremonial life that uses the Lion²⁷" such as birthdays and weddings. Expanding on Slovenz's observation, I posit

²⁵ Ibid., 33.

²⁶ McGuire, "Music of the Martial Arts", 155-175.

²⁷ Anita Slovenz, "'The Year is a Wild Animal': Lion Dancing in Chinatown", 81.

that the ritual force evoked by the lion dance is cemented by the troupe's participation in larger social rituals. The troupe's respect, signified by gestures like bowing and using only new lion heads when performing for deities, let them be legitimized by audiences who recognize how they honor behavioral standards expected of members of the local Chinese community.

The martial, ritual and cultural associations tied to lion dance also let the lion dance gain a performative character when audiences see it as signifying various aspects of 'Chinese-ness'. For instance, the frequent performance of lion dance at events considered distinctively Chinese, like New Year celebrations, allow it to become a metonymy for Chinese culture. KCWK's involvement in activities related to cultural preservation enhances lion dancers' representation of not just performing Chinese culture in lion dance itself, but an exclusively traditional version of lion dance constructed by a martial habitus and the troupe's long history. Depending on their knowledge of the signs used in performances, audiences have different expectations of what an authentic performance is. In the subsequent section I will provide an account of three performances from my field notes to see how martial, ritual and performative elements of lion dance are variously evoked to audiences in different performance settings in ways that authenticate the KCWK performers.

Account of Performances

Around 25 members, led by Mr. Leong, were involved in the performances, a number considered 'small' by my interlocutors. The total included four male members of a Thai lion dance troupe aged between 13 to 16 who had come to Singapore by Mr. Leong's request to perform as the lion since the younger Singaporean performers were at school. Mr. Leong told me that he had taught them "lion dance and other martial arts." The Thai performers spoke exclusively Thai and only recognized the Chinese characters which were used in performances. Due to my relative inexperience, I was allowed only to play the cymbals that day. Around eight others also took turns playing drums, gongs and cymbals. A middle-aged Thai woman who accompanied the Thai youths performed as a Fortune God mascot. Though Mr. Leong had informed the members that we were to leave the headquarters at 12.30 p.m., the troupe left an hour later as some came late. The lorry was loaded with two regular-sized *Fut-hok* lion costumes, one smaller costume for child performers, weapons, and a full percussion set consisting of a drum, a gong and six pairs of cymbals. I asked one of my interlocutors, a man in his late 60s known as 'Uncle Robin', why the weapons were necessary. He replied that the weapons wouldn't be used. The usual bows to the association's Guandi altar and the ancestral tablets were not performed before the performers left the building.

The first performance was at the Mun San Fook Tuck Chee temple. The main building in the temple complex houses altars to the Taoist deity Tua Pek Kong and the bodhisattva Guanyin.²⁸ Its courtyard doubled as a practice area for the Sar Kong Mun San Fook Tuck Chee Lion Dance Troupe, which many of KCWK's older volunteers also travelled with. When we arrived, the Fortune God mascot was asked to stay on the lorry while the rest disembarked. A crowd of around twelve devotees and one of the temple caretakers stood aside to watch us perform. Two lions were used to signal the troupe's arrival to the deities. After bowing before the main building entrance, the lions entered the building to perform standing and kneeling bows to each of the altars. As the drummer could not see the lions inside, one of the older members stood beside the entrance signaling to the drummer which patterns to play to coordinate the lion's movements. A shorter dance was later staged at the temple courtyard with one lion where some oranges, a pomelo, and a leek were rearranged into the character *fu* (prosperity). Mr Leong replaced the performer of the lion tail during the performance to take over the re-arrangement of the props used in the *qing*. Extra oranges were provided, which the lion tossed out towards the temple caretaker.

Subsequently we visited a branch of the Mala Wang chain of Sichuanese hotpot restaurants at Geylang at around 3 p.m. Besides the store manager, her twin grand-daughters and the restaurant's staff, only one table had customers. Immediately Mr Leong asked for the weapons to be placed onto the hand-pulled cart carrying the drum. I asked Uncle Robin why the weapons were needed, and he replied that it was to make the drum "look prettier" (*geng piao liang*). The addition of weapons to the cart was ignored by the audience at the restaurant. A *qing* consisting of lettuce, a pomelo, oranges, leeks and a steamed cake had been left outside the storefront. Two lions were selected for the initial part of the performance involving bows to the storefront. Before the customary bows, the troupe walked to the building of a Buddhist study association next door to bow towards the entrance. Later, the lion paused for pictures with the proprietor's grand-daughters, and as the main performance ensued, the Fortune God mascot stood around to take pictures with the audience. The performance concluded with one lion shredding the lettuce and throwing it out towards the storefront before re-arranging the rest of the food items into the character *fu*. The workers emerged from the kitchen to watch the performance and rushed to pick up and keep scraps of lettuce during the performance.

