

Yüe Ou

Local Culture, Identity and Mobility in Early Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou

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To my great-grandfather, my grandparents, Ah Gong and Ah Po who instilled in me a sincere love for the music tradition of our dear Guangzhou.

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Prologue

In the 1790s, Shen Fu (1763-1832), a native of Suzhou in the culturally rich Jiangnan region arrived in Guangzhou (Canton), a city on the southernmost frontier of China. It was during Lunar New Year's celebration and Shen's first time traveling to Guangzhou, and wanting to experience the notoriously voyeuristic entertainment of the, Shen boarded a floating brothel called "Hua-ting" (flower-boat) on the Pearl River that flows through the city. But the sophisticated Suzhou native was disappointed. In his travelogue, Shen complains, "I thought flower-boat courtesans possess the beauty and musical talent to steal souls of men, for everyone warns, 'No young man should ever go to Guangzhou.' But whose heart is there to be flipped when confronted by such vulgar appearance and barbaric tongue?"¹ In Shen's opinion, songs of the courtesan, sung in the Guangzhou dialect, resembled sounds of a barbarian. Yuan Mei (1716-1797), a renowned poet and epicure concurs and write, "I have long heard about the beauty of the *Zhuniang* (Pearl River courtesans) of Guangdong. But when I visited Guangzhou and my friends invited me to a flower-boat banquet, I did not see one [courtesan] that was worthy of the reputed charm."² Like Shen Fu, Yuan Mei, who was also a native of Jiangnan, was disappointed by what he saw. However, many Guangzhou locals contemporary to Shen's time would most likely disagree. Xie Lansheng (1769-1831), a Guangzhou local and former member of the Hanlin academy once boasts the beauty of a local courtesan in a poem:

When the music plays and the wind joins her sleeves,
Like a peony and hibiscus, her slim body glows.³

¹ Shen Fu, *Fu Sheng Liu Ji*, (1808), vol.4.

² Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan Shihua*, (18th century), vol. 16.

³ Xie Lansheng, *Changxingxing zhai riji*, the 20th day of the 7th month in the 25th year of Jiaqing (1820). The days and months in this diary are recorded according to the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar, whereas the years are recorded according to the reign name and regnal year of Qing emperors.

In the same poem, Xie Lansheng further exclaims the courtesan's music and write, "*Yüe Ou* is not a vulgar song, for its melody is as clear as snow."⁴ Similarly, Xu Rong (1836 Jinshi), a friend of Xie also writes:

Born and raised in the southern Man (barbaric) village, we ply the vulgar tongue.

Yet, even in vulgar words we can express our emotions and concerns.⁵

In their poems, Xie Lansheng and Xu Rong invoke both the poetic quality of a local music genre, *Yüe Ou*, and their pride of being Guangzhou locals. The similar diction—valorizing the vulgarity, barbarity, beauty or clarity of *Yüe Ou* and the Guangzhou dialect—show their efforts to defend these localist elements. By so doing, Xie and Xu identified themselves with the beauty of local music and dialect, and reinforced their connection with other Guangzhou locals. In contrast to Shen, who scorned local music and dialect as vulgar and barbaric, the laudatory views of Xie and Xu convey the local men's love for local music. But the question must be made about how one's local status was determined or, even more precisely, constructed.

For when we look into the backgrounds of Xie Lansheng and Xu Rong, we will find both of their *local* status questionable. Xie on one hand, was part of the third-generation of a gentry lineage in the township of Mashe in Nanhai that relocated to Guangzhou.⁶ Settling in the city, however, didn't necessarily separate the urban Xie family from its ancestral town outside of Guangzhou. In his diary, Xie records his many interactions with his kin in Mashe, Nanhai. For instance, Xie Lansheng would return with his brothers, or send his sons and

⁴ Xie, *Changxingxing zhai riji*, the 20th day of the 7th month in the 25th year of Jiaqing (1820). The Hanlin academy was an imperial institution for literati who achieved highest honors in the civil service examination. Members of the Hanlin performed secretarial and literary tasks for the imperial court. Xie Lansheng himself was a Shujishi, or an apprentice in the academy. See also, Zhang Weiping, "*Yitanlu*," in *Guangzhou dadian*, ed. Chen Jianhua, Cao Chunliang, vol. 14. 11., (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Chubanshe, 2008), 590.

⁵ Zhao Ziyong, (1828), *Yüe Ou*, 8. Xu Rong's pseudonym in the anthology is Meihua Laonong, the old nurturer of plum-blossoms.

⁶ Nanhai was a county under the administration of Guangzhou prefecture. See also Steven B. Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 57.

nephews to Mashe for the ritual of “Baishan” (worship the mountain) a term in the Guangzhou dialect referring to the worship of ancestors at the place where they were buried.⁷ Xu Rong on the other hand, was a Han Bannerman whose ancestors were sent from Beijing to be stationed in Guangzhou.⁸ A registered member of the local Banner garrison, Xu resided in the Banner Quarter that was supposedly beyond reach for other residents in urban Guangzhou.⁹ Xu’s style name (*Zi*) Tiesun, literally the grandson of Tie, also implies that he was aware of his ancestral link to the region of Tieling in Northeast China.¹⁰ But such discrepancy in family background and identity was often ignored in their poetry on local topics. Unlike Shen Fu, a visitor and therefore a true outsider, Xie and Xu fully identified with local music and Guangzhou and deemed themselves locals of the city.

The music despised by Shen Fu and praised by Xie Lansheng and Xu Rong was Yüe Ou, one of the music genres local to the Pearl River delta, and one that was popular in Guangzhou’s Pearl River entertainment scene during the early nineteenth-century. In an 1857 European account a French diplomatic attaché, Yvan Melchior, describes his impression of Pearl River entertainment, “By night, [Guangzhou] is a rich and beautiful courtesan, crowned with flowers, decked with bright jewels, murmuring, with winsome voice, quaint melodies and songs of love-in-idleness, and plying, with little reticence, her voluptuous trade under the shadow of the dark.”¹¹ In this account, the “songs of love-in-idleness” were Yüe Ou songs described by Xie and Xu. As Melchior suggests, Yüe Ou is a genre defined by stories of

⁷ See Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 333, note 4.

⁸ Wang Zhaoyong, *Lingnan Hua Zhenglüe*, 104, 146. The Han Banner was a Han Chinese unit under the Eight Banners: the administrative/military divisions during the Manchu Qing dynasty (1636-1912) into which all Manchu households were placed.

⁹ Interestingly though, the Banner Quarter of Guangzhou, unlike most other major Chinese cities with Bannerman garrisons, was not walled off from the rest of the city. Nevertheless, the Banner Quarter remained clearly distinguishable from other parts of the city. Relying on fixed incomes established in the early years of the dynasty, the growing banner population, supposedly military elites of the region, gradually became impoverished in relation to other residents in the city.

¹⁰ *Zi*, or style name, is an additional name bestowed upon or chosen by a person at the age of twenty as a symbol of adulthood and respect. In following parts of this study, style name will be abbreviated as s.n.

¹¹ Yvan Melchior, *Canton: Un coin du céleste empire*, (Paris: M. Levy frères, 1857), 149.

romance and regrets on the Pearl River. Most Yüé Ou songs were also sung from the perspective of courtesans and describe their sufferings in the entertainment scene.¹² Since its appearance in the early nineteenth-century, Yüé Ou was popular not only among locals and descendants of migrants such as Xie Lansheng and Xu Rong, but sojourners as well.¹³ On the Pearl River, many literati also devoted themselves to the composition of new Yüé Ou songs.¹⁴ Considering the melancholic subject matter of Yüé Ou, there are questions about why it became one of the dominant musical genres in the early nineteenth-century Pearl River entertainment scene. Why did many literati in Guangzhou partake in the composition of new Yüé Ou songs? Overall, what did Yüé Ou contribute to early nineteenth-century Guangzhou society and culture?

This study explores the social and cultural significance of Yüé Ou in reinforcing the course of identity-construction, local culture affirmation, as well as the vitalization of transregional and social mobility in early nineteenth-century Guangzhou society. Historians who study local societies of late imperial China have noted connections between transregional and local mobility—that migrants were often met with distinct localist elements, which in turn instigated new developments in local societies and cultures. Whereas G. William Skinner points to the exportation of talent as a way of social mobility, James Cole highlights the natives of Shaoxing, Jiangnan who formulated a wide network of administrators and legal secretaries throughout the empire.¹⁵ In his study of the scholarly

¹² Leung Pui-Chee, *Nanyin yu Yüé Ou zhi yanjiu*, (San Francisco: Asian American Studies & School of Ethnic Studies, San Francisco State University Press, 1988), 179-180. Yüé Ou songs often lament about actions of unfaithful brothel patrons, and the emotional pains they bring to courtesans.

¹³ For instance, towards the end of the nineteenth-century, a Fujian literatus recalls that “on the Pearl River, hundreds of flower-boats gathered at the docks and sang Yüé Ou songs.” See, Qiu Weiyan, (1899), *Keyunlu xiaoshuohua*, vol. 2.

¹⁴ For instance, Xie Lansheng writes one time, “I attended a banquet... [where] Mingshan handed someone a kumquat fruit, and a Yüé Ou song was composed. What an elegant event.” Xie, *Changxingxing zhai riji*, the 16th day of the 8th month in the 25th year of Jiaqing (1820).

¹⁵ G. William Skinner, “Mobility strategies in late imperial China: A regional-systems analysis,” in *Regional Analysis*, Vol. 1, *Economic Systems*, edited by Carol A. Smith, (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 355; James Cole, “The Shaoxing Connection: A Vertical Administrative Clique in Late Qing China,” in *Modern China*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Jul. 1980), *passim*.

institution, Xuehaitang, and urban Guangzhou elite society, Steven B. Miles emphasizes the ways in which sojourners and migrants were able to climb the social ladder through commerce, cultural patronage, and participation in and reinvention of localist scholarship and literary production.¹⁶ In exploring the culture of Guangdong province, of which Guangzhou was the capital, May-Bo Ching calls for the importance of the Guangzhou dialect as a symbol of identity to Guangzhou elites.¹⁷ Moreover, by studying the poetry of Guangzhou poets, Honey identifies motifs in Guangzhou poetry. According to David B. Honey, those themes reveal a love for local symbols (such as the litchi fruit), a reverence for the ruling dynasty, and an eagerness of Guangzhou poets, who lived in the peripheral outpost of the Chinese civilization, to prove their cultural authenticity and refinement.¹⁸ The Guangzhou dialect and other localist elements were media for Guangzhou elites in the Ming-Qing period to construct their local identities, and affirm and transcend their local culture beyond prejudices of a coterie of refined non-Guangdong literati. Concordantly, for sojourners, migrants, and their descendants who resided in Guangzhou, those localist elements became the media through which they could acquire upward social mobility and reinvent themselves as locals of the city.

This study differs from earlier studies in that it looks at one particular localist element in early nineteenth-century Guangzhou's entertainment sector: the music genre known as Yüe Ou. I argue that Yüe Ou became popular because it fosters emotional resonance among entertainment patrons, particularly literati who failed in the Chinese officialdom or in the traditional pursuit for an official career. The genre also justifies the merrymaking actions of

¹⁶ Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 282-297. See also Jerry Dennerline, *The Chia-ting Loyalists*, (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1981), 117; William Rowe, *Hankou*, (Redwood City, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1992), 90; Antonia Finnane, *Speaking of Yangzhou*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 199-203.

¹⁷ May-Bo Ching, *Diyu wenhua yu guojia rentong*, (Beijing, China: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2006), 132-133.

¹⁸ David B. Honey, *The Southern Garden Poetry Society*, (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2013), 157. Litchi is a tropical tree native to the Guangdong and Fujian provinces of southeastern China, where cultivation is documented from the 11th century.

patrons who used these songs to portray themselves as saviors and tender lovers of courtesans. Written in a mixture of classical and vernacular writing, Yüe Ou became something intimate to speakers of the Guangzhou dialect. It was also a medium for the literati, merchants, migrants, sojourners and the Guangzhou-dialect-speaking-population at large to become part of local society, affirm local culture, and move upwardly in society. As sojourners and descendants of migrants portrayed themselves as locals and as merchants reinvented themselves as literati, they joined a local literary movement surrounding Pearl River entertainment and Yüe Ou. We will see how residents in Guangzhou used Yüe Ou to portray themselves as locals of the city on one hand, and valorize their local culture and surmount contemporary non-Guangdong prejudices on the other.

Throughout its pages, readers will find in the study one particular term: *literati* or its singular form, *literatus*. Originating from Latin, the word refers to intellectuals who have interests in literature. In a historical Chinese context however, literati refer to educated males who earned civil service examination degrees (such as *Jinshi*, *Juren*, and *Zhusheng*) and served in government as officials, in countryside as gentry, or as producers of elite culture in cities like Guangzhou. As the literary elites of the empire, literati formulated the highest strata in society and dominated both government and local life in the empire until the mid-twentieth-century. In Guangzhou, they were also among the main patrons of Pearl River brothels. As literati boarded brothels and flower-boats on the Pearl River and developed intimate relationships with courtesans, they familiarized themselves with the different music genres of courtesans, and became the driving force behind the consolidation of Yüe Ou and the valorization of local culture in the early nineteenth-century.

Finally, this study is possible through the exploration of literature produced by Guangzhou literati. They include travelogues, records of local history (gazetteers), poetry and prose collectanea, and diaries. This study looks particularly at poetry and prose collectanea,

such as *Ziliang shicun* by Feng Xun and *Wenzang youxi* by Miao Gen, and diaries like *Changxingxing zhai riji* by Xie Lansheng. Whereas poetry and prose reflect an embellished culture of Guangzhou literati, diaries show a more direct description of their lives. Since all sources this study described are written in literary (classical) Chinese, they appear in its pages as my own translations. The only exceptions are the Yüe Ou songs of Zhao Ziyong: the most celebrated of the music genre. For their popularity, Zhao's songs have been translated into English by Cecil Clementi, a British colonial administrator of Hong Kong, in 1904 with the title *Cantonese Love-Songs*.¹⁹ Nevertheless, I modified the translations of Clementi and changed allusions referenced in the songs and transliterations of various terms and names where appropriate. In contrast to older studies that employed romanization styles such as Wade-Giles or Jyutping, this study uses the Hanyu Pinyin system, the official romanization system for Standard Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) in mainland China. Ultimately, these sources, either published for the public or written for friends and circulated within different elite cohorts, offer us glimpses into the grandeur of early nineteenth-century Guangzhou's Pearl River entertainment scene as well as the careers, activities, social circles, and thoughts of Guangzhou elites. As we revisit scenes where Guangzhou elites gathered on the Pearl River, chanted Yüe Ou songs and composed literature about the genre, we will see what the activities meant for those *locals* of Guangzhou and what long lasting effects their activities have created for the culture of the city.

The Floating World of Guangzhou

City, People, and Culture

¹⁹ Cecil Clementi, *The Cantonese-Love Songs*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1904).

The recurring waves carry the grandeur of the sea,
 Since when did the Pearl River's prosperity begin?
 Alluring courtesans chant of their carefree melodies,
 Glamorous flower-boats outshine the somnolent night.
 Everyone says in this earthly world the purest is when youths fall in love,
 But everyone is only interested in fulfilling their lustful desires.
 Speak not of morality whilst squandering monies for pleasure,
 For I would rather use my savings to relieve the poor.
 —Zhang Weiping, “Zhujiang” (The Pearl River), nineteenth-century²⁰

In the poem quoted above, Zhang Weiping (1780-1859), one of the three poetry masters of Guangdong (Yüedong Sanzi), writes about the prosperous entertainment scene on the early nineteenth-century Pearl River (Zhujiang) that flows through the Guangzhou Prefecture and its river delta. The provincial capital of Guangdong, Guangzhou was the most important administrative seat of the empire in South China. Close to the South Seas, it was also a major trade hub and was known for its commercial prosperity. In a late seventeenth-century account, commodities such as pearls and ivories in market quarters of Guangzhou were recorded to be piled up like mountains, while exotic flowers and feathers laid on the ground like seas.²¹ Since the mid-eighteenth-century, it also became the only port-city where all Chinese trade with the West are focused on.²² In Guangzhou, “merchants from all four directions of the world gather... [and] their harbored ships are as numerous as fish and ants.”²³ The commercial prosperity of Guangzhou, partnered with frequent appointments of non-Guangdong officials to the city, resulted in a large influx of sojourners and migrants towards the city.²⁴

²⁰ Zhang Weiping, “Zhujiang,” in *Songxin Shiji, Caotangji*, ed. Deng Guangli and Cheng Ming, *Zhang Nanshan Quanj*, vol. 2, (Ruyuan, Guangdong, China: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), 507.

²¹ Qu Dajun, *Guangdong Xinyu*, (17th century), vol. 17, 485.

²² This was known as Yikou tongshang, or the Canton System (1757–1842) which allowed China to control trade with the West within its own country by focusing all trade on the southern port of Canton (now Guangzhou).

²³ Wu Rongguang, (1830), *Foshan zongyi xiangzhi*.

²⁴ According to the Qing law of avoidance, officials were prevented from serving in their home provinces. When high-rank officials such as regional governor-generals were appointed, they would either bring with them, or that their presence would attract cohorts of administrative clerks and private legal secretaries (Muyou) from their home provinces to their service.

