In the field of Chinese studies, we learn mostly from classical and vernacular Chinese texts that inform us about different disciplines including history, literature, society, economy, and politics related to the Chinese. While this may form the mainstream discourse, the speaker’s research and teaching focus more on lesser-known communities residing outside China, who constitute a significant part of the society but are often underrepresented. In her view, the terms “Sinophone” and “Sinosphere” challenge our common understanding of “Chinese”, especially in sites where the mainstream language was/is not limited to Mandarin, or where cultural and linguistic syncretism had already taken place. Hence, the concept of the Sinophone/Sinosphere will be discussed in relation to the various communities whom the speaker has observed in her study of traditional Chinese theatre. While opera performers/puppeteers are the main subjects in theatre, they often play multiple roles—community stakeholders, religious/ritual specialists, proprietors, middlemen and so forth. Throughout this study, themes that are seemingly contrasting but interrelated—tradition/modernity, orality/literacy, religious/secular, local/regional/transnational—are useful points of connection in understanding the complex narratives gathered from the study of these communities.

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