²⁸ Mayo Martin, "Of coolies and fire dragons: Unearthing Kallang's hidden gem", *Channel NewsAsia*, 16 February 2018. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/lifestyle/of-coolies-and-fire-dragons-unearthing-kallang-s-hidden-gem-9939564>



Figure 4: The arrangement of items in the *qing* used for the performance at Mala Wang restaurant before and after the performance. 21 February 2018.

The troupe arrived at 7 p.m. for the day’s final performance at the Owen Seafood restaurant at Bukit Timah for a gala dinner by a social club. I was ordered by Mr. Leong to perform as the tail for the child-sized lion, with the youngest of the Thai performers performing as the head. He said to me, “You will look cute and would get a lot of money”. He instructed me to walk between tables and stop for the guests to give us red packets of money without needing to follow the music. Two other members were requested to perform in the ‘big-head Buddha’ role for the first time that day. All the lions performed the standing and kneeling bows before the restaurant’s Guandi altar before proceeding upstairs to the performance venue. All the lions, the Fortune God mascot and the ‘big-head Buddha’ figures walked around while guests gave them red packets.

As the performer of the lion tail, I was required to move in a crouch while leaning forward at the waist until my upper body was parallel to the ground. I also had to tuck my face in towards my chest so that the outline of my head could not be seen under the costume. In this position I could not see anything except my feet and those of the person in front of me. Resisting my physical discomfort, I tried to move in time with the performer at the head as we were led around the room. I felt light taps and strokes along the sides of my head, which I knew from experience came from people reaching out to touch the sides of the costume. From conversations with audience members of previous performances, I knew that audience members saw touching the lion costume as a means to gain good luck.

After some time, we were ushered to a platform at the front of the room. An emcee encouraged the diners to give generously as the troupe was “preserving traditional culture”. To my chagrin, he also told the audience that “the performers of the small lion are actually children” and praised us for working hard by participating in traditional cultural activities instead of staying indoors playing video games.

Discussion

Both ritual and performative signs appeared to have been evoked in the first all three performances. Ritual signs included bowing towards deities and storefronts and the indirect invocation of blessing through the re-arrangement of items in the *qing*. Performative signs include the physical act of donning the lion dance costumes, playing music, as well as crowd interaction by walking around tables or taking pictures with audience members. The only time an explicitly martial sign was seen to have been used was when the weapons were added next to the drum during the performance at Mala Wang.

The lack of a tangible performance of a martial sign would reflect how for the performers, an authentic martial character of lion dance is already expressed within the performance and reinforced by performers. To performers, a martial character was already present in each performance, given how the lion dance which the KCWK troupe practiced had accrued martial characteristics through its association with performers who had martial arts training. The lion dance's martial characteristics would not have been apparent or important to many audiences, depending on their knowledge of KCWK's history and their expectations of the performance. Nevertheless, performers already viewed the lion dance they practiced as authenticated through performers' martial habitus and the troupe's history of martial practice. As martial signs of authenticity were already viewed by performers as being encoded in and expressed in the act of performance, performers did not consider displaying explicitly martial traits to be necessary in authenticating their performance to an audience who would not recognize these traits' presence or importance. The subtlety of the performance's martial characteristics also downplays the visibility of martial signs to the audience which could emphasize a connection between lion dance and martial violence.

The intricacy of each performance also appears to have reflected different audience's expectations and the different signs through which they recognized authentic lion dance. The performance at Owen Seafood, which simply involved walking around in costume, was the least complex and could easily have been performed by untrained individuals. Nevertheless, the diners recognized the performance as a display of traditional culture, even when some of the performers were not Chinese and the performance lacked the technical finesse demanded of most other lion dances. This reflects how they recognized the presence of lion dance costume and music as already constituting a performance and the only signs needed to signify a lion dance. For the audience at Owen Seafood, it was sufficient that the performance resembled lion dance outwardly.

Audiences at Mala Wang and Mun San Fook Tuck Chee temple, however, appeared to demand not just outward signs of cultural performance but also performance skill. The staff at

Mala Wang expected the lion to bless the store. As such, the re-arrangement of the food items in the *qing* into an auspicious character was essential as it reflected the lion's expected role in providing blessings. To them, an authentic lion dance would involve the correct gestures, like bowing to the storefront, and generate the appropriate characters from the props to appear truly legitimate. Another set of gestures which convey skill is the sequence and movements expected of a lion in paying respect to deities. This would have been important to the devotees and caretaker of the Mun San Fook Tuck Chee temple, for whom honoring the deities would have been important. Thus, to the audience at the temple, an authentic lion dance consists of gestures which showed the appropriate respect to deities. The complexity of the later performance at the temple was also a concern for the caretaker insofar as it reflected the technical prowess he expected to see given his extensive experience with another lion dance troupe. This shows how the audiences at Mala Wang and the temple used legitimacy derived from skill as another way to authenticate a lion dance performance.