The presence of these newcomers, as well as of their sons and grandsons boasted a cosmopolitan vibrancy in the city, which in turn brought changes to its society and culture. In his study, Miles identified several regional cohorts of sojourners, migrants and their descendants that assumed important positions in the commercial and cultural life of the city. These included Chinese Bannermen, such as Xu Rong, who were originally from the northeast; retired officials and officials' secretaries (*Muyou*), and salt merchants from various provinces of Jiangnan; maritime merchants from Fujian; and literati from the Hakka-predominated northeastern Guangdong (Jiayingzhou prefecture). At the same time, whether in the eyes of Pearl River delta natives like Xie Lansheng or in their own views, first-generation migrants likewise created an impression of "sojourning" and retained their native-place identities. As Miles points out, many of them, if died in Guangzhou, were often buried in their native place.²⁵ It was their descendants who—either prospered in commercial ventures or succeeded in examinations and had the desire to ascend the social ladder or assert dominance in the production of culture (wen)—started to stress their identity as locals of Guangzhou and their familiarity with local culture. To contest their place in Guangzhou elite society and in the production of elite culture against members of established gentry lineages of the Pearl River delta, "newcomers," as Miles suggested, participated in the Xuehaitang academy.²⁶ Established by governor-general of Guangdong-Guangxi and Jiangnan native Ruan Yuan (1764-1849), Xuehaitang provided with these migrants, sojourners and their descendants a space and necessary patronage to consolidate their elite status and create credentials as "arbiters of local culture" by the publication of poetry and scholarship concerning the local and reinterpretation of local history. But if we depart from an academic

²⁵ Miles, 39.

²⁶ While newcomers here are defined as first-generation migrants, sojourners who moved to Guangzhou in the mid-Qing (eighteenth to nineteenth century) and their sons, grandsons and great-grandsons, many established gentry lineages claimed relations to ancestors who settled in the Pearl River delta as early as the Song (9th century). During the Qing, sons of these gentry lineages would relocate to urban Guangzhou, a process of which William Rowe labels "urbanization." See Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 39; and Rowe, *Hankow*, 217.

perspective and look into the daily lives of these “newcomers”, we will see that the busy and mobile entertainment scene on the Pearl River also provided them a means to mingle with sons of established gentry lineages who relocated to the city and by joining their discourse, become members of the coterie of local elites who define taste and culture of urban Guangzhou.

In Guangzhou, different elites would spend their leisure on the Pearl River directly south of the walled city and the suburbs of Lizhiwan (Litchi Cove) and Henan (Southern shore). As described by the aforementioned poem of Zhang Weiping, these points of attraction along the Pearl River, with their floating brothels and famous flowers (courtesans), formulated the prosperous entertainment scene of Guangzhou. In the diary of Xie Lansheng, a locally renowned poet, painter, calligrapher and one of the most important arbiters of taste in urban Guangzhou, we also see frequent interactions between elites of different backgrounds on the Pearl River. Xie Lansheng’s social calendar was filled with activities with persons of different backgrounds. On one day, Xie would visit salt or maritime merchants in their firms in Xiguan, on the northern shore of the Pearl River next to the New City. On the other day, he would accompany other literati—whether native to the Pearl River delta or with non-Guangdong backgrounds—to the many points of attraction in Henan, on the southern shore of the river. In the decade recorded in his diary, between 1819 and 1829, Xie was constantly moving between different sites on the banks of the Pearl River, rarely spending more than a few consecutive days entirely on land. Indeed, as Miles describes, Xie Lansheng’s Guangzhou was a floating world. Figuratively, different social boundaries—between literati and merchants, and between locals and “newcomers”—were crossed; and literally, Guangzhou elites’ excursions almost always involved boating on the Pearl River.²⁷

²⁷ Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 61.

Though on a map the Pearl River seemingly divided Guangzhou into two parts, it did not act as a barrier separating Henan from other parts of Guangzhou nor thwarting “newcomers” from mingling with the locals. Rather, the river supported a community of boats that would connect the two shores and the diverse population that lived in the city. These boats, from those of the Tanka people (or “boat-people”) to merchant junks and canal boats, and from ferry-boats to flower-boats, formed the basis of the floating entertainment world of Guangzhou.²⁸ Western observers estimated that the number of boats on the Pearl River in the 1830s and 1840s ranged from forty thousand to over eighty thousand.²⁹ Among this great variety of vessels, the flower-boats (Hua-ting) that served as floating brothels or as private cruises attracted the most attention from elite patrons. Though uniformly named the flower-boat, there were in fact many variations of these boats—with smaller ones that could accommodate a party of five to ten patrons, and larger ones that could support ten to fifteen patrons onboard. While both small and large flower-boats were long and slim in shape, and were often consisted of a single corridor with pillowed couches on both sides, some of the better ones had elaborate cabin structures with extensive upper rooms, deck and balcony.³⁰ For the embellished space that they provided, flower-boats acted as carriers of the elite society of Guangzhou where most of its important official, commercial, and literary discussions were conducted.³¹ One European who visited Guangzhou in the 1820s described

²⁸ The Tanka or boat people are an ethnic group in Southern China who have traditionally lived on junks in coastal parts of South China, particularly on waterways of the Pearl River delta. While they were considered outcasts by landed society, the Tankas and their music tradition, as will be discussed in later parts of this study, played an important role in the formation of the genre Yüé Ou.

²⁹ Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 62.

³⁰ Paul Van Dyke, “Floating Brothels and the Canon Flower Boats: 1750-1930,” in *Revista de Cultura*, (37, January 2011), 116.

³¹ Van Dyke, 117, 126. In an 8th century poem by the Tang poet Bai Juyi, the terms Hua-fang and Hua-chuan appear frequently. Although Hua-fang or Hua-chuan (painted-boat) are both different terms from Hua-ting (flower-boat), Van Dyke notices the similar pronunciation between them. They all refer to a type of pleasure boat where one went to enjoy an evening out on the river. Van Dyke suggests that since exchanging characters with similar pronunciations was common in the Qing dynasty even with personal names, it may be possible that foreigners translated the terms Hua-fang or Hua-ting from Chinese into ‘flower-boat’ in English, rather than the other way around. See Van Dyke, 141, note 22. However, Van Dyke does not take into account that the terms Hua-fang and Hua-ting, while strikingly similar in sound in Mandarin Chinese, are quite different in the dialect of Guangzhou,

flower-boats as “the ultimate in luxury and pleasure,” and “next to quail-fighting, the flower-boats occupy most of a Chinese gentleman’s leisure hours.”³² Xie Lansheng, the arbiter of taste, concurs and records in his diary a social gathering with friends during the Mid-Autumn festival of 1821:

Afternoon, I boarded Zou’s flower-boat with Lisheng (a courtesan) for a few Yüe Ou performances. I saw Mingshan and invited him over for a short conversation. When the sky turned dark, Mingshan returned to his town. At night, all flower-boats celebrated the holiday with firecrackers. Like a painting, the water reflects the full moon. Sounds of stringed instruments and drums echoed across the Pearl River. What a peaceful and prosperous sight to see.³³

Although there existed the dichotomy between established gentry lineages, represented by Xie Lansheng, and “newcomers” to Guangzhou, their interactions on the flower-boats were what heightened the hustle-bustle of the Pearl River entertainment scene. As the Jiangnan literatus Shen Fu recorded, the phrase “No young man should ever go to Guangzhou” in Qing society warned of the danger of being consumed by the city’s seductive world of entertainment. Nevertheless, the Pearl River entertainment scene remained ever prosperous until the late nineteenth-century. And when people from all social strata and backgrounds in Guangzhou indulged themselves on the Pearl River, the background for this study was set.

In addition to the presence of flower-boats, the early nineteenth-century Guangzhou also welcomed the emergence of a new genre of music known as Yüe Ou. As recorded in the aforementioned diary entry of Xie Lansheng, listening to Yüe Ou performances was a popular activity among many others for Guangzhou elites. Sung in the dialect of Guangzhou, Yüe Ou was particularly favored by immediate locals like Xie Lansheng and sons and grandsons of “newcomers” who in the early nineteenth-century began to see themselves as

where flower-boats were the most common, let alone phonetic changes of the Chinese languages throughout the millennia. Nonetheless, the question of origin of the name flower-boat remains open for discussion.

³² Peter Dobell, *Travels in Kamtchatka and Siberia*, vol.2, (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), 225.

³³ Xie, *Changxingxing zhai riji*, the 15th day of the 8th month in the 1st year of Daoguang (1821). Mingshan is the s. n. of Zhao Ziyong, a Nanhai native and author of the 1828 Yüe Ou anthology.

locals. Along with their fondness for the music genre were their productions of various laudatory literature on Yüé Ou and the local culture it represented. On one hand, this shows that “newcomers” began to use Yüé Ou as a way to portray their local identity and to create credentials as “arbiters of local culture.” On the other, this seemed to be a response from elites who identified with Guangzhou vis-à-vis outside prejudices. As shown in the travelogue of Jiangnan literati Shen Fu and Yuan Mei, Guangzhou and the Lingnan region in large was a peripheral post and in the eyes of literati from parts further north, a cultural and intellectual backwater.³⁴ Far away from the central plains (Zhongyuan)—a traditional denotation for the center of the Chinese civilization—the dialect of Guangzhou was also mutually-unintelligible with other dialects in the Chinese language.³⁵ In classical Chinese literature, the Guangzhou-dialect, sometimes along with other dialects spoken in Southern China, was often referred to as the southern *Man* (barbaric) speech. This led to the increasing conscience of Pearl River delta literati, native to the Guangzhou-dialect, in feeling the need to defend their dialect in face of outside prejudice.³⁶ Such mentality of Guangzhou literati was inevitably reflected in their literature—poetry and prose—about Yüé Ou. We will see how Guangzhou literati followed this tradition and valorized their local dialect and ultimately local culture against the prejudices of a refined coterie of contemporary non-Lingnan literati.

³⁴ Shen Fu’s home region, Jiangnan, or the Yangtze River delta emerged as the cultural center of China since at least the 9th century. The region’s literati predominated in the population of civil service examination degree-holders since the 13th century. In one account, the author records, “What the people of Suzhou, Jiangnan sees as elegant, people of all four directions follow; what they see as vulgar, others concur as well.” See Wang Shixing, (16th century), *Guangzhiyi*, vol. 2.

³⁵ In European or American accounts, usually written by missionaries, diplomats and merchants, the dialect had been referred to as *Cantonese*. Built into the word was a sense of connection with the city of *Canton*, or Guangzhou. In *The Sea of Learning*, Miles also uses the term *Cantonese* to represent people of Pearl River delta origin or those who spoke the dialect. Nevertheless, the word *Cantonese* has no exact Chinese equivalent and for the purpose of this study, I will use the phrase *Guangzhou-dialect* as a more accurate replacement.

³⁶ The trend of Pearl River delta “Cantonese” literati defending the Guangzhou-dialect became especially conspicuous in their literature since the 15th century. In multiple versions of the *Guangzhou fuzhi* (Gazetteer of Guangzhou), Guangzhou-dialect was described as an “ancient and pure,” “clear and emotional” speech. Whereas Chen Li, a nineteenth-century Guangzhou literatus, notably with ancestral background in Jiangnan, wrote a defense for the dialect, claiming its antiquity, purity, and close phonetic connection with archaic Chinese. For examples see *Guangdong shengzhi* (1822), vol. 92; *Guangzhou fuzhi* (1879), vol. 15; and Chen Li, “Guangzhou yinshuo,” in *Dongshuji* (1886).

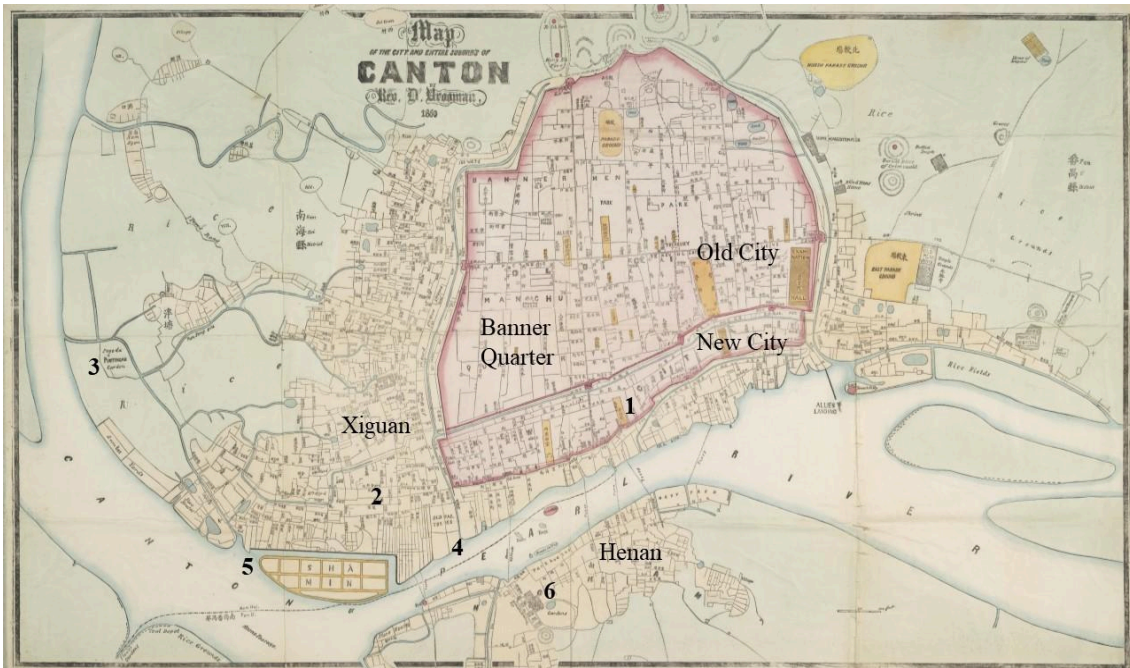


Figure 1, American missionary Daniel Vrooman's 1860 map "City and Entire Suburbs of Canton." This map shows the old and new cities of Guangzhou, the Banner Quarter where the Banner military personnel, such as Xu Rong stationed, and the city's suburbs and the Pearl River. Important locations in relation to Xie Lansheng and other Guangzhou elites' social itinerary include: 1) Subo Alley, where Xie Lansheng's residence Chang Xingxing Zhai (Studio of Constant Awareness) was located, 2) the thirteen factories and maritime merchant firms that Xie Lansheng often visited, 3) the Litchi Cove, 4) Xihao Cove, the dock where most flower-boats are anchored, 5) Sha-mian, a sandbank island and another dock where flower-boats anchored, and 6) flower fields, monasteries, pagodas and private gardens of maritime and salt merchants in Henan.



Figure 2, Physiographic Macro-regions of China. This map shows the economic and social centers in imperial China proper. The regions this study concern are: 1) Lingnan on the bottom, with Guangzhou located on the tip of the Pearl River delta; 2) Jiangnan, or the Lower Yangzi as shown on the right, this is where Shen Fu came from. Retrieved from: *The City in Late Imperial China*, ed. G. William Skinner, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977).

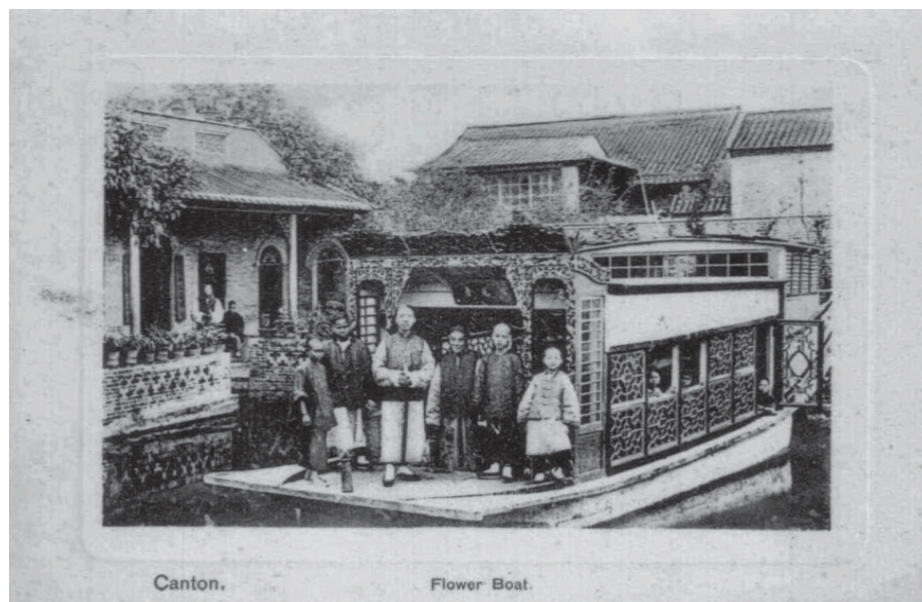


Figure 3, "Photo of a Canton flower boat and crew, published by M. Sternberg, Hong Kong, ca. 1910. Private Collection." Retrieved from Paul A. Van Dyke, "Floating Brothels and the Canon Flower Boats: 1750-1930," in *Revista de Cultura*, (37., January 2011), 140.



Figure 4, "Photo of the inside of a Canton flower boat, ca. 1900. Holmes prided himself in taking this photo. The people inside were unaware of his presence outside, with a camera. Reproduced from Burton Holmes, *Burton Holmes Travelogues. With Illustrations from Photographs by the Author*. New York: The Cultural Institute. McClure Company, 1901, vol. 5, p. 199." Retrieved from Paul A. Van Dyke, "Floating Brothels and the Canon Flower Boats: 1750-1930," in *Revista de Cultura*, (37, January 2011), 130.

