

Contested Transnational Memories: Historical Museums of Angel Island, American Chinatowns and Wuyi Qiaoxiang

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Over the past decade major efforts have been made to develop and preserve museums and heritage sites about Chinese American history in both the United States and China. In February 2009 the Angel Island Immigration Station Museum and grounds near San Francisco in California were renovated and reopened just prior to the Centennial Anniversary of the Immigration Station in 1910. Half-way around the world the Jiangmen Wuyi Overseas Chinese Museum in Guangdong near the traditional villages sending emigrants to the United States was expanded and opened in a new site in November 2010. This museum was originally opened in November 2005 before the inscription of Kaiping diaolou villages (fortified overseas Chinese mansions) as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site in July 2007. These developments coincided with the renovation and construction of Chinese American historical museums in Chinatowns with new museum sites in Chicago (2005) and New York (2009) as well as expansions in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Through an analysis of permanent and special exhibits as well as construction of meanings in educational materials, this paper offers a preliminary comparison of the interpretations over Chinese immigration to the United States as contested collective memories of transnationalism. There are multiple state, community, and individual interests of negotiation over the meanings of Chineseness, multiculturalism, and transnational history. While Angel Island and museum in China traditionally focus on stories of discrimination and triumphs in the Chinese American experience, recent trends of globalization and localization have further questioned the monolithic discourse of racism and nationalism by stressing multicultural encounters, conflicting identities, and transnational memories.

Wing-kai To received his BA and M Phil degrees in History from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and his Ph.D. degree in History from the University of California at Davis. He has taught at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts since 1997. As a public historian, he is also serving as the Vice-President of the Chinese Historical Society of New England. A former Fulbright Visiting Professor in American Studies at the University of Hong Kong in 2010, he is currently associated with the same Program this semester during his sabbatical leave. To's research focuses on the history of Chinese and Japanese in the United States, primarily about New England in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. His earlier publications deal with local society in late imperial South China and its maritime connections and overseas emigration. He is the author of a book entitled *Chinese in Boston, 1870-1965* and other articles on missionary and heritage education, local institutions, groceries and restaurants concerning the Chinese community in Boston. He is currently editing a book relating to historical connections between South China and North America which grew out from a Fulbright scholar conference he organized at HKU in 2010.