The Cantonese Ballads Collections at the East Asian Library of Rutgers University and the Wason Collection of Cornell University

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Nanyin is a form of popular folk literature found in the Pearl River delta region of Guangdong Province. Usually appearing in engraved woodblock booklets, many such works were mass-produced at a low price in Canton and nearby areas like Dongguan and Foshan. They circulated widely in Canton, Hong Kong, and in the surrounding regions from early Qing times until the 1950s. These works were performed in various kinds of settings, such as in private homes for housewives and their servants, in restaurants, teahouses, or on street corners as popular entertainment. Nanyin is a popular culture form not generally highly regarded by the sophisticated elite. Occasionally, a performer's talent might catch the attention of an educated person who would compose a well-crafted work for the performer to sing. One noted example is "Huajianji" which was translated into English in 1824 and into German in 1836. Since the 1950s the nanyin has lost the mass appeal it once enjoyed. Its appeal was noted by Fu Kung-wang:

"Books printed from woodblocks available in the market numbered a few hundred in kind. Unengraved texts numbered over a thousand ... This kind of song book is very popular, available even in villages where books and newspapers are inaccessible. ..."

Changing economic conditions, value systems, and other competitive forms of entertainment such as movies, television, and modern popular songs have made the nanyin obsolete. The last printer and publisher of nanyin, Wu Guei Tang, went out of business in Hong Kong in July 1972. Before that time at least some four hundred titles were published and widely circulated in South China and Southeast Asia.

Formerly a popular genre, the nanyin bears similarities to the tanci in the Yangtze River area and the guci in northern China. The nanyin are lyrical pieces sung by musicians accompanied with a stringed instrument, drum, or clapper. Another kind of popular Cantonese narrative, longzhou, does not use musical instruments except for a small drum and a small gong hung on the neck of the player. Muyu, or muyushu, is used as a collective term for various forms of Cantonese ballads. Improvisational in nature, muyu may not always have a fixed text when performed. Muyushu, in printed form, generally have a story line adapted from folktales, mythology, and official history. The artistic pieces are written by the educated. Typically, the

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*nanyin* is written in seven-character sentences. Following Jin Shengtan's (1619-1661) system for evaluating Chinese literary classics, some *nanyin* were named the eighth, ninth, and tenth "books of the talented".

At the present time, collections of *nanyin* texts are found at various places in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the United States, and Germany. A brief description of each collection follows:

a. The collection in the Institute of History and Philology of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan is the largest in the world. Its catalog lists more than 350 items of *nanyin* and *longzhou*. Formerly drawn from the various collections of the Peking Library, National Palace Museum, and the Institute of History and Philology in the 1930s in Beijing, the entire collection was shipped to Taiwan in 1949 and in 1965 was opened to the public. The catalog was prepared in 1970.

b. The Chungshan University collection in Canton is the second largest. Based on a catalog published in 1982 by Tan Zhengbi and Tan Xun, it includes 154 items of *nanyin* and 126 items of *longzhou*.

c. The Hong Kong collections in the Centre of Asian Studies and the Fung Ping Shan Library of the University of Hong Kong have a total number of 207 items.

d. The Wason Collection of Cornell University contains 179 titles with 110 in *nanyin* and the rest equally divided in number between *muyu* and *longzhou*.

e. The Gest Memorial Library of Princeton University has a special collection of *muyushu*, consisting of 130 items of *nanyin* and 60 of *longzhou*. The collection is not cataloged.

f. The Rutgers East Asian Collection has ninety volumes with eighty-five in *nanyin*. These books were purchased from Hong Kong. They include quite a few valuable items not found in the Hong Kong and the Wason collections. The entire collection of ninety volumes is completely cataloged in the Research Libraries Information Network. Individual titles are therefore accessible online. Requests for the use of *nanyin* may be granted, but only under special terms, since many of them that were printed in the early 1930s are in brittle condition.

g. Outside of the United States and Asia and based on the catalog compiled by Wolfram Eberhard, there are thirty-eight items in the Munich State Library in Germany. In this collection can be found one of the earliest *muyushu* dating back to 1778.

The following is a brief description of the Rutgers Collection by subject matter:

1. Beauty/scholar romances, unusual love stories, and folk legends constitute the largest group with thirty-four titles.

2. Military romances and legendary folk heroes constitute the second group with thirteen titles.
3. The rest are about equally divided among the following categories:
   a. eight didactic and moralistic tales;
   b. seven detective stories;
   c. five filial daughter and chaste wife stories;
   d. five Buddhist self-cultivation tales.

The earliest printed piece of nanyin literature dates back to 1712 during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor and is entitled Huajianji. This text was found in France at the Bibliothèque Nationale. It was then translated into English under the title, "Chinese Courtship" and later into German. Huajianji is also available in the Rutgers collection. It is a good representative of the refined, well-crafted nanyin genre.

Nanyin, longzhou, and muyu are various Cantonese song forms. There is no hard and fast distinction made among them but, generally speaking, longzhou refers to the short and orally performed pieces sung by blind musicians. The nanyin generally refer to more elegant and refined pieces about the leisurely life of the educated elite and is written in seven-character lines. Muyu are generally improvised and written in short sentences and are about the sufferings of the unfortunate.

At the present time, the nanyin is a dying genre. On special occasions, it may still be performed by a small number of musicians in Hong Kong.

Like many other texts of popular literature, Cantonese ballads are social documents of the Cantonese colloquial language and the Cantonese way of life. Certain aspects of Cantonese marriage and death rituals are now rarely observed, yet they can be found in this body of literature. Given the fact that Guangdong Province is closely tied to China's revolution early in this century, muyushu, a popular and sometimes even propagandistic work, reflected the political and social climate as well as political consciousness of the Cantonese people. They are good research material for scholars of popular literature and folklore. They are also valuable documents for linguists, social and political historians, anthropologists, and sociologists.

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