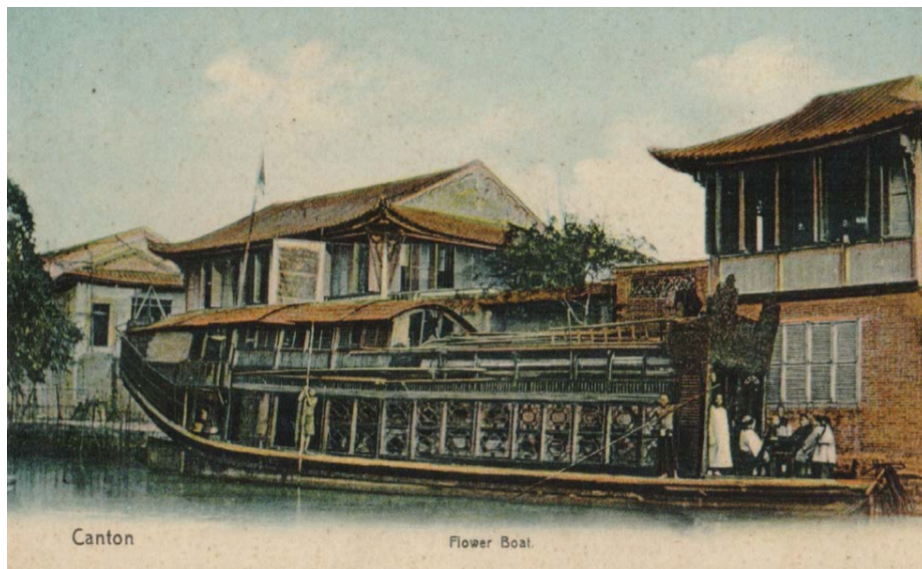


Figure 5, "Canton flower boat, published by M. Sternberg, Hong Kong, ca. 1910. Note the men using poles to move the vessel along. Private collection." Retrieved from Paul A. Van Dyke, "Floating Brothels and the Canon Flower Boats: 1750-1930," in *Revista de Cultura*, (37, January 2011), 120.

The Song of Yüe

Music on the Pearl River and Formation of Yüe Ou

When the rain stops pouring, sunshine takes over the sky.
 When the water-melody stops playing, sound of Yüe Ou channels into my ears.
 After a few sips of wine, memories of the past reappeared in front of my eyes,
 Disoriented, I sighed for the good flowers (Peony blossomed in a time of rainstorms).
 —Zhang Weiping, “Zhujiang” (Pearl River), nineteenth-century³⁷

In the poem quoted above, written sometime between the Opium Wars and the Red Turban uprising that devastated the city, Zhang Weiping recalls the nostalgia of antebellum Guangzhou’s prosperity in a lamenting tone.³⁸ Besides the wailing sentiment that the rain, the fallen peony pedals and drunkenness of the poet carry, the poem speaks of the Pearl River’s cosmopolitan entertainment world and the different music genres that embellished its splendor. Whereas Yüe Ou is the local music genre lauded by many local literati, the water-melody (Shui Diao) is a music genre imported from the Jiangnan region.³⁹ This suggests that just as Guangzhou society was consisted of elite cohorts categorized by their different ancestral and occupational backgrounds, the Pearl River carried different entertainment elements from other regional cultures of China. Mainly embodied in the form of music these elements gave vibrancy to the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Pearl River and contributed to the emergence of new music genres in its entertainment world.

Music on the Pearl River, whether songs or instrumental performances, were performed by courtesans or sing-song girls. Often sold to flower-boat procurers by their parents who could not support their families, these girls were casted as courtesans at a very

³⁷ Zhang Weiping, “Zhujiang,” in *Songxin Shiji, Caotangji*, ed. Deng Guangli and Cheng Ming, *Zhang Nanshan Quanji*, vol. 2, (Ruyuan, Guangdong, China: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), 615.

³⁸ Zhang Weiping was known as one of the three poetry-masters of Guangdong in the Qing dynasty.

³⁹ The water-melody is rumored to have been originated from Emperor Yangdi of the Sui (r. 604 – 618 CE), who, during his visit to the grand canal in Jiangnan, composed the melody. Tang Dynasty poet Du Mu once writes about Yangzhou, a city in Jiangnan.

young age, mostly ranging from thirteen to sixteen.⁴⁰ In his visit to Guangzhou in the late nineteenth-century, Florence O'Driscoll, who spent considerable time examining activities of Pearl River flower-boats describe courtesans on board in great detail:

Dining-out girls [courtesans] will come [to a flower-boat banquet] prettily dressed, their hair done up in most wonderful shapes, and brushed over with a sort of varnish which makes it appear like a fantastic head-dress carved in ebony. They will ornament this structure with bright flowers... or... sometimes add jade, gold, or feather-inlaid ornaments. Their faces will be painted in white and pink—very artistically painted, smooth, and soft-looking; delicately traced, sharp, black crescents will mark their eyebrows. Dainty, demure dolls they will appear, and pretty to look upon; but seemingly one touch would destroy their artistic effects, as a rough hand the radiance of a butterfly's wing.⁴¹

While the term courtesan sometimes exert a suspicion for prostitution, O'Driscoll did not describe women on flower-boats as public women. Rather, he sometimes compared them with the most genteel and educated women from his homeland.⁴² But many records, such as the diary of Shen Fu, did point to these courtesans' connection with brothel activities. Besides prostitution, one of the most prevalent hints of sexual implication, for Chinese patrons, were the bound-feet of courtesans. To imitate an impression of female elegance valued amongst high-class Chinese society, girls on flower-boats were forced to bind their feet at early age—a practice that severely distorted the shape and size of their feet, and that resulted in limited mobility and lifelong disabilities. But for a male Chinese elite, a pair of perfectly bound-feet of three Chinese inches—called Sancun Jinlian (golden lotuses)—were a desirable object for intensively erotic imagination.⁴³ In 1836, Downing writes of this seductive physique that “The women [on the flower-boats] sit out in rows on the balconies... Some of them toddle

⁴⁰ Van Dyke, 134; Walter William Mundy, *Canton and the Bogue. The Narrative of an Eventful Six Months in China*, (London: Samuel Tinsley, 1875), 155.

⁴¹ Ibid, 133; Florence O'Driscoll, “Scenes in Canton. The Punishment of Criminals, and the River Population,” in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, (January 1895), 367.

⁴² Ibid, 133.

⁴³ Three Chinese inches are around four inches in American measurement. Sigmund Freud considered foot-binding to a perversion that corresponds to foot fetishism, see Arthur Hacker, *China Illustrated: Western Views on the Middle Kingdom*, (Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2012). But in Chinese society, foot-binding had deeper cultural and historical interpretations.

about to show off their little feet, which are considered the extreme of beauty in this singular country.”⁴⁴ And according to Van Dyke, the only way a courtesan could leave her flower-boat—before being abandoned by her procurer for contracting venereal diseases or growing too old in age and no longer useful—was to become a concubine of a patron and through such, acquire an established legal position and a secured future.⁴⁵ The way in which they attract attention from patrons and possibly secure a comfortable future was through presenting their beauty, particularly their perfectly bound-feet, to those men. When the French diplomatic attaché Melchior was traveling on one of Guangzhou’s waterways, he grabbed a glimpse of a courtesan as their boats were caught in a collision and marvels at her beauty:

[This] little collision created a commotion among the passengers of the [flower-boat], and one of them [courtesans] appeared at a port-hole of the elegant craft. She wore handsome gold bracelets, or, at least, perfectly gilt ones. Her gown was of a clear yellow, and embroidered with floss silk; in a word, she was armed, from head to foot, ready to lead a formidable attack on the heart of some rich person.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, to sustain themselves as a form of refined entertainment for Chinese elites and to remain competitive, it was inevitable that flower-boat courtesans present themselves in both voluptuous and sophisticated ways: prostituting themselves whilst being conversant with the arts of music, poetry, and other forms of refined activity. After a music performance or other services on flower-boats, many literati patrons would often pay in the forms of paintings or calligraphy, of which courtesans would gladly accept. For instance, Ni Hong (1828- ?) records the popularity of the paintings of two literati—Wen Rushui and Zhao Ziyong (1786-1847)—among courtesans and write, “Wen’s ink bamboos and Zhao’s crabs, the art masters attract the admiration from a troupe of flowers.”⁴⁷ And labeled as famous

⁴⁴ C. Toogood Downing, *The Fan-Quy in China in 1836-1837*, 3 vols, (London: Henry Colburn, 1838), vol. 1, 241-242.

⁴⁵ Van Dyke, 132, 134.

⁴⁶ Melchior, 144.

⁴⁷ Ni Hong, *Tongyin Qinghua*, 168.

flowers (Minghua), as in flowers who would be resorted to by male butterflies, these courtesans were often associated with a flower-boat and were owned by procurers who advertised them in the taste of the music of a particular region.

In the early nineteenth-century, Pearl River flower-boats branded themselves according to the music styles from three different cities. These include Yangzhou in the Jiangnan region, Chaozhou in the Han River delta of eastern Guangdong and lastly, Guangzhou in the Pearl River delta. Xian Yuqing in her study of opera in Qing Guangzhou notes that troupes traveling to and performing in Guangzhou were divided into factions according to their regions of origin.⁴⁸ Leung Pui-Chee further points that similar factionalism happened among flower-boats on the Pearl River where they appeared as parts of the Yangzhou, Chaozhou or Guangzhou factions.⁴⁹ Gradually, such division became more of a need of advertisement than reality. Whereas many opera troupes were indeed from provinces other than Guangdong, flower-boats branded themselves with a particular region or city even when most of their courtesans were not native to the advertised region or city. During his visit to Guangzhou in the 1790s, Shen Fu was informed by a companion that on a flower-boat which branded itself with Yangzhou, only its procurer and her assistant were native to Jiangnan while all courtesans onboard were either from Hunan, Jiangxi or Guangdong.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, courtesans mastered music style of their factions and dressed in regional fashion accordingly. Amongst the three factions, the Yangzhou faction, specializing in the narrative music genre *Tanci* and Kun opera (Kunqu) was the most popular and dominant Guangzhou elite entertainment. Whereas *Tanci* was widely popular during the Jiajing and Wanli periods of the Ming dynasty, Kun opera dominated Chinese theatres from the sixteenth

⁴⁸ Xian, Yuqing. 1963 “Qing Dai Liu Sheng Xi Ban Zai Guangdong,” in *Xian Yuqing, Xian Yuqing Lunzhu Huibian*, (Guilin, Guangxi, China: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2016), 484.

⁴⁹ Leung, 132-135.

⁵⁰ Shen, vol. 4.

to eighteenth centuries. Originating from Jiangnan, these two music genres defined elite refinement and elegance in Ming-Qing society.

Attending a banquet on Yangzhou flower-boats and listening to their Jiangnan style music then, appeared to be the refined activity of choice for an elite, particularly the literati. When Shen Fu—the literatus native to Suzhou, Jiangnan—patronized a Yangzhou flower-boat, he describes the courtesans dressing in Jiangnan fashion as having “Chignons like clouds and innocent make-up, with a clear, intelligible speech.”⁵¹ Standing on the outer-balcony on the flower-boat and with a Yangzhou faction courtesan in his arms, Shen Fu exclaims, “Like the recurring waves, sounds of emotionally-moving music channel into my ears. How true it is when people say that ‘No young man should enter Guangzhou!’”⁵² In contrast to his unpleasant experience with a Guangzhou flower-boat courtesan who had a “vulgar appearance and barbaric tongue,” the Yangzhou flower-boat and the entertainment that it provides seemed only appropriate to the elegant taste of the Jiangnan native. In the diary of Xie Lansheng, the arbiter of taste in Guangzhou also spent a considerable amount of time listening to “Suzhou music” (Kun opera) with friends.⁵³ This suggests that for many literati, despite of their origins, Jiangnan music formulated the sphere of elegance in their understanding of entertainment.

Below the sphere of elegance of course, was what had been regarded by Chinese elites as vulgar: the entertainment of commoners. In the case of Guangzhou, these included vernacular songs played in suburban slums and boat-communities of outcasts on the Pearl River known as the Tanka people. Since they are all local to the Pearl River delta and to a large extent, Guangdong province, these songs were collectively referred to by Chinese literati as *Yüe Ge* or sometimes, *Yüe Ou*. In this case, *Yüe Ge* or *Yüe Ou* literally means song

⁵¹ Shen, vol. 4.

⁵² Ibid, vol. 4.

⁵³ For instance, Xie records, “Ye Jianshan and Wu Yingda invited Zhao Ziyong, Li Yingzhong and I to Henan. During the banquet, we listened to Suzhou music.” Xie Lansheng, *Chang Xingxing Zhai Riji*, the 17th day of the 5th month in the 25th year of Jiaqing (1820).

of “Yüe,” a name abbreviation for the Guangdong province. An early record in which the name Yüe Ou appears is in a sixteenth-century biographic anthology. In *Baiyüe Xianxian Zhuan*, Ou Daren (1516-1595), a Shunde native records, “Zhang Mai was a native of Yüe... he served as the imperial attendant of Hui emperor of Han (r. 210-188 BCE)... and could sing Yüe Ou with drum-beats while paddling the boat.”⁵⁴ Unlike the first Yüe Ou anthology published in 1828, which established Yüe Ou as a distinct and structured music genre, the record in the anthology of Ou Daren lacks any description on the musical composition or origin of the “Yüe Ou” songs sung by Zhang Mai. Thus, this points out that before the nineteenth-century, Yüe Ou was simply a term used to denote vernacular songs in the Pearl River delta of Guangdong. Nevertheless, vernacular songs before the nineteenth-century, despite their often scorned vulgarity, gradually developed into several structured music genres that became prevalent in the entertainment of Pearl River delta among commoners.

The first vernacular music genre to have established itself in the Pearl River delta was the *Muyu Ge* (sometimes written as *Moyu Ge*). Building upon musical compositions and accompaniment style of the narrative music genre Tanci from Jiangnan, *Muyu Ge* was structured with a fixed musical meter. However, borrowing contents directly from Buddhist chants and Confucian-oriented tales, its songs were long and monotonous, and are mostly concerned with teachings of morality. According to Qu Dajun (1630-1696), a famed Panyu monk-scholar in the late seventeenth-century, “The culture of Yüe is music-oriented... Music is always present in celebrations... [The music] is named *Moyu Ge*... [it is] sung by blinded-buskers... its stories, historical or fictions, often celebrate the virtues of filial piety, righteousness and chastity.”⁵⁵ Nevertheless, as *Muyu Ge* became established in the Pearl River delta society, it became one of the first things that visiting literati notice when they arrive in Guangzhou. When the leading poet of the empire in the early eighteenth-century,

⁵⁴ Ou Daren, (16th century), *Baiyüe Xianxian Zhuan*, vol. 1.

⁵⁵ Qu Dajun, (17th century), *Guangdong Xinyu*, vol. 12, Shiyu.

Wang Shizhen (1634-1711) arrived in Guangzhou, his impression of the city was a vivid scene where “Color of red painted-railings on the two banks are reflected on the river-surface; [and] boaters all sang of Muyu Ge.”⁵⁶ For certain Guangzhou literati who wished to capture a lively portrayal of their city, the music genre also became a recurring motif in their poetry. For instance, local poet Kuang Lu (1604-1650) records the splendor of the 1634 Lantern festival in Guangzhou by writing that the people “plucked the Muyu Ge with a Pipa, whilst the wine’s aroma drifted away with the music of the embroidered Se.”⁵⁷

In addition to Muyu Ge, there were also songs of the Tanka people who lived on the Pearl River. Collectively known as *Xianshui Ge* to local residents of the Pearl River delta, songs of the Tanka music tradition were often duetted by a male and female singer. In an 1877 *Zhuzhici* poem, an anonymous local poet describes a scene of Tankas on the Pearl River:

The Tanka girl sings under fishing lights,
The boat goes round-and-round from *Shaji* to *Neihe*.
Her *Xianshui Ge* are so popular,
They all rhyme with by the name of her lover.⁵⁸

This poem suggests that different from Muyu Ge, Tanka *Xianshui Ge* was centered on courtships and romances between Tanka youths. Although Tankas were considered by landed society as social outcasts—who live their entire lives on water and would only step on land in the form of a burial—many young Tanka women worked as prostitutes on the Pearl River, serving low-class workers and sailors. But when some of them made their ways into high-brow flower-boats (mostly of local Guangzhou faction), their *Xianshui Ge* were able to

⁵⁶ Wang Shizhen, (18th century), “Guangzhou Zhuzhi,” in Hu Puan, *Zhonghua Quanguo Fengshuzhi*, (Shanghai: Dada Tushu Gongyingshe, 1936).

⁵⁷ Kuang Lu, (17th century), “Pohou Xiyunxiao Gongti Ji Shiqing Liang Zhongyu,” in Kuang Lu, *Qiao Ya*. In this poem, both Pipa and Se were musical instruments used to accompany a Muyu Ge performance.

⁵⁸ Yinxiangge Zhuren, 1877, *Yangcheng Zhuzhici*. This is an anthology of winning *Zhuzhici* poems collected from a poetry competition on the topic of Guangzhou.

circulate in the Pearl River and imprinted a trace of its candor, philistine romance on other music genres and perhaps, even on patrons in the river's entertainment scene.

Like other regions with local cultural peculiarity, local literati in Guangzhou and its Pearl River delta did not constrain themselves solely to the taste of the predominant empire-wide literati culture. In the early nineteenth-century, Tanka songs and Muyu Ge were adopted and transformed—in combination with musical styles of the Jiangnan and Chaozhou factions—by Guangzhou literati into a new music genre. The first literatus to have done so was Feng Xun (1792-1867), a Jinshi from the Panyu county just outside urban Guangzhou. According to his student Lai Xuehai, “*Zhuniang* [Tanka girls or Pearl River courtesans] love to express their feelings through songs. The master (Feng Xun) felt their lyrics to be vulgar. He refined their melodies and turned them into poetic songs.”⁵⁹ On the Pearl River, Feng Xun's new songs quickly became popular in many Pearl River flower-boats. Collectively, these songs were referred to, by pleasure-seekers, as *Yüe Ou*. Among the many patrons who took on Feng's songs as their new favorite was his close companion Zhao Ziyong, who returned to Guangzhou after resigning from his official position as county magistrate. Following Feng Xun, Zhao “exerted [his] talents, and composed hundreds of new songs.”⁶⁰ One time in a flower-boat banquet with Xie Lansheng and others, it was said that “[Zhao Ziyong] handed someone a kumquat fruit, and a *Yüe Ou* song was composed.”⁶¹ When in 1828, Zhao Ziyong collected his songs and published them in an anthology titled, *Yüe Ou*, his publication signaled the emergence of *Yüe Ou* as an established independent music genre. Even when Feng Xun's songs were lost in the second half the nineteenth-century, Zhao Ziyong's *Yüe Ou* anthology persisted and became something that impacted the local culture of the Pearl River delta at large. Although these literati deliberately maintained the line

⁵⁹ Lai Xuehai, (1892), “Xüelu Shiniang,” in *Qing Shihua Sanbian*, vol. 9, (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2014).