Consequently, both performing and non-performing troupe members' reactions in each setting reflected their understanding of the expectations which would be imposed on them by the audience. Demands of technical skill in responding to the musical patterns were virtually absent from the performance at Owen Seafood, allowing Mr. Leong to bring on more performers than was necessary and let inexperienced practitioners perform. The performance at Mala Wang required more experience in performers to know when and how to perform gestures like bowing and re-arrange the props correctly. The most attention to technical finesse was paid at the Mun San Fook Tuck Chee temple, with another member ensuring the drummer played the correct patterns and Mr. Leong interceding for one of the younger performers as he was more experienced and could create a more aesthetically-pleasing re-arrangement of the *qing*. In this way, the KCWK troupe consciously mediated the signs that would be presented to different audiences in a way that would preserve their desired appearance of authenticity before each audience while excluding superfluous actions that the audience wouldn't recognize.

Nevertheless, there were occasions where the performers consciously enacted signs which audiences would not have been able to see or recognize. Two examples of this were the inclusion of weapons next to the drum during the performance at Mala Wang and the bows made to the altar of Guandi below the dining hall at Owen Seafood. Given the sparse audience at the restaurant and performance's location along a remote side street, the troupe might have done this to bolster the force of their performance by looking 'pretty' while taking advantage of the lack of public scrutiny to flaunt signs of their martial identity cultivated through kung fu. The troupe's decision to show respect to the Guandi altar, conversely, appears to have been an extension of the bows typically made to the altars at the headquarters and reflects the respect the troupe

members themselves held for the deity. In both cases, the performance of these signs helped troupe members show outward signs among themselves of a shared identity as Cantonese traditional martial arts practitioners, bolstering the perception and performance of their own perceived authenticity.

Conclusion

What appears to have allowed the lion dance to be well-received at each performance was how different perceptions of authenticity could converge through the interaction caused by signs being performed by the dancers and recognized by the audience. The interaction between performers' and audience's ideas of authenticity can be analyzed through the three perspectives of objective, constructive and existential authenticity experienced by tourists outlined by Nicola MacLeod.²⁹ Objective authenticity, where one believes they are having a genuine experience of what they believe to be the real thing³⁰, is experienced by audiences when they view each performance as a true representation of lion dance. Performers experience existential authenticity, where one believes they can create authentic selves through experiencing an object.³¹ This view reflects how the KCWK performers see in themselves as representing a true Cantonese identity. Both views of authenticity can be brought together by constructive authenticity. Constructive authenticity is experienced when an audience projects onto an object its own expectations and beliefs which are shared within the community.³² The KCWK troupe can be said to form different communities with different audiences, each with its own unique mutual understanding on the meaning and importance of certain signs. This lets performers communicate authenticity to different audiences. The performance of these signs not only signaled to audiences what they were watching was 'real', but also cemented performers' essential identity as their actions are authenticated by audience perceptions. This reflects Sarah Weiss' observation on how different perspectives on authenticity can coexist in the same situation.³³ The coexistence of objective, existential and constructive authenticities that not only satisfies different audience expectations but allows performers to benefit from being a true representation of a culture.

²⁹ Nicola MacLeod, "Cultural tourism: aspects of authenticity and commodification" in Mike Robinson and Melanie Smith, ed. *Cultural Tourism in a Changing World: Politics, participation and (Re)presentation* (Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2006), 181-188.

³⁰ Tazim Jamal and Steve Hill, "The Home and The World. (Post) Touristic Spaces of (In) Authenticity?," in G. Dann, ed. *The Tourist as Metaphor of the Social World* (Wallingford: CAB International), 77-108.

³¹ Ning Wang, "Rethinking Authenticity in Touristic Experience", *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 26, 2 (1999), 351-352.

³² MacLeod, "Cultural tourism: aspects of authenticity and commodification", 184.

³³ Sarah Weiss, "Perspectives on Balinese Authenticities: Sanggar Çudamani's Odalan Bali" in Kendra Sepputat, ed. *Performing Arts in Postmodern Bali—Changing Interpretations, Founding Traditions* (Germany: Shaker Verlag, 2013), 291.

The social recognition that lion dance receives today could then be ascribed to the different meanings it accumulates from the performances of different types of signs. McGuire points out how peoples' perspectives on lion dance build onto its para-liturgical function in providing blessings and let lion dance convey diverse meanings simultaneously.³⁴ Each different perspective of authenticity by a given audience reconstructs lion dance as different objects. The signs used in each performance allow lion dance to variously become a performance of tradition, a tool for blessings or a medium for veneration. Lion dance becomes recognized as holding different dominant functions to different audiences which supersede the associations they had as symbols of violence. These accumulated meanings allow lion dance to perform variable narratives to performers and audience alike which gloss over the stain of its notorious past.

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³⁴ McGuire, 131.

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