⁶⁰ Qiu Weiyan, (1899), *Keyunlun xiaoshuohua*, vol. 2.

⁶¹ Xie, the 16th day of the 8th month in the 25th year of Jiaqing (1820).

between refinement and vulgarity, they have appropriated music traditions of slum dwellers and social outcasts. This chain of transformation points to the understanding of music or culture in Guangzhou, for that which are refined have originated from that which were vulgar. In this sense, local literati in the Pearl River delta in fact acted as intermediaries between the spheres of elegance and vulgarity, connecting elements of the two extremes; and as arbiters of taste, constantly revising the definition of refinement, and selecting elements that could be added to their list of refined activities.

Literati aestheticism and imagination rid Yüe Ou of the monotony of Muyu Ge and the pandemonium of Xianshui Ge on courtship. Unlike these two music genres, Yüe Ou became a music genre sung from the perspective of courtesans and which, expressed their feelings. In the preface of Zhao Ziyong's Yüe Ou anthology, the Han Bannerman Xu Rong exclaims:

Flies the flowery brush of Qingzhou's prefect,
Pausing to artfully compose the feelings of our sisters.
With infinite care, Yüe Ou tries to perfect its charm of style,
Souls of listeners would burn in ravishing joy even if they are fools.⁶²

In the first two stanzas of the poem, Xu describes Zhao, the "Qingzhou's prefect", as a talented composer who understood the feelings of Pearl River courtesans exploited by both procurers and patrons. In the last two stanzas, Xu shifts to praise the poetic lyrics and ravishing rhythms of Zhao's songs. On one hand, Xu Rong's poem reinforces the impression of audience in retrospect that Guangzhou literati were closely connected with the high and low in the Pearl River entertainment world. On the other, it further points to the fact that when literati infused their own imagination and aestheticism into songs of commoners, and when they boarded Pearl River flower-boats, they were also entering a subaltern area where

⁶² Zhao Ziyong, (1828), *Yüe Ou*, 8. The diction "Qingzhou's prefect" is a reference to Zhao Ziyong's official career as a county magistrate in Weixian, Shandong, in which Qingzhou was the archaic name of the province.

vulgarity and elegance coexisted. And as a music genre created for the purpose of brothel-entertainment, Yüe Ou retained certain traces of both Muyu Ge and Xianshui Ge.

Unlike lyric poetry (Ci), which is also composed upon definitive musical tones, Yüe Ou is unfettered by musical meter nor are its rhymes restricted by syllabic rules.⁶³ In a Yüe Ou performance, the music is accompanied by the Pipa, a Chinese stringed instrument. But unrestrained in style, Yüe Ou “ignores all tonic sequence, and permits its lines to be ‘long or short’” as long as “all the lines of [a] given song end in the same rhyme.”⁶⁴ For Xian Yuqing, the shift of Yüe Ou away from lyric poetry was the result of a literary trend among certain Guangzhou literati to do away with the tawdry rhyming scheme of traditional poetry, which was initiated by the father of Zhao Ziyong, Zhao Maozang.⁶⁵ Overall, as a vernacular music genre that grew out from the sphere of vulgarity, and was reimagined and refined by literati aestheticism, it is perhaps not difficult to see why Yüe Ou was able to replace its predecessors and became one of the dominating and most influential music genres on the early nineteenth-century Pearl River.

In the 1850s, Guangzhou was severely devastated by a series of wars and the Pearl River entertainment scene had lost its former prosperity. But compiling what was to be one of his last works—an annotated biography on notable Guangdong locals—the senile Zhang Weiping makes a reminiscence under the entry for Zhao Ziyong, who had long since died from illness:

Mingshan (s. n. of Zhao) studied under me when he was twenty... his calligraphy was strong and vigorous... Mingshan excelled in equitation and archery... in painting orchis, bamboo, and crabs; in playing the Pipa; [and] in composing Yüe Ou. Mingshan’s Yüe Ou songs were the best among others. Even in today’s places of

⁶³ Lyric poetry (Ci) uses a set of poetic meters derived from a base set of certain patterns, in fixed-rhythm, fixed-tone, and variable line-length formal types, or model examples. Its rhythmic and tonal patterns are based upon certain, definitive musical tones.

⁶⁴ Clementi, 13.

⁶⁵ Xian, (1947), “Zhao Ziyong Yanjiu,” in Xian Yuqing, *Xian Yuqing Lunzhu Huibian*, (Guilin, Guangxi, China: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2016), 35.

strings and bamboos (pleasure-quarters), there are still courtesans who could sing them.⁶⁶



Figure 6, cover of Zhao Ziyong's 1828 *Yüe Ou*

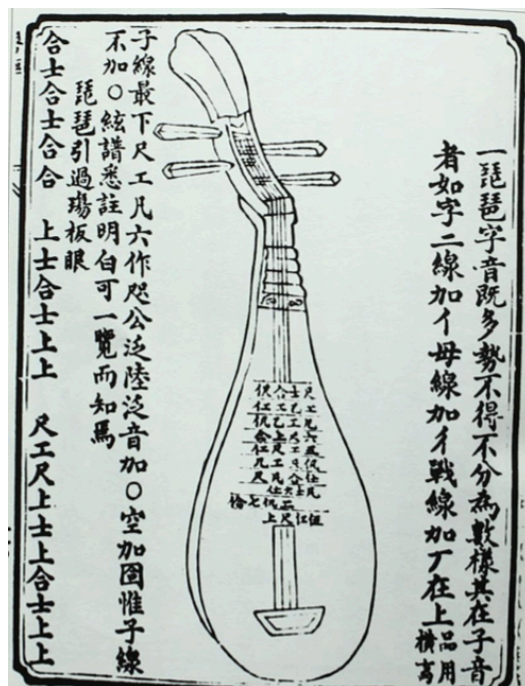


Figure 7, Pipa musical notation in Zhao Ziyong's 1828 *Yüe Ou*

⁶⁶ Zhang Weiping, (19th century), "Yitanlu" in *Guangzhou Dadian*, ed. Chen Jianhua, Cao Chunliang, 14. 11., (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Chubanshe), 602.

The Relief of Suffering

Literati, Entertainment and Literary Meanings of Yüe Ou

Sentiments of love linger in the verses,
Her *Jie Xin* (Yüe Ou) is the most touching.
All of a sudden, the literatus sheds a tear,
When she plucks the fourth string of her Pipa.
—Zhang Weiping, “Pipa,” nineteenth-century⁶⁷

To whirl in the sea of desire is easy,
So, the power to resist is up to you.
To waste your fortune for the emptiness of lust?
Be it a brief encounter but not to drown yourself.
—Zhang Weiping, “Zhujiang Zayong” (A Trivial Song on the Pearl River),
nineteenth-century⁶⁸

As written in the first poem quote above, Yüe Ou was often referred to in the writings of Guangzhou literati by the name of its melody, *Jie Xin* or sometimes, *Jie Xinshi*. In the first song in his Yüe Ou anthology titled “Jie Xinshi,” Zhao Ziyong exclaims:

When a person is relived from inner troubles and sufferings,
his heart will be cleared.
The sea of worldly suffering is deep and vast...
[But] he will taste boundless joy if his heart is relieved.⁶⁹

According to Zhao, Jie Xin stands for resolving the troubles in one’s heart or relieving one of miseries and sufferings. But why did Guangzhou literati, such as Feng Xun and Zhao Ziyong, feel compelled to cross the boundaries of elegance and vulgarity and compose such songs? In

⁶⁷ Zhang Weiping, “Pipa,” in *Songxin Zashi, Zhujiang Zayong*, ed. Deng Guangli and Cheng Ming, *Zhang Nanshan Quanjì*, vol. 3, (Ruyuan, Guangdong, China: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), 216.

⁶⁸ Zhang Weiping, “Zhujiang Zayong,” in *Songxin Shiji, Huadiji*, ed. Deng Guangli and Cheng Ming, *Zhang Nanshan Quanjì*, vol. 2, (Ruyuan, Guangdong, China: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), 488.

⁶⁹ Zhao, (1828), “Jie Xinshi,” in *Yüe Ou*, 33.

his preface, Zhao explains, “Since the literati, who tread the path of virtue, take eager pleasure in hearing the sincere devotions of Yüe Ou, my hope is that this little volume may serve to rescue all such who are drowned in the sea of desires.”⁷⁰ In his preface, Zhao Ziyong gives the reason for the popularity of Yüe Ou. It is because Yüe Ou is a sincere music genre and that it may rescue those “who drowned in the sea of desires.” A similar attitude can be found in second poem of Zhang Weiping quoted above, where the mentor of Zhao warns the world to not waste fortune in the meaningless pursuit for lust. While the words of Zhao Ziyong and Zhang Weiping revealed the reality about the Pearl River Entertainment world, they raise additional questions in the creation and popularity of Yüe Ou. Why were the literati, practitioners of refinement and supposedly, Confucian morality, those who drowned in the sea of desires? Subsequently, why didn’t they, like Feng Xun and Zhao Ziyong, write about themselves in their Yüe Ou songs? The answer to these questions can perhaps be found in the lives of the two literati who composed Yüe Ou.

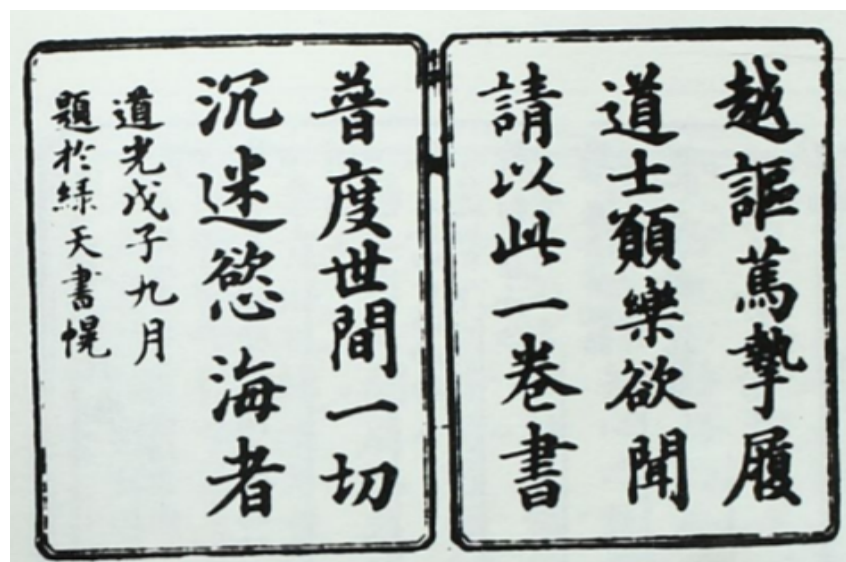


Figure 8, Zhao Ziyong’s preface in his 1828 *Yüe Ou*

Although becoming a bureaucrat was the traditional pursuit for most Chinese literati, both Yüe Ou composers had rather difficult experiences with Chinese officialdom. While

⁷⁰ Zhao, (1828), *Yüe Ou*, 1.

Feng Xun earned the Jinshi degree in the civil service examination at the young age of twenty-five, he did not receive an official appointment until forty-six. Zhao Ziyong on the other hand earned a Juren degree at thirty but enjoyed no luck in his subsequent pursuit for the Jinshi degree. Zhao was eventually appointed county-magistrate in Shandong based on the principle of *Datiao*.⁷¹ During his appointment however, Zhao Ziyong was accused of colluding with the British and he was forced to resign.⁷² Ironically, when Zhao's official career was over, Feng Xun's official appointment had yet to arrive. Despite being talented scholars and responsible officials, both Feng Xun and Zhao Ziyong had a tough career path.⁷³

In Guangzhou, the two abject literati chose to relieve themselves through entertainment. In a conversation with a student, Feng Xun recalled that the happiest moment in his life was:

[When I, Feng Xun] became a Jinshi... Awaiting the appointment at home, I indulged myself in Pearl River brothels with Qiu Zhongyu, Zhao Ziyong and six, seven friends. Singing for the moon and crying for the wind, we squandered monies and competed for the most daring acts. In only a few years, my family fortune was wasted. Yet the official appointment was nowhere in sight, and I was unable to fulfill my ambition.⁷⁴

Rather than a description of a "happiest moment," this passage appears to be an irony and lament of Feng Xun over the failure and hopelessness of his life. Towards the second half of

⁷¹ *Datiao*, or Juren *Datiao*, was a principle of official position appointment established in the 17th year of Qianlong (1752). It rules that every six years, the Qing court will select Juren degree holders who failed to earn higher degrees in the civil service examination as reserve officials. The principle of selection was based primarily on the appearance, and secondarily on the ability of the person. *Datiao* was divided into two ranks, Zhao Ziyong was selected for the first rank, as a reserve county-magistrate.

⁷² When Zhao served as county-magistrate in Shandong, a British warship traveling northward sent men to purchase supplies from the county under Zhao's jurisdiction. The locals saw the British as bandits and the county was under panic. A responsible official, Zhao Ziyong sought the help of Pao Cong, a comprador and native of Zhongshan, Guangdong who could speak English but was wanted by the Qing government for "colluding with the barbarians." Though the trouble was settled, Zhao was later accused of providing shelter to the fugitive Pao Cong and colluding with the British. See *Nanhai Xianzhi* (1872), vol. 20.

⁷³ Feng Xun was known as one of the best Guangzhou poets in his time. When Zhao Ziyong resigned, people of the county formerly under his administration presented him a plaque labeled "Bukui qingtian," meaning that Zhao was well deserved to be called a just official. For a detailed study on Zhao Ziyong, see Xian, 1947 "Zhao Ziyong Yanjiu," in *Xian Yuqing Lunzhu Huibian*, 23-72.

⁷⁴ Lai Xuehai, (1892), "Xüelu shihua," in *Qing shihua sanbian*, vol. 9, (Shanghai, China: Shanghai guji Chubanshe, 2014).

the Qing dynasty, the empire produced more degree holders annually than official positions available. And it can be said that among the larger Guangzhou elite population, Feng Xun and Zhao Ziyong were not alone in their situations. Frustrated and disappointed, these abject literati wandered their ways into Pearl River flower-boats where they witnessed the lives of the equally miserable courtesans, and their experiences sparked emotional resonance. For Feng Xun and Zhao Ziyong, as well as other literati who failed and indulged themselves in brothels, verses of Muyu Ge and of Tanka girl songs, despite their vulgarity, became something that portrayed an ostensible empathy between themselves and courtesans. They also temporarily relieved their miseries, be it in Chinese officialdom or in Pearl River flower-boats, and offered them an emotional escape from a heartless reality. When abjection resonate empathy, it is not difficult to imagine why literati like Feng Xun and Zhao Ziyong felt close to those music and adopted and transformed them into a new music genre named Yüe Ou. Although lyrics of Yüe Ou songs, at face value, chanted of the agony and miseries of courtesans, how can one be so sure that they were not subtle reflections of laments of literati themselves?⁷⁵

As a music genre performed and enjoyed on flower-boats or other places of entertainment however, Yüe Ou appears to be a medium of merrymaking and justification of desires of entertainment patrons who came from different strata of Guangzhou society. In *Zhujiang Minghua Xiaozhuan*, the author, with the pseudonym Zhi Jisheng, writes biographies of Pearl River courtesans in the early nineteenth century. Nearly all of them are said to have been “Girls of poor but good families, who have unfortunately fallen into the entertainment world.”⁷⁶ Another popular publication, *Wenzang Youxi*, collects accounts of

⁷⁵ Due to the lack of sources available, I was unable to explore and discuss the response and feelings of Pearl River courtesans toward Yüe Ou and the literati. However, the acknowledged but lacking aspect of this research will be addressed in a future study focusing on courtesan experiences in the Pearl River entertainment scene.

⁷⁶ Zhi Jisheng, (19th century), *Zhujiang Minghua Xiaozhuan*.

different men who patronized courtesans listed by Zhi Jisheng.⁷⁷ This suggests that not only were the courtesan biographies popular in the Pearl River entertainment world, but they also reveal another aspect of the popularity of Yüe Ou amongst entertainment patrons. In an 1899 account, Qiu Weiyuan (1894 Juren) describes the time when Feng Xun and Zhao Ziyong first composed their Yüe Ou songs as a scenery where “[Patrons] imitated [Feng and Zhao] and competed against each other for the best songs... Before a cup of wine could be finished, a new song would already be composed.” More than Zhao Ziyong who gave the reason for the popularity of Yüe Ou to its sincerity, Qiu Weiyuan adds that “Pleasure-seekers love the songs’ ravishing but melancholic sentiments.”⁷⁸ This further points that while patrons, such as the abject literati, sang of the miserable lives of courtesans, they still played their part in the exploitation of these courtesans. When Huang Zunxian (1848-1905), a famed Hakka poet visited Guangzhou, he records the excitement of his experience with Yüe Ou:

Singing about Zhao Ziyong’s lament over the death of his lover Qiuxi,
The alternating peach blossom rhythm brings ravishing joy.⁷⁹

Similarly, in a poem dedicated to Zhao Ziyong, Xu Rong writes:

Infamously unfaithful was your claim to fame,
But in the world of entertainment this is rather inevitable.⁸⁰

Ultimately, the attitude in the poems of these literati who frequented flower-boats manifested the reality that, Yüe Ou, apart from acting as a merrymaking implement for patrons who found joy within sorrow, served to justify their pleasure-seeking intentions.

⁷⁷ Miao Gen, the author of *Wenzang youxi*, quotes and commentates biographies of Zhi Jisheng. Since Miao Gen was a frequent patron of flower-boats, it is possible that it was Miao who authored the biographies in *Zhujiang minghua xiaozhuan* under the pseudonym Zhi Jisheng.

⁷⁸ Qiu Weiyuan, (1899), *Keyunlun xiaoshuohua*, vol. 2.

⁷⁹ Huang Zunxian, (1911), “Huai Chen Yishan Shi,” in *Renjinglu Shicao*. In the poem, the Yüe Ou described is Zhao Ziyong’s “Diao Qiuxi” (Mourning Qiuxi), in which Zhao laments over the death of his lover Qiuxi, a courtesan who was unable to repay her debt and chose to drown herself in the Pearl River. It is also worth noticing that the name Qiuxi, literally the joy of autumn, carries the paradoxical contrast of sadness, which was often associated with the season autumn in Chinese literature, and happiness.

⁸⁰ Xu Rong, (19th century), “Zhao Mingshan Daling Tongnian,” in *Huagu Tianshe Shichao*, vol. 6.

This mentality among many patrons was shown in one of the most popular Yüe Ou songs titled, “Chu Que Liao Ah Jiu” (Apart from Ah Jiu). According to local tale, the Yüe Ou song was written by a local literatus Ye Tingying for his patron Wu Chongyao (1810-1863), one of the wealthiest maritime merchant in Guangzhou in the 1850s. The song itself was composed much earlier than the 1850s and the anecdote goes that Ye composed the song in order to convince a flower-boat courtesan, Ah Jiu, to accept Wu’s courtship and become his concubine. The song touched and softened Ah Jiu’s heart that when she finally agreed, Ye was awarded a mansion in Xiguan district, a suburb outside urban Guangzhou.⁸¹ In the song, Ye praises the beauty of Ah Jiu but also laments the courtesan’s miserable fate and advises her to “follow a good man” and leave her flower-boat:

Apart from Ah Jiu, who else could be called a soul-ravishing beauty?
 You are so sweet, so winsome, how can the man not love you?
 Whenever he goes to a banquet, he waits for you onboard.
 Your supple waist and limbs, so lithe and graceful, tantalize and induce great longing and regrets,
 Your eyebrows are like the hills of spring, a halo of smile.
 You are clearly the fairy. Alas! Fallen into this earthly place.
 He suffers from a one-sided lovesickness on your account,
 Truly, it is not without cause.
 The Pearl River names you the highest beauty, the very first among maids of wine.
 But don’t you know, for gaiety and wealth, how easily it palls!
 But don’t you know, for men who visit the pleasure-quarters, how unfaithful they can be!
 You make a fortune for your Madame, but you won’t get a share.
 It may be true that sometimes one makes a mistake in following a man ashore,
 And one would rather play for safety and stay in the gay quarters.
 But if one does not settle down, to be anchored to a home, any amount of talk is just useless chatter.
 You think well on it, think well of the world!
 Slowly and thoroughly, you will choke with emotion in your throat,
 Before lifting the wine pot, you will have to swallow your tears.
 Have you ever thought of the words “Follow a good man?”
 My dear! Wander no more!
 The more beautiful and popular you become, the more anxious I grow.

⁸¹ Leung, 205-206; and *Chongxiu Nanhai xianzhi*, (1910), vol. 20.

Seeing you girls escape from the sea of sorrow is far better than us ascending high official world.⁸²

In this Yüe Ou song, Ye Tingying, or Wu Chongyao for whom Ye had written the song, portrayed himself as a tender lover to the courtesan Ah Jiu—one who truly understands her sufferings in a Pearl River flower-boat. Ironically though, the patron necessarily contributed to the courtesan's suffering. He portrays himself as a moralistic savior in the verses but is the ultimate cause of the courtesan's moral dilemma.

What is more revealing however, is the fact that the Yüe Ou song “Chu Que Liao Ah Jiu” was a result of the patronage of a maritime merchant to a literatus. Although there existed a meticulously maintained sphere of refinement of the literati, the interaction between Ye Tingying and Wu Chongyao marks the fact that its boundary was, as Miles notes, “porous and constantly negotiated.”⁸³ Wu Chongyao's passion in collecting works of famous Guangdong literati also affirmed the convergence between the literati strata and the increasingly influential merchant strata in Guangzhou. Across a timespan of almost four decades, Wu Chongyao commissioned a multitude of anthologies, such as *Lingnan Yishu* and *Yüedong Shisanjia Ji* on the literary and scholarly heritage of Guangdong, most of which were compiled by the Xuehaitang scholar Tan Ying (1800-1871). Along with the story about Ah Jiu, these collectanea, commissioned by Wu Chongyao, facilitated and inspired in historical reality further production of texts on the local in Guangzhou. They also reflect in retrospect two different but converging discourse taken by literati and merchants, and by natives and “newcomers.”

Despite their different social statuses, both actors behind the story of the Yüe Ou song, “Chu Que Liao Ah Jiu,” Wu Chongyao and Ye Tingying, have recent ancestors from the province of Fujian and similar experiences in ascending the social hierarchy of

⁸² K. P. K. Whitaker, “A Cantonese Song Entitled ‘Creoy Keok Irio Aa Gao,’” in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 36. 2, 446-459. This is an excerpt of Version C in Whitaker. I used my translation here.

⁸³ Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 63.

Guangzhou. Wu Chongyao on one hand, belonged to the Wu family from Jinjiang, Fujian, which engaged in maritime trade in Guangzhou. Ye Tingying on the other hand, belonged to the Ye family from Tongan, Fujian, which found itself in the salt trade in Guangzhou in the late eighteenth century.⁸⁴ Whereas members of the Wu family portrayed themselves as patrons of Guangzhou literati, members of the Ye family over the course of the nineteenth century began to recast themselves as literati. Likewise, both families, despite their non-Guangdong ancestry, began to see themselves as locals of Guangzhou through showing their familiarity with local culture, dialect, and interaction with elements of both the refined and vulgar in the Pearl River entertainment world.

⁸⁴ Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 36; *Xuxiu Nanhai Xianzhi*, (1910), vol. 20.

The Sound of Home

Identity and Social Mobility in Guangzhou Society

Erstwhile, as I faced the east wind, I vied in singing the songs of Guangzhou,
 The most unforgettable is the sound of my dear home.
 I thank your Excellency for cleaning my ears with your Pipa,
 With a scroll of plum-blossom, your verses reflect a fragrant snow-white heart.
 —Cai Ruping, “Preface in *Yüe Ou*,” 1828⁸⁵

Like Ye Tingying and Wu Chongyao, descendants of recent migrants and sons of local gentry lineages, such as the poet quoted above, Cai Ruping, begun in the early nineteenth century to identify themselves as Guangzhou locals who were familiar with local culture, dialect, and capable of producing or interacting with literature and music of refinement on the Pearl River. Likewise, many sojourning literati have also joined the cohort of arbiters of taste in Guangzhou through their interactions with local elites in the city’s entertainment world. Partaking in the production of localist literature, these sojourners not only joined the discourse of local elites but became part of local Guangzhou culture themselves.

A quintessential sojourning literatus who became part of local Guangzhou culture was the Wulin native, Miao Gen (1766- ?), or better known by his nom de plume, Lianxian. Growing up in the culturally-rich Jiangnan region, Miao Lianxian entered private school at age eight. Troubled by poverty however, his education was forced to be discontinued at age thirteen. Three years later, Miao traveled to Beijing and studied the Classics under his uncle, then a prefect in the capital. At age twenty-two, Miao returned to Wulin county to attend the civil service examination but to no avail. At age twenty-eight, both of his parents passed

⁸⁵ Zhao, *Yüe Ou*, 11.

away, and since then, Miao's life entered a state of constant abjection. Though described by his contemporaries as an erudite scholar who excelled in literature from the antiquity to the present, Miao, much like Feng Xun and Zhao Ziyong who had a lamentable experience with Chinese officialdom, never succeeded in the traditional pursuit of a Chinese literati. From 1795 to 1810, Miao attended nine examinations but to no avail. Impoverished, he was forced to wander across China, making a living by selling calligraphy and acting as a part-time legal secretary (Muyou) for county-magistrates. In disparity, Miao Lianxian laments, "Hunger forced me to find a living from all four directions of the world, I wandered across [eight provinces] ... I failed to make a name for myself, and my ambition wore down by endless suffering, what does heaven want for me?"⁸⁶

Miao Lianxian eventually found his way to the "southern sky" (Guangzhou) when he was over forty-five. Well-versed in the Classics and poetry, Miao quickly befriended leading local figures like Xie Lanheng and Zhang Weiping. When Miao Lianxian paid a visit to Zhang Weiping in one occasion and asked the poetry master for a poem, Zhang writes the following:

The Wulin lyricist Miao Lianxian,
He had sojourned beyond the mountains for twenty-years.
The envoy of Vietnam seeks his old works (Your Excellency authored the work *Wenzang Youxi*),
Whilst talented ladies chant his new lyrics (The courtesan Hongdou loves to read your Excellency's poetry).⁸⁷

In Xie Lanheng's diary, Miao Lianxian was also mentioned. For instance, Xie writes one time, "I attended a banquet of [Zeng... and] around nine o'clock at night, [I left the flower-boat] and met with Gen [Miao Gen] on a boat at Kuijiang cove."⁸⁸ Perhaps in a similar state of mind as Feng Xun who then, was waiting for his official appointment, and as Zhao

⁸⁶ Miao Gen, "Zishushi," in Miao Gen, *Mengbi Shenghua: Wenzang Youxi*. (Shanghai, China: Guangyi Shuju, 1935), vol. 1; Miao Gen, "Qiansheng Zhuan," in *Wenzang Youxi*.

⁸⁷ Zhang Weiping, "Untitled," in *Tingsonglu Shicao*, vol. 16, ed. Deng Guanli and Chang Ming, *Zhang Nanshan Quanji*, vol. 1, 452.

⁸⁸ Xie, *Changxingxing zhai riji*, the 16th day of the 8th month in the 25th year of Jiaqing (1820).

Ziyong who was already forced to resign; Miao Lianxian also indulged himself on the Pearl River whenever he had the chance and developed affections with many courtesans and companionships with different literati.

In his publication *Wenzang Youxi*, which surprisingly was popularly sought after in Nguyễn Vietnam, Miao Lianxian records several Zhuzhici poems composed by himself, Liu Huadong (1773-1836), Yi Kezhong (1796-1838), and Wu Lanxiu (1789-1839).⁸⁹ Written with colloquial diction in the Guangzhou dialect, these poems described the poets' appreciation for talented flower-boat courtesans and the music, particularly Yüé Ou, they played. Among the four literati, Miao Lianxian was a native of Wulin county in the Jiangnan region, and Wu Lanxiu was from the Hakka-predominated Jiayingzhou prefecture in northeast Guangdong. Whereas Liu Huadong and Yi Kezhong were born in Guangzhou only because their fathers—a salt merchant from Fujian and an administrator from Shanxi—found commercial opportunity and official appointment in the city. On one hand their poems, reflect the familiarity of these four “newcomers” with localist elements like the Guangzhou dialect and Yüé Ou. On the other, they reveal a gradual, if not immediate process of identity transformation from sojourner and newcomer to local.

The interaction with and incorporation of Yüé Ou and other localist elements in the literature of these four literati, as well as their frequent gatherings with leading locals indicate that they had successfully created upward social mobility and became part of local elite society. Even more, two of the four literati—Wu Lanxiu and Yi Kezhong—became members of the first cohort of co-masters of the Xuehaitang, one of the most influential academies in nineteenth century Guangzhou. Along with other co-masters and students, they partook in the reinterpretation of local history, like *Nanhan Ji*, through a localist framework; and compiled collectanea, such as *Xuehaitang Ji*, of literature and scholarship by Guangdong literati they

⁸⁹ Ching, *Di Yu Wenhua*, 132. The Nguyễn dynasty was the last imperial family that governed present day Vietnam from 1802 to 1945.

deemed significant to the enrichment of local culture.⁹⁰ Through the association with this important academy, and their endeavors at producing local history, literature, and scholarship, these newcomers and sojourning literati constructed their local identities and reinvented themselves as locals of Guangzhou. Interestingly, when Miao Lianxian and others produced literature, they became part of the local culture they wrote about. Whereas Liu Huadong, in the image of an eloquent pleader (Zhuangshi or Songshi), became a favorite character of Cantonese opera and of local tales in Guangzhou; Miao Lianxian and his romance with a flower-boat courtesan were adapted into a Nanyin song titled, “Ketu Qiuhen” (The Autumn Exile). Prevalent in Pearl River delta popular culture, the story of Miao Lianxian continues to be told today in Guangdong cinema and television.⁹¹ But while it may seem inspiring for locals of a particular region that outsiders accepted and even became interactive with local culture; such phenomenon should not be seen as the expansion of this region’s culture beyond its dialect- and regional boundaries. Rather, it was the historical episode in which outsiders were merely absorbed into a local society and the culture it carried. For whether intentionally or accidentally, through their adoption of localist elements, newcomers and sojourning literati in Guangzhou left a trace in the city and became an integral part of its local culture.

Like sojourning literati, merchant lineages with non-Guangdong ancestry also began to utilize local entertainment, like Yüé Ou, to reinvent their social and cultural identities. However, different from sojourning literati who could quickly establish ties with local cultural elites through their shared knowledge on literati culture, many merchants lacked the necessary cultural resources to do so. In fact, anti-merchant rhetoric and the will to maintain their boundary of literary elite status and cultural refinement at times proved to be a compelling discourse among Pearl River delta literati.⁹² One impactful controversy, where a

⁹⁰ Miles also suggests “newcomers,” that is migrants and sojourners produced localist texts and reinterpreted local history in order to portray themselves as the leading figures of the city’s elite culture. See Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 127-164.

⁹¹ Ching, *Diyu Wenhua*, 132.

⁹² Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 71.

maritime merchant family was severely criticized by a dozens of literati, occurred when a merchant, Lu Wenjing from Xinhui county, enshrined his father, Lu Guanheng following his death in 1812. In 1814, Lu Wenjing and other members of the Lu lineage rallied the support from a number of Xinhui gentry and petitioned to local authorities to allow Lu Guanheng to be enshrined in the Local Worthies Shrine. Their justification was that, Lu Guanheng, a merchant, had charitable acts and had even printed the *Zhouyi Benyi Zhu*, an annotation of neo-Confucian master Zhu Xi's commentary to the *Yijing* by a Xinhui scholar named Hu Fang (1654-1727). The petition was approved by provincial officials in 1815 and to celebrate the event, which marked the elevation of the status of the Lu lineage in local society, Lu Wenjing arranged a ceremony in front of the county school.⁹³

In the meantime, when the aforementioned Liu Huadong found out about the affair after his failed attempt in the metropolitan-level examination, the Panyu Juren was outraged. In response, Liu composed an essay titled, "Mourning Baisha," in which he suggested that a petty merchant Lu Guanheng should in no way, be honored in the shrine along the great Ming scholar Chen Xianzhang (1428-1500), known as Master Baisha. Additionally, Liu sent a letter to the governor-general of Guangdong, arguing that merchants should not be honored in a Confucian temple. When the letter was returned, because the governor-general refused to meet with anyone lacking credentials of office, Liu turned to his friend, Chen Tan, who then colluded with Liu in printing and distributing the letter as a pamphlet. Their actions quickly mobilized the support of over two hundred of Guangzhou's literati. Seeking to remove Lu Guanheng's name from the shrine, they went from yamen to yamen until evidence was discovered that in 1787, Lu Guanheng had gotten into a dispute with his older cousin and rooted out some of the latter's hair. With new proof, Liu Huadong and his supporters co-signed a petition to provincial authorities. But the officials stalled—with rumors of having

⁹³ *Xinhui Xianzhi*, (1841), vol. 14; see also Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 72.

received bribes from Lu Wenjing—and instead took Liu Huadong and his friend, Chen Tan, into custody. The case lasted ten months, and for five months Liu Huadong was in the Nanhai prison, where a young scholar from his home county, named Yi Kezhong daringly visited him and brought him rice porridge from time to time.⁹⁴ The controversy alarmed the Qing court and two imperial envoys were sent to investigate the matter. They ruled that Lu Guanheng indeed could not be enshrined as a worthy because he had struck an older cousin and because there was no evidence that he had any scholarly accomplishments. In the end, Lu's name was officially removed from the shrine in 1816; and for his role in agitating the protest, Liu Huadong had his Juren degree revoked, which in Zhang Weiping's words, was also because "the provincial governor hated [Liu's] guts."⁹⁵

Though the Lu Guanheng controversy appears to have been a result of the literati's desires to maintain the status boundary between merchants and themselves, Miles points out that under its surface there existed the possibilities of bias and conflict between different regional cohorts of elites. Whereas the Lu lineage and its supporters were all natives of Xinhui, the leaders of the outrageous literati, Liu Huadong and Chen Tan, were descendants of recent migrants from Fujian. By siding themselves with a local cultural icon—Master Baisha, Chen Xianzhang—"newcomer" literati associated with the Xuehaitang legitimized their own standing in local society.⁹⁶ More ironically were the two literati's relationship with other merchant lineages in Guangzhou, namely the Pan family, which also originated from Fujian. In fact, Liu's right-hand-man in the protest, Chen Tan, was brother-in-law and maternal cousin to a son of the Pan family, Pan Zhengheng (亨). When Pan Zhengheng's cousin, another member of the Pans, Pan Zhengheng (衡) built a studio in on the Pan estate in Henan to store his large collection of the paintings of famed Shunde artist Li Jian

⁹⁴ Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 73.

⁹⁵ Zhang Weiping, "Yitanlu," in *Guangzhou Dadian*, 591; Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 73.

⁹⁶ Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 73.

(1747-1799), he was not only able to acquire a commemorative work from Xie Lansheng—but also a poem from Chen Tan and even an essay from the unbending Liu Huadong.⁹⁷ Indeed, though it could prove to be a motivating discourse, anti-merchant rhetoric cannot, as Miles suggest, be reduced to a simple dichotomy between merchants and literati.⁹⁸ Like other late imperial Chinese cities, the boundary between merchant and literati or gentry was porous, and that merchants and literati were inevitably tied with each other.

Writing on the late Ming, Yü Ying-Shih observes a shift in the attitude of literati on selling their literary services to wealthy merchants.⁹⁹ In the commercially prosperous early nineteenth-century Guangzhou, a similar dynamic was present. Like Tan Ying, the Xuehaitang scholar who was commissioned by maritime merchant Wu Chongyao to compile literature and scholarship collectanea, Zhang Weiping observed that his friend Xiong Jingxing (1816 Juren), a Nanhai native, could earn several hundred teals of gold annually by selling his paintings and calligraphy.¹⁰⁰ All the while Zhang Weiping himself grew up in the Pan estate in Henan, where his father was hired as a private tutor for the Pan children. When he recalled his childhood in the Pan estate, Zhang described its gardens as being a world away from the earthly presence of wine shops and markets.¹⁰¹ Before Xie Lansheng became an academy master of the Yangcheng Shuyuan academy in 1804, he was also a private tutor in the Pan family. Like Zhang Weiping who remained close to the Pan members he grew up with, Xie Lansheng kept his ties with the family after his resignation. In 1822, Xie visited the Pan estate and performed the Kaimeng ceremony for a Pan child.¹⁰² Again, the interactions

⁹⁷ Huang Renheng, (1945), *Panyu Henan Xiaozhi*, (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2012); Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 75.

⁹⁸ Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 74.

⁹⁹ Yü Ying-Shih, “Shi-Shang Hudong Yu Ruxue Zhuanxiang: Ming-Qing Shehuishi Yu Sixiangshi Zhao Yi Mianxiang,” in *Jinshi Zhongguo Zhi Chuantong Yu Tuibian: Liu Guangjing Yuanshi Qishiwu Sui Zhushou Lunwenji*, edited by Hao Yanping and Wei Xiumei, vol. 1, (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1998), 11, 14-15 (3-52).

¹⁰⁰ Zhang Weiping, “Yitanlu,” in *Guangzhou Dadian*, 14. 11., 601.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, “Huajia Xiantan,” vol. 1, in *Guangzhou Dadian*, 14. 11., 619.

¹⁰² Xie, *Changxingxing Zhai Riji*, the 4th day of the 11th month in the 2nd year of Daoguang (1822). Kaimeng is a ceremony to signify that the formal education for a child will thereafter be commenced.

between literati and merchant, in the form of exchange, complicates the simple dichotomy between merchant and literati. Indeed, the social and cultural mobility that both merchants and literati enjoyed were symbiotic. On one hand, merchant families wished to establish a standing in the sphere of refinement and recast themselves as cultural elites could do so by commissioning literary works from the literati. On the other, literati with non-Guangdong ancestry who sought to legitimize themselves in local society could do so under the cultural patronage of wealthy and ambitious merchants. Furthermore, by interacting with the merchants, local literati could get hold of refined works they otherwise have no access to—as in the case of Pan Zhengheng, the merchant cousin of Chen Tan, and his large collection of Li Jian paintings, which were highly valued by the coterie of Guangdong literati.



Figure 9, Zhang Weiping studying the Classics under his father at the Pan estate in Henan, in Zhang Weiping, “Huajia Xiantan,” in *Guangzhou Dadian*, ed., Chen Jianhua and Cao Chunliang. Volume 14. 11, (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Press, 2008), 94.



Figure 10, Zhang Weiping studying the Classics under his father at the Pan estate in Henan, in “Huajia Xiantan,” in *Guangzhou Dadian*, 94.

In addition to the exchange between literary services and remunerative returns, merchant families often showcased their cultural and local credentials by patronizing literati in the Pearl River entertainment world. In Xie Lansheng’s diary, the arbiter of taste in Guangzhou often records his social gatherings with merchants in the city. On one day in 1820, Xie writes, “I boarded the rich flower-boat of Pinghu... the courtesan sat in the gazebo [in Pinghu’s garden], her green clothes corresponded with the redness of the litchi fruits, what an elegant sight to see.”¹⁰³ On the next day, Xie appeared in the banquet of Nanzhou and listened to Yüe Ou songs with Zhao Ziyong.¹⁰⁴ In the first entry, Pinghu was the nom de plume of Wu Bingjian (1769-1843), father of aforementioned maritime merchant Wu Chongyao. Whereas Nanzhou in the second entry was the nom de plume of Wu Bingzhen, younger brother of Wu Bingjian. Originally from Tongan, Fujian, the Wu family ventured to Guangzhou in tea business during the seventeenth-century. Under the fifth-generation patriarch Wu Guoying, father of Wu Bingjian and Wu Bingzhen, the family stepped foot into maritime trade. When Wu Bingjian assumed family leadership in 1801, he became in his time

¹⁰³ Xie, *Changxingxing Zhai Riji*, the 7th day of the 5th month in the 25th year of Jiaqing (1820).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, the 8th day of the 5th month in the 25th year of Jiaqing (1820).

the wealthiest maritime merchant in Guangzhou, amassing possibly the largest personal fortune in the world.¹⁰⁵ As shown in the cases of the father, uncle, and son—Wu Bingjian, Wu Bingzhen, and Wu Chongyao—the Wus, like the Pans, frequently patronized local literati—inviting them to banquets on their privately-owned flower-boats or to poetry readings in their family gardens on the southern bank of the Pearl River. These activities, which provided literati with the opportunities for refined entertainment, not only allowed merchants to establish and reinforce cultural credentials but also showed their familiarity and deep association with different localist elements. And like other wealthy and ambitious merchant families, the Wus retained their financial capabilities whilst accumulating more and more cultural capitals and portraying themselves as part of local elite society. In the reigns of Daoguang and Xianfeng, from 1820 to 1861, the Wu and Pan families, including others like the aforementioned Ye lineage, ascended the status of literati through several of their family members who earned Juren degrees from the civil service examination. While the ancestral shrines of the Wu and Pan families, signifying their identities as Guangzhou locals, still stand today in the old city.

¹⁰⁵ Both the father and son, Wu Bingjian and Wu Chongyao, were known to Westerners by their business title, Howqua. See Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 35.



Figure 11, a portrait of Zhang Weiping, mentor of Feng Xun, Zhao Ziyong, and Xu Rong, in Ye Yanlan & Ye Gongchuo, (1928 & 1953), *Qingdai Xüezhe Xiangzhuan Heji*, Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1989.



Figure 12, a portrait of Xie Lansheng, in *Qingdai Xüezhe Xiangzhuan Heji*.



*Figure 13, a portrait of Tan Ying, the anthologist and Xuehaitang co-master commissioned by maritime merchant Wu Chongyao, in *Qingdai Xüezhe Xiangzhuan Heji*.*



*Figure 14, a portrait of Yi Kezhong, Xuehaitang co-master, in *Qingdai Xüezhe Xiangzhuan Heji*.*



*Figure 15, a portrait of Wu Lanxiu, Xuehaitang co-master and revisionist of local Guangdong history, in *Qingdai Xüezhe Xiangzhuan Heji*.*



*Figure 16, “Wu Ziyuan Gong Yixiang” (Memorial portrait of His Excellency Wu Chongyao), in *Ruyüe Wushi Zupu*.*

The Poetic Pedigree

Valorization and Elaboration of Local Culture

The strings are broken, and the jade zither shattered.
Before the waning moon, the wind of dawn chills the remaining night.
Who would be relieved from sufferings?
When he listens to the clear song a hundred times.

—Feng Xun, “Zhujiang Xiaoxia Zhuzhici” (Summer Zhuzhici on the Pearl River), nineteenth-century¹⁰⁶

Like the sorrowful *Ziye* songs, it tells of her helpless love,
The verses of *Jie Xin* channel romantic sentiments into my ears.
No matter if it comes from the present or the antiquity, from the south or the north,
So long as it touches our hearts it is a sincere song.

—Zhang Weiping, “Tingge” (Listening to songs), nineteenth-century¹⁰⁷

When Feng Xun first composed his Yüe Ou songs, he was determined to transform the vulgar Tanka songs and Muyu Ge into a refined and poetic music genre. When Zhao Ziyong published his Yüe Ou anthology in 1828, he was equally concerned with attributing literati aesthetics to the genre. And in Zhao’s Yüe Ou songs, readers will encounter a large number of allusions to history, mythology and literature. In his song titled, “Taohua Shan” (Peach-blossom Fan), Zhao takes on the perspective of a courtesan and laments:

The peach-blossom fan has written upon it a poem of heart-breaking verses.
If you write of deep passion, the fan will be but a source of anguish.
For no fate is frailer than the peach-blossom, no passion thinner than paper;
Wherefore you know that peach-blossom drawn on paper is more fragile still.
My lord! If you write of the flower’s beauty, you first should understand her thoughts:
Youth is not to gain! Spoil not the blossom-season.
For playful romance is nothing to be proud of.
The autumn wind brings a dirge, the round fans sit lifelessly in her boudoir.
She paints thereon ten thousand leaves and a thousand flowers, all for the passion you left behind.

¹⁰⁶ Feng Xun, “Zhujiang Xiaoxia Zhuzhici,” in *Ziliang Shichun*, vol. 21.

¹⁰⁷ Zhang Weiping, “Tingge,” in *Songxin Shiji, Zhujiangji*, ed. Deng Guangli and Cheng Ming, *Zhang Nanshan Quanj*, vol. 2, (Ruyuan, Guangdong, China: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), 20.

Look at the love of Xiangjun and Lord Xin: had not their passion been deep, how could they have reached the joyful days?¹⁰⁸

In this particular song, Zhao Ziyong borrows the theme of passion from the eponymous play “Peach-Blossom Fan” by Shandong playwright Kong Shangren (1648-1718), which depicts the fall of the Ming dynasty through the love story of its two main characters: a young scholar Hou Fangyu (Lord Xin) and a courtesan named Li Xiangjun. Transferring the setting from a dynastic catastrophe to one of peace and prosperity, Zhao retains the motifs of separation and union between literati and courtesans in love. And adding a unique style of combined literary (Classical Chinese) and vernacular (Guangzhou dialect) writing, Zhao Ziyong’s song calls both to the dominating Chinese literary tradition and distinctive local characteristic of Guangzhou.

In another song titled, “Jietan Boming” (Lamenting for Life’s Frailty), Zhao Ziyong writes of a courtesan who compares her own fate to four tragic beauties whose stories appear frequently in Chinese literature:

Look ye! Consort Yang’s jade bones were buried beside the mountain track.
The grass of the Great Plains remained green on Zhaojun’s tomb.
Fallen was Xiaoqing who mourns over her past.
And Shiniang drank of her misery as abundant as water.¹⁰⁹

Among the four beauties, Consort Yang and Zhaojun were historical figures; and Xiaoqing and Shiniang appeared in fictional works. The first beauty, Consort Yang (Yang Yu-Huan) was the favorite consort of Tang emperor Li Longji. The diction “jade bones” (Yu-Gu) was in no doubt, a reference to the consort’s name, Yu-Huan. In his poem “Chang Hen Ge” (Song of Everlasting Regret), which tells the love story between Consort Yang and Li Longji, Tang poet Bai Juyi writes, “Although there were three-thousand beauties in the inner palace; he places the love for all three-thousand on her alone.” However, for those who envied the favor

¹⁰⁸ Zhao, (1828), *Yüe Ou*, 67. This is my modified version of the original translation by Cecil Clementi, in Clementi, 97.

¹⁰⁹ Zhao, (1828), *Yüe Ou*, 33.

she received, Consort Yang was a cause for the fall of emperor Li Longji's prosperous reign. When the An Lushan rebellion broke out and Li Longji was forced to leave the capital, the imperial army refused their loyalty to the emperor unless he execute his beloved consort. In Bai Juyi's words:

The six armies refused to advance any further, so the emperor was left without a choice.

The writhing fair maiden, whose long and slender eyebrows resembled the feathery feelers of a moth, died in front of the horses.

The second beauty, Zhaojun (Wang Zhaojun), was a maid in the Han imperial palace. She was picked and sent by emperor Liu Shi to marry Chanyu Huhanye in order to establish friendly relationship between the Han empire and the nomadic Xiongnu empire. In the most prevalent version of her story, it is said that Zhaojun left her hometown on horseback on a bright autumn morning, with a Pipa in her arms, and began a journey to the great plains in the north. For Zhao Ziyong's contemporary audience, this must've evoked in their imaginations, the image of flower-boat courtesans who excelled in the art of Pipa performance. In the Xiongnu harem, Zhaojun made her request to return home, but to no avail. When Chanyu Huhanye died, she was forced to follow Xiongnu levirate and remarry the next Chanyu, her stepson. She eventually died in the plains, with the ever-longing hope of returning home.

The third and fourth beauties, Xiaoqing and Shiniang (Du Shiniang), were both characters in the works of Ming playwright Feng Menglong (1574-1646). Xiaoqing appeared in Feng Menglong's love-story collection, *Qingtian Baojian*. A concubine, Xiaoqing was bitter enemy to her lover's wife. One day, after a quarrel, in which the wife carried the day, Xiaoqing invited a painter to draw a portrait for her. After several revisions, the portrait was painted, surpassing in grace and loveliness. When the painter left, Xiaoqing put the picture on her bedside, burning incense-sticks and pouring a libation of pear-wine before it. Then with a cry, "Xiaoqing! Xiaoqing! Was this your fate?"—she fell back from a chair, and with tears

like rain, she died.¹¹⁰ Shiniang (Du Shiniang) on the other hand, appeared in Feng Menglong's *Jingu Qiguan*. A courtesan, she met a talented young scholar, Li Yuxian, at the age of nineteen. Li and Shiniang fell in love, but after a year in the brothel, the scholar had spent all his money; and his father, lieutenant-governor of Zhejiang, hearing of his son's indulgence, ordered him home. Deeply in love, Shiniang redeemed herself from the brothel, left with her lover, and carried with her a heavy chest. Traveling on the riverine way, they met a merchant, who, availing himself of the poverty of Li Yuxian and his fear of his father's anger, induced the scholar to sell to him Shiniang for a sum of ten-thousand teal of silver. Desperate, Li agreed. And Shiniang, after learning of the bargain and being handed over to the merchant, took out her heavy chest. She showed the chest to her lover and the merchant, and in it, were piles of priceless jewelry. To their surprise, Shiniang condemned her lover for his unfaithfulness and avarice; and taking the chest with her, she jumped into the river and was drowned.¹¹¹

By transferring the stories from their original settings to the Pearl River and replacing the traditional intertwining structure of love with one of agony and regret, Zhao Ziyong's Yüe Ou songs resonate both with the dominating Chinese literary tradition and the flavor of local entertainment. Perhaps to promote his songs among a non-Guangzhou-dialect-speaking audience, and to draw a parallel between Yüe Ou and classical Chinese literature, Zhao included a comprehensive dictionary of vernacular idioms and diction and their Classical Chinese equivalents in his publication.¹¹² In *Nanhai Xianzhi*, the gazetteer of Zhao Ziyong's home-county attributes vulgarity and profanity to Tanka songs, all the while Zhao's Yüe Ou songs are "rather appealing and emotional, expressing an archaic beauty of Ziye folk songs."¹¹³ In this gazetteer entry, Ziye was a folkish music genre. Originating in second to

¹¹⁰ Feng Menglong, *Qingtian Baojian*, xiv.

¹¹¹ Feng Menglong, *Jingu Qiguan*, v.

¹¹² Zhao, (1828), "Fangyan Fannie," in *Yüe Ou*, 1-4.

¹¹³ *Nanhai Xianzhi*, (1872), vol. 20.

fifth century Jiangnan, Ziyè songs were sung in the perspective of females and expressed their romantic experiences. A friend of Zhao Ziyong once describes him as a person who “excelled in the art of Ziyè songs, and whose melodious voice is ver clear and pleasant.”¹¹⁴ Perhaps the editors of the gazetteer wished to draw a parallel between Ziyè and Zhao Ziyong’s Yüè Ou, and give the music genre of their native region a similar sense of archaic beauty so enjoyed by Ziyè songs. Overall, by drawing different allusions and adding a unique style of combined literary and vernacular writing, Zhao Ziyong presented Yüè Ou as part of both the Chinese literary tradition and local Guangzhou culture.

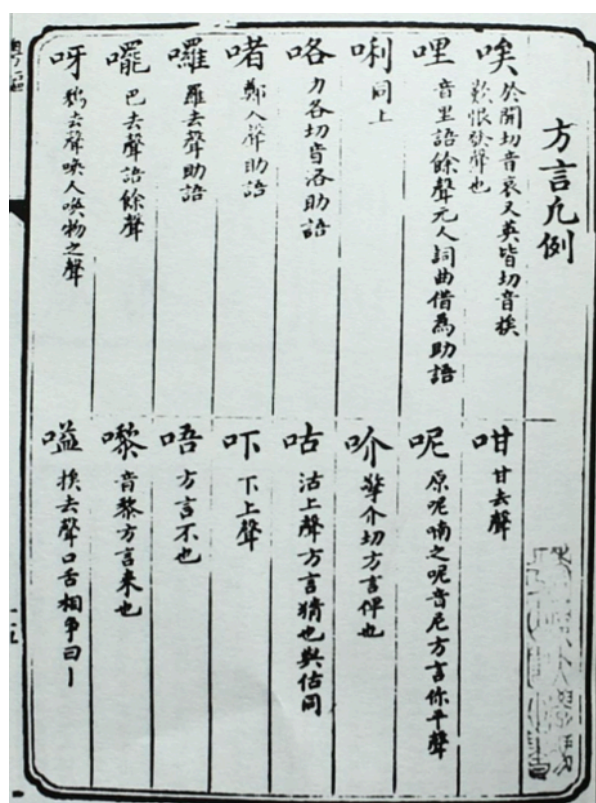


Figure 17, “Fangyan Fanlie” (Explanatory notes on the dialect) in Zhao Ziyong’s 1828 *Yüè Ou*

Like Zhao Ziyong, many literati, who associated themselves with Guangzhou, also took Yüè Ou as a way to validate their linkage with the city and promote the music genre as

¹¹⁴ Xu Rong, (19th century), *Huagui Tianshe Shichao*, vol. 6.

part of its local culture. In one of his poems, printed in the preface of Zhao's anthology, Han Banner man Xu Rong affirms the local culture and dialect of Guangzhou and writes:

Born and raised in the southern Man (barbaric) village, we ply the local tongue.
 Yet, even in vulgar words we can express our emotions and concerns.
 The Pipa melody breaks and unites as the notes sob into the sounds of yi-yi ya-ya.
 Our poet makes his verses long and short, just like the *Zhuzhici* poems.¹¹⁵

While the description of a “Man (barbaric) village” and the “local tongue” seem to imply a self-mockery on the poet's part, they also reflect Xu Rong's attachment to Guangzhou, its dialect and culture. The diction “yi-yi ya-ya” was also a reference to the fourteenth century poem, “Guangzhou Ge” (Song of Guangzhou) by Nanhai poet, Sun Fen (1337-1393), in which he writes, “Min courtesans and Yüe girls have countenances like flowers. Their southern Man songs and rustic tunes sound yi-yi ya-ya.”¹¹⁶ Originally, the diction “yi-yi ya-ya” implies a mockery by outsiders on the barbarity of the music of Guangdong in antique times. But under Sun Fen and Xu Rong, it became a representation of chants of Pearl River courtesans. Despite having an ancestral link to north China, Xu's appreciation for local culture—the poem of Sun Fen, a local poet, and Yüe Ou, a local music genre—as well as his active participation in the production of localist literature reveal his endeavor to construct an identity that was local.¹¹⁷ By connecting with Sun Fen, whose poetry was revered and quoted by generations of Guangzhou poets, Xu Rong inscribed himself and Yüe Ou into the poetic pedigree of Guangzhou poets, and therefore the culture of Guangzhou. He might have been a Han Bannerman stationed in Guangzhou's Banner Quarter to oversee the city, but by

¹¹⁵ Zhao, (1828), *Yüe Ou*, 8.

¹¹⁶ *Guangzhou Fuzhi*, (1879), vol. 15. For the translation, see Honey, *The Southern Garden Poetry Society*, 18-19. Honey's original translation for the diction was “goo-goo ga-ga.” I changed the transliteration to match the diction's pronunciations in both Mandarin Chinese and the Guangzhou dialect.

¹¹⁷ Sun Fen was also a connoisseur in pre-nineteenth-century Yüe Ou (vernacular songs). When he was captured by Zhu Yuanzhang, founder of the Ming dynasty, and imprisoned in Nanjing, he often looked far into the distance (towards the direction of Guangzhou) and sang songs of Yüe.

connecting with Sun Fen and Yüe Ou, Xu reinvented himself as a Guangzhou local who was ever concerned with promoting the local culture of his city.¹¹⁸

Similarly, Zhang Weiping, mentor of Feng Xun, Zhao Ziyong and Xu Rong, compares Yüe Ou with two established music genres from other parts of the empire and exclaims in the preface of Zhao's anthology:

While the Kun melodies are elegant, they lack novelty.
While the Qin tunes are vigorous, they lack softness.
Our poet's songs are filled by melancholic rhymes: they trip and throb, stop and subside.
When they are being sung, the fish and dragons in the water depths come forth and roam.
Know ye the reason?
He has woven into his songs the love of this earthly world.¹¹⁹

Zhang Weiping further claims, "Who has composed these verses in a local tongue? Had I met master Yu-Yang betimes, I would have shown him this book for his poetry anthology."¹²⁰ In his preface, Yu-Yang is the pseudonym of renowned Shandong poet Wang Shizhen, who according to Zhang, collected "Yüe Ge" (Songs of Yüe) in his poetry collectanea, *Chibei Outan*. Wang Shizhen was in fact a friend with various Guangdong poets. In 1685, when he was dispatched to conduct sacrifices in the Temple of the God of the South Seas, located east of Guangzhou, Wang mingled with leading local poets and felt at ease in the city's poetic climate.¹²¹ More than Xu Rong who inserted himself and Yüe Ou into the poetic pedigree of Guangzhou, Zhang linked the music genre, for him an embodiment of local culture, with Wang Shizhen, a famous non-Guangzhou poet and the Chinese literary tradition he

¹¹⁸ Xu Rong also shared close ties with the prominent Xuehaitang academy in Guangzhou, which was known for its production of localist literature. According to Miles, Xu Rong was dedicated to promoting his identity as a Han Chinese (rather than a Bannerman)—or more specifically, a Guangzhou literatus. See Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 137.

¹¹⁹ Zhao, (1828), *Yüe Ou*, 7. Zhang Weiping's pseudonym in the anthology is Hongliao tanbian yuzhe, the fisherman by the red weed shores. The other two masters of poetry in Guangdong were Huang Peifang and Tan Jingzhao. Huang was also an author of multiple poems in the preface of Zhao Ziyong's preface. Huang's pseudonym in the anthology is Xiangshi, stone of fragrance.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 7.

¹²¹ For Wang Shizhen's travel in Guangzhou, see *Guangzhou Fuzhi*, (1879), vol. 111.

represented. By so doing, Zhang Weiping elevated the literary value of Yüé Ou and promoted the local culture of Guangzhou to a national level. Nevertheless, Zhang Weiping's promotion of Yüé Ou, along with the efforts of Xu Rong and other literati who associated themselves with Guangzhou, proved fruitful.

Since it first appeared in the early nineteenth-century, Yüé Ou became so established in the Pearl River delta that "[it is] known to high and low, rich and poor; [it is] sung alike by [courtesans] on board... flower-boats, by blinded-minstrel girls... and by the dairy beggar in the suburban slum."¹²² The music genre's popularity among different strata of Guangzhou society, once again point to an intersection between what has traditionally been regarded as literati-like and commoners-like, and between the refined and vulgar. Despite being created from literati imagination, Yüé Ou cannot be regarded as a music genre solely enjoyed by the educated elites. For it was, originally, a music tradition of Tanka girls and commoners; and was only extracted by literati, like Feng Xun and Zhao Ziyong, from the sphere of vulgarity. Though Yüé Ou as a local music genre had been recreated with literati asceticism and though commoners were less literarily oriented and erudite; they were able to understand, appreciate, and even identify with Yüé Ou because of its roots in the Guangzhou dialect and local music tradition. For the Guangzhou-dialect-speaking population at large, and for those who took root in the city and its culture, Yüé Ou as a part of Pearl River entertainment and local Guangzhou culture remained popular and ever active in their imagination throughout the nineteenth-century.

In 1924, a decade after the abdication of the Qing court, Liao Fengshu (1865-1954) published an anthology of his own Yüé Ou songs titled, *Xin Yüé Ou Jie Xin*. In the preface, he tells a story of how Yüé Ou evoked his nostalgia for Guangzhou:

¹²² Clementi, *The Cantonese Love Songs*, 1.

[In Spring 1921] I was recuperating in Japan without much friends. Sitting by the window, the lonely moon and waning light prompted me to think of the past. That year when I was on a Pearl River flower-boat, the night was quite, and shades of people faded into shadows. A courtesan sat under the curtain—the Pipa covered half of her face—she sang a Yüe Ou song in a soft voice. Before me, tears dropped from her eyes. That moment felt like only yesterday, and I couldn't help but sighed [stroked my beard] and whispered to myself a Yüe Ou song.¹²³

Luo Yinggong (1872-1924), a Beijing opera playwright and native of Shunde, Guangdong who sojourned in Beijing makes a similar remark about Yüe Ou in Liao's anthology:

Our Yüe (Guangdong) dialect is strange, it does not match the sound of the central plains (Mandarin-speaking provinces)... But Yüe Ou of Zhao Ziyong is the most wondrous music in all-under-heaven. Its verses are ordinary, but their meanings are deep... On the Pearl River, under the glimmers lantern lights, when she plucked the Pipa and whispered her melancholic chants, I didn't know if I was joyful or sad, dizzy or conscious... Around me, there were people who looked down and wept... I have resided in the capital (Beijing) for almost twenty years, and haven't heard the music for a long time. [But] whenever I hold a volume of Yüe Ou in my hands, I can't help but feel saddened and think about the past.¹²⁴

In these two prefaces, both Liao and Luo recall their heartfelt experiences with Pearl River courtesans who sang Yüe Ou and emphasize the significance of the Guangzhou dialect in complementing the quality of the genre. Living far away from their native region, the attachment of Liao and Luo to the dialect and culture of Guangzhou also refuted the remote contempt of Shen Fu and resonated with local literati such as Xu Rong and Zhang Weiping. Whereas Xu and Zhang a century ago found Yüe Ou to be elegant and enjoyable, Liao and Luo found that the genre could make them feel at home. Although both Liao Fengshu and Luo Yinggong were not natives of urban Guangzhou—Liao was born in Huiyang county and Luo a native of Shunde county—their nostalgia about Yüe Ou reveal the regional influence of the music genre have across the Pearl River delta and the Guangzhou-dialect-speaking population. The prefaces of Liao Fengshu and Luo Yinggong thus suggest that, as an integrated part of Guangzhou culture, Yüe Ou not only absorbed non-Guangdong sojourners,

¹²³ Liao Fengshu, (1924), *Xin Yüe Ou Jie Xin*, (Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu, 2011), I. Liao Entao, s. n. Fengshu, was a diplomat of the Republic of China.

¹²⁴ Liao, *Xin Yüe Ou Jie Xin*, I. Luo Guorong (1872-1924), pseud. Yinggong, famous playwright and mentor of the renowned Beijing opera performer Cheng Yanqiu.

like Miao Lianxian, into local society, but it also created a familiar and cordial feeling for Pearl River delta locals who identified with Guangzhou and who sojourned far away from their native region.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Yüe Ou was even used by revolutionaries and republican scholars as a populist tool in advancing their political agendas and promoting the New Cultural Movement. In fact, Liao Fengshu's Yüe Ou songs, unlike those of Feng Xun and Zhao Ziyong and a century earlier, reflect Liao's revolutionary mentality and his wish to promote vernacular literature. In the second part of his preface, Liao writes:

After the years of Xinhai (1911) and Renzi (1912), scholars from home and aboard called thunderously for the promotion of vernacular literature. Yet, each province has its own dialect, and the sounds are drastically different from each other. It would be difficult to establish or promote a single standard. Therefore, to use local dialect as a guide is the only feasible way.¹²⁵

The fact that other prefaces in Liao's anthology were also written by renowned revolutionaries and republican scholars, such as Liao Zhongkai (1877-1925), Liang Qichao (1873-1929), and Tang Shaoyi (1862-1938), only reinforces the revolutionizing intent of Liao's publication.¹²⁶

Indeed, as an integrated part of Guangzhou culture, Yüe Ou was the medium that revolutionary intellectuals turned to when they sought a down-to-earth instrument to arouse populist support. In Guangzhou's published newspapers, Yüe Ou was reimagined and recreated as a form of satire in mocking contemporary events happening in early twentieth century China. For instance, after the 1911 revolution which eventually led to the demise the

¹²⁵ Liao, *Xin Yüe Ou Jie Xin*, I.

¹²⁶ Liao Zhongkai, younger brother of Liao Fengshu, was a revolutionist and co-founder of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT); Liang Qichao was a late Qing Juren and republican scholar who inspired other Chinese scholars with his writings and reform movements; Tang Shaoyi was a republican statesman who served briefly as the first Premier of the nascent Republic of China in 1912. All three were native to counties under the administration of the Guangzhou prefecture.

Qing dynasty, a Guangzhou newspaper, *Nanyüe Bao*, publishes a Yüe Ou song with lyrics that suggests all royalists should descend to hell to serve the deposed Qing court:

Wait! Don't you die yet and listen to my words.

Listen to my words and bring them to the underworld with you.

I believe the underworld today still has its despot.

Its autocracy is no different from the world of living.

You royalist! It is the utmost importance that you pay a visit to the despot of the underworld,

And ask him about his wellbeing,

Better yet implore him to take you in as an imp.

Otherwise, on his list of servants, your name will be erased.

There are emperors and kings everywhere, and you wish to protect them all.

Regardless of life and death, you wish to protect your monarch.

You couldn't protect him in life, you really should follow him to death.¹²⁷

Moreover, as Guangdong exported more and more sojourning workers overseas, particularly to the United States, Yüe Ou as a mark of culture followed their footsteps across the oceans and played an important role in overseas Cantonese-Chinese communities. Following the passing of xenophobic legislation in the U.S., such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, Yüe Ou as a genre was given new lyrics and became a way for sojourning Chinese workers to express their poor situations in a foreign land and to call for support from their native region, Guangdong. A result of the concatenation of xenophobic events in the U.S. was the 1905 nation-wide Chinese boycott of American goods that started in Guangzhou, and in which Yüe Ou had played an important part as a stimulant of anti-American sentiment.¹²⁸ Although the Chinese literature tradition had experienced great shifts in the early twentieth-century, and that Yüe Ou songs in this period lost the ornate diction and literati asceticism of its early nineteenth-century counterparts, their frequent appearance in newspapers or other public literatures still point to the importance that the music genre has in the culture of the Pearl River delta. Finally, from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the transformation of Yüe Ou leaves one wondering: when revolutionaries borrowed Yüe Ou as a

¹²⁷ Leung, 232-233; *Nanyüe Bao*, the 1st day of the 11th month in the year Xinhai (1911), 2.

¹²⁸ Leung, 249-254; Xian, (1965), "1905 Fanmei Aiguo Yundong Yu Yüe Ou," in Xian Yuqing, *Xian Yuqing Lunzhu Huibian*. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2016.

promotional instrument for their anti-Qing cause; when republican intellectuals used Yüé Ou as a guide for the reformation of vernacular literature in Guangdong; and when Chinese workers infused in Yüé Ou their sweat and tears, did they ever considered that the music genre was originally created on Pearl River flower-boats for those who drowned in the “sea of desires?”

Coda

Early nineteenth-century Guangzhou was a cosmopolitan metropolis and its local entertainment was a transregional scene. During this time, the national warning that “No young man should ever go to Guangzhou” failed to stop men from all over the empire to immerse themselves in Pearl River flower-boats. Some of them, such as Shen Fu, come and go. Others, like Miao Lianxian, settled themselves part of local society, partook in the production of localist literature, and inscribed their stories into local culture. A genre composed of the colloquial rhyming scheme of music traditions from within the sphere of vulgarity, and literati imagination and aestheticism, Yüé Ou served as more than a music genre that provided an emotional escape, invoked self-reflection, portrayed empathy, or justified pleasure-seeking desires of flower-boat patrons. To members of Guangzhou society, it was also a medium through which the construction of local and social identities, and the validation of local culture were fulfilled.

The majority of those who participated in this discourse of valorizing local culture and constructing identity were migrants, sojourners, their descendants and scions of the gentry. They could also be literati, merchants or commoners. But there was never a fixed line for nor a dichotomy of different social strata. Through an appreciation for Yüé Ou and local culture it represents, all of them proclaimed their own close connection with Guangzhou. Their social interactions and cultural exchanges on the Pearl River and their efforts to validate local culture also showed the endeavor of these men to legitimize their own standing as locals and arbiters of refined taste in Guangzhou society. Furthermore, the motifs used by Guangzhou literati in their Yüé Ou songs and poetry reveal their efforts to mark themselves onto the poetic pedigree of their native land and to link its local culture with the empire-wide Chinese literary tradition. The prefaces of Liao Fengshu and Luo Yinggong on the

importance of the Guangzhou-dialect also attest that the people of Guangzhou and its Pearl River delta, fully identifying with local culture and dialect, saw Yüe Ou as a reminder of their identity as locals of Guangzhou. And when Yüe Ou became so deeply rooted in Guangzhou society, it became a part of the local culture that could be given different social functions as historical circumstances changed.

Lastly, to reiterate the main lines of this study, I conclude here with a poem written by a retired Guangzhou literatus to another one who was about to begin his official career far away from the city:

A long time has passed since the last Yüe Ou song was played.
But when I heard the Pipa melody today,
A beam of light flashed through my ears.
What's better than listening to a song composed by an old friend?
Like the cry of nightingales, it speaks of my concerns for thee.¹²⁹

A farewell from one Guangzhou literatus to another, this poem both recalls the heartfelt sentiment that Yüe Ou fosters and the nostalgia of being a Guangzhou local. By doing this, the poet identifies himself with the beauty of his local dialect and culture, as well as his connection with other locals of his native land. He demonstrates himself to be thoroughly conversant with the conventions of the genre and culture of the city, and ultimately passes these on to the next fledgling local of Guangzhou.

¹²⁹ Xie, *Chang xingxing zhai riji*, the 8th day of the 3rd month in the second year of Daoguang (1822).

English to Chinese Glossary

This is a glossary of English terms and names referenced in the study and their Chinese originals. The style name (s. n.) or pseudonym (pseud.) of a person will be included if it was referenced in the study, or if it appears in the original text of a particular source cited by the study.

An Lushan	安祿山		Jiangnan	江南
Bai Juyi	白居易		Jiangxi	江西
Baishan	拜山		Jiaqing	嘉慶
Beijing	北京		Jiayingzhou	嘉應州
Cai Ruping (s. n. Luye)	蔡如萍 (字鹿野)		Jie Xin	解心
Chaozhou	潮州		Jie Xinshi	解心事
<i>Chang Hen Ge</i>	長恨歌		Jietan Boming	嗟歎薄命
Chanyu Huhanye	單于呼韓邪		<i>Jingu Qiguan</i>	今古奇觀
Chen Tan	陳曇		Jinjiang	晉江
Cheng Yanqiu	程硯秋		Jinshi	進士
Chen Xianzhang (pseud. Baisha)	陳獻章 (號白沙)		Juren	舉人
Ci	詞		Jyutping	粵拼
<i>Chibei Outan</i>	池北偶談		Kaimeng	開蒙
<i>Chu Que Liao Ah Jiu</i>	除卻了阿九		Ketu Qiuhen	客途秋恨
Daoguang	道光		Kong Shanren	孔尚任
Danjia (Tanka)	蛋家		Kuang Lu	鄺露
Datiao	大挑		Kuijiang	葵江
Du Shiniang	杜十娘		Kunqu	昆曲
Feng Xun (s. n. Ziliang)	馮詢 (字子良)		Lai Xuehai (pseud. Xuzhou)	賴學海 (號虛舟)
Feng Menglong	馮夢龍		Liao Entao (s. n. Fengshu)	廖恩濤 (字鳳舒)
Fujian	福建		Liao Zhongkai	廖仲愷
Haoguan (Howqua)	浩官		Liang Qichao	梁啟超
Han	漢		Li Jian	黎簡
Hanlin	翰林		Li Longji	李隆基
Henan	河南		Lingnan	嶺南
Hou Fangyu	侯方域		<i>Lingnan Yishu</i>	嶺南遺書
Hua-ting	花艇		Liu Huadong (s. n. Sanshan)	劉華東 (字三山)
Huang Zunxian	黃遵憲		Liu Shi	劉爽
Hu Fang	胡方		Li Xiangjun	李香君
Hunan	湖南		Li Yuxian	
Guangdong	廣東		Lizhiwan	荔枝灣
Guangzhou	廣州		Lu Guanheng	盧觀恆
<i>Guangzhou Ge</i>	廣州歌		Luo Guorong (pseud. Yinggong)	羅敦融 (號癡公)
Guangxi	廣西		Lu Wenjing	盧文錦
Jiajing	嘉靖			

Man 蠻		Wang Zhaojun 王昭君	
Mashe 麻奢		Weixian 濰縣	
Miao Gen (pseud. Lianxian) 繆良(號蓮仙)		Wen 文	
Ming 明		Wen Rusui 溫汝遂	
Minghua 名花		Wu Bingjian (pseud. Pinghu) 伍秉鑒(號平湖)	
Moyu Ge 摸魚歌		Wu Bingzhen (pseud. Nanzhou) 吳秉珍(號南洲)	
Muyou 幕友		Wu Chongyao (s. n. Ziyuan) 伍崇曜(字紫垣)	
Muyu Ge 木魚歌		Wu Guoying 伍國瑩	
Nanhai 南海		Wulin 武林	
Nanhan Ji 南漢紀		Wu Lanxiu 吳蘭修	
Nanyüe Bao 南粵報		Xiaoqing 小青	
Nanyin 南音		Xianfeng 咸豐	
Ou Daren 歐大仁		Xianshui Ge 鹹水歌	
Panyu 番禺		Xie Lansheng (s. n. Lipu) 謝蘭生(字澧浦)	
Pan Zhengheng 潘正衡		Xihao 西濠	
Pan Zhengheng 潘正亨		Xiguan 西關	
Pipa 琵琶		Xiong Jingxing (s. n. Dijiang) 熊景星(字遂江)	
Putonghua 普通話		Xiongnu 匈奴	
Qingtian Baojian 情天寶鑒		Xinhai 辛亥	
Qiu Zhongyu 邱仲魚		Xu Rong (s. n. Tiesun) 徐榮(字鐵孫)	
Qiu Weiyuan 邱煒萼		Xuehaitang 學海堂	
Qu Dajun 屈大均		Xuehaitang Ji 學海堂集	
Renzi 壬子		Yamen 衙門	
Ruan Yuan 阮元		Yangcheng Shuyuan 羊城書院	
Ruyüe Wushi Zupu 入粵伍氏族譜		Yang Yuhuan 楊玉環	
Sancun Jinlian 三寸金蓮		Yangzhou 揚州	
Se 瑟		Ye Tingying 葉廷瑛	
Shaoxing 紹興		Yijing 易經	
Sha-main (Shameen) 沙面		Yi Kezhong 儀克中	
Shandong 山東		Yikou Tongshang 一口通商	
Shanxi 山西		Yuan Mei 袁枚	
Shen Fu 沈復		Yüe 越	
Shui Diao 水調		Yüe 粵	
Shunde 順德		Yüedong Sanzi 粵東三子	
Shujishi 庶吉士		Yüedong Shisanjia Ji 粵東十三家詩集	
Songshi 訟師		Yüe Ge 粵歌	
Sun Fen (pseud. Xi'an) 孫蕢(號西庵)		Yugu 玉骨	
Suzhou 蘇州		Yüe Ou 粵歐	
Taohua Shan 桃花扇		Zhao Ziyong (s. n. Mingshan) 招子庸(字銘山)	
Tanci 彈詞		Zhao Maozang (pseud. Tongpo) 招茂章(號桐坡)	
Tan Ying (s. n. Yusheng) 譚瑩(字玉生)		Zhang Ruzhi (s. n. Mochi) 張如芝(字墨池)	
Tang Shaoyi 唐紹儀			
Tongan 同安			
Tieling 鐵嶺			
Wanli 萬曆			
Wang Shizhen (pseud. Yu-Yang) 王士禎(號漁洋)			

Zhang Mai	張買	
Zhejiang	浙江	
Zhi Jisheng	支機生	
Zhongyuan	中原	
<i>Zhouyi Benyi Zhu</i>		周易本義注
Zhuangshi	狀師	
Zhujiang	珠江	

Zhuniang	珠娘	
Zhusheng	諸生	
Zhu Xi	朱熹	
Zhu Yuanzhang		朱元璋
Zhuzhici	竹枝詞	
Zi	字	
Ziye	子夜	

Appendix

Selected Sources in Original Text and Translation

This appendix includes all poems quoted at the beginning of each section, and the three Yüe Ou songs referenced in the study.

珠江（清）張維屏

潮去潮来海气连，珠江花事始何年？
 笙歌士女无愁地，风月楼船不夜天。
 浮世以情相赠答，众生于色最缠绵。
 莫持崇俭为高论，欲济穷黎散富钱。

Zhang Weiping, "Zhujiang" (The Pearl River), nineteenth-century

The recurring waves carry the grandeur of the sea,
 Since when did the Pearl River's prosperity begin?
 Alluring courtesans chant of their carefree melodies,
 Glamorous flower-boats outshine the somnolent night.
 Everyone says in this earthly world the purest is when youths fall in love,
 But everyone is only interested in fulfilling their lustful desires.
 Speak not of morality whilst squandering monies for pleasure,
 For I would rather use my savings to relieve the poor.

珠江（清）張維屏

雨鸠啼罢又晴鸠，水调歌残换粤讴。
 小醉忽生前事感，大痴常替好花愁（牡丹初开，连日风雨）。

Zhang Weiping, "Zhujiang" (Pearl River), nineteenth-century

When the rain stops pouring, sunshine takes over the sky.
 When the water-melody stops playing, sound of Yüe Ou channels into my ears.
 After a few sips of wine, memories of the past reappeared in front of my eyes,
 Disoriented, I sighed for the good flowers (Peony blossomed in a time of rainstorms).

琵琶（清）張維屏

儿女痴情句里传，解心（粤歌名）音调最缠绵。
 无端几点青衫泪，湿到琵琶第四弦。

Zhang Weiping, "Pipa," nineteenth-century

Sentiments of love linger in the verses,
 Her *Jie Xin* (Yüe Ou) is the most touching.
 All of a sudden, the literatus sheds a tear,
 When she plucks the fourth string of her Pipa.

珠江雜詠（清）張維屏

茫茫欲海易沉沦，勒马悬崖事在人。
 散尽天花空是色，只宜过眼莫沾身。

Zhang Weiping, "Zhujiang Zayong" (A Trivial Song On the Pearl River), nineteenth-century

To whirl in the sea of desire is easy,
 So, the power to resist is up to you.
 To waste your fortune for the emptiness of lust?
 Be it a brief encounter but not to drown yourself.

粤讴鹿野序（清）蔡汝萍

曾向東風擅越吟，最難忘是故鄉音。
 多君洗盡箏琶耳，一卷梅花香雪心。

Cai Ruping, "Preface in *Yüe Ou*," 1828

Erstwhile, as I faced the east wind, I vied in singing the songs of Guangzhou,
 The most unforgettable is the sound of my dear home.
 I thank your Excellency for cleaning my ears with your Pipa,
 With a scroll of plum-blossom, your verses reflect a fragrant snow-white heart.

珠江消夏竹枝詞（清）馮詢

彈斷銀絲碎玉箏，曉風殘月夜冷冷。
 不知解得誰心事，一樣清歌百樣聽。

Feng Xun, "Zhujiang Xiaoxia Zhuzhici" (Zhujiang Summer Zhuzhici), nineteenth-century

The strings are broken, and the jade zither shattered.
 Before the waning moon, the wind of dawn chills the remaining night.
 Who would be relieved from sufferings?
 When he listens to the clear song a hundred times.

聽歌（清）張維屏

子夜淒清喚奈何，解心（粵歌名）入耳覺情多。
 不分今古兼南北，能感人心即善歌。

Zhang Weiping, "Tingge" (Listening to songs), nineteenth-century

Like the sorrowful *Ziye* songs, it tells of her helpless love,
 The verses of *Jie Xin* channel romantic sentiments into my ears.
 No matter if it comes from the present or the antiquity, from the south or the north,
 So long as it touches our hearts it is a sincere song.

无题（清）张如芝

经年不听越讴声，一拨琵琶耳暂明。
 况是故人亲制曲，新莺啼出更关情。

Zhang Ruzhi, "Untitled," nineteenth-century

A long time has passed since the last Yüe Ou song was played.
 But when I heard the Pipa melody today,
 A beam of light flashed through my ears.
 What's better than listening to a song composed by an old friend?
 Like the cry of nightingales, it speaks of my concerns for thee.

桃花扇（清）招子庸

桃花扇，寫首斷腸詞。寫到情深，扇都會淒慘。命有薄得過桃花，情有薄得過紙。紙上桃花，薄更可知。君呀！你既寫花容，先要曉得花的意思，青春難得莫誤花時。我想絕世風流無乜好恃。秋風團扇怨在深閨，寫出萬葉千花，都為情一字。你睇信公子，李香君，唔係情重，點得合佳期。

Zhao Ziyong, "Taohua Shan" (Peach-blossom Fan), nineteenth-century

The peach-blossom fan has written upon it a poem of heart-breaking verses.
 If you write of deep passion, the fan will be but a source of anguish.
 For no fate is frailer than the peach-blossom, no passion thinner than paper;
 Wherefore you know that peach-blossom drawn on paper is more fragile still.
 My lord! If you write of the flower's beauty, you first should understand her thoughts:
 Youth is not to gain! Spoil not the blossom-season.
 For playful romance is nothing to be proud of.
 The autumn wind brings a dirge, the round fans sit lifelessly in her boudoir.
 She paints thereon ten thousand leaves and a thousand flowers, all for the passion you left behind.
 Look at the love of Xiangjun and Lord Xin: had not their passion been deep, how could they have reached the joyful days?

除却了阿九（清）葉廷瑛

除却了阿九，重有邊一個及得佢咁銷魂。靚到咁淒涼，我怕鬼火都要讓你幾分。兩頰似足桃花，紅到肉緊。你嬌姿成咁叫佢點樣子唔溫。每飲就等你上船，規矩見光閃一陣。好比流霞吐月，罩住江濱。腰肢楚楚，極會撩人恨。兩鬢蓬鬆，壓住暮雲。你眉鎖春山，長帶笑暈。媚態夾住癡情，實在係攞命是真。醉後個種放誕風流，天下惡搵。分明仙女，墮落紅塵。至到抱起琵琶，越發唔使問。唱到關王廟會，字字傾心。顏色推你最佳，脾氣算你極穩。不饒人處，愛鼻席上輕嗔。共你多飲一場，就慳一晚眼訓。單思成病，未必話無因。

珠江近日，把妹喧傳震。讓你做香國名標，第一個侍酒人。但係快樂繁華，容乜易斷癮。酒筵歡會，再不過月落三更。你是情種碰著情癡，還算有幸。怕到薄情強飲，夜夜紅燈。倘或計到月不長圓，花又易隕。遇鐘情者，你便趁早留神。想吓男子落到青樓，邊個唔會薄倖。你地女流個日得遇真主，就係個日超生。見你自少咁聰明，平日咁謹慎。怕到一時疏失，就負卻青春。唔係日日淨曉得替老母發財，實在無你份。賺到肥婆亞寶咁多家當，再有俾你養女來分。況且你年紀已一日日漸多，佢情義

一日日漸褪。煙花容貌，一吓就失落三分。唔怕你鬧熱似火一般，轉眼就如水咁冷。我勸你求簽拜佛先要問一紙自身。虽則有時唔帶眼跟錯個佬上街，到不若河底下穩陣。究竟人無歸結，講極都係閒文。

你把世界慢慢想真，喉底就咽哽。酒壺掂起，眼淚先吞。總之唔得上街，千日無所倚憑。借問從良二字，你咁耐有想過唔曾。妹啊，你今日曉得知機，就算你前世福分。唉，休要再混。見你越靚越發行時，我越替你心事緊。睇見你地脫離苦海，好過我地平步上青雲。

Ye Tingying, "Chu Que Liao Ah Jiu" (Apart from Ah Jiu), nineteenth-century

Apart from Ah Jiu, who else could be called a soul-ravishing beauty?

You are so beautiful.

I am afraid even the succubus has to concede to your charm.

Your cheeks are peach-blossoms, so pink that men are excited to a frenzy,

You are so sweet, so winsome, how can he not love you?

Whenever he comes to a banquet, he waits for you onboard.

And when you do, he habitually sees a beam of light flashing past.

Like the floating wisp of clouds opening out to yield up the moon,

Your light shines over the whole bank of the river.

Your supple waist and limbs, so lithe and so graceful, tantalize and induce great longing and regrets,

Your side-locks, loosely combed, press on the evening clouds,

Your eyebrows are like the hills of spring, a halo of smile,

Your sweet and pleasing manners with a touch of loving naïveté could indeed spell the end of a man's life

When mellowed by wine,

Your enchanting delight cannot be found anywhere else in the world.

You are clearly the fairy. Alas! Fallen into this earthly place.

When you take up the Pipa, it is really unnecessary to ask anything more,

When your song reaches the festival at the Temple of Lord Guan,

Each and every word tips the man's heart over.

Your complexion is by all acclaimed the finest and your temper most sensible,

But when you are annoyed, you are not afraid of showing your anger.

To be at the same party with you once more means that one is saved from the boredom of falling asleep for one more night.

The man suffers from a one-sided lovesickness on your account,

Truly, it is not without cause.

The Pearl River names you the highest beauty, the very first among maids of wine.

But don't you know, for gaiety and wealth, how easily it palls!

Banquets and parties, they only last till the moon sets at the third watch of morning.

You are a romantic, meeting one who has fallen hopelessly in love with you—I think you could be considered fortunate.

Unlike the kind who forces you to drink night after night beneath the red lamps.

If one thinks how the moon will not always be full and flowers easily fall,

Then when one meets a true lover, one should pay heed betimes.

But don't you know, for men who visit the pleasure-quarters, how unfaithful they can be!

You girls, the day that you meet with a patron who truly loves you, that is the day you become reborn in heaven.

I saw that you were so intelligent, from an early age, and generally you are so careful,

So, you ought to know better!

I fear that for a moment you might make a mistake and waste your youth.

You make a fortune for your Madame, but you won't get a share.

You earned so much to provide riches for the fat Madame, Ah Bo, she would never share it with you, her adopted daughter.

Your age is increasing daily and his love and affection will daily grow less.

Soon you will lose your beauty of flowers in the entertainment world.

It does not count even though you are as glamorous as the raging fire,

For in a twinkle of an eye you would become like cold water.

I advise you when you pay homage to Buddha and ask for your fortune at a sortilege,

Ask about your personal fortune!

It may be true that sometimes one makes a mistake in following a man ashore,

And one would rather play for safety and stay in the gay quarters.

But after all, if one does not settle down, to be anchored to a home, any amount of talk is just useless chatter.

You think well on it, think well of the world!

Slowly and thoroughly, you will choke with emotion in your throat,

Before lifting the wine pot, you will have to swallow your tears.

As long as you fail to get taken home by a patron

You will, for a thousand days, lack something on which you can rely.

Have you ever thought of the words "Follow a good man?"

If today you understand the situation and seize the opportunity,

That could be reckoned as a piece of good luck ordained from your previous life.

My dear! Wander no more!

The more beautiful and popular you become, the more anxious I grow.

Seeing you girls escape from the sea of sorrow is far better than us ascending high official world.

你唔好死住（民國）南粵報

你唔好死住，聽我講句言詞。等埋我呢句說話，一起帶落陰司。如今地府，想必重以君為主。陰間專制，亦與陽間無特殊。你抱住保皇宗旨，至緊要走到閻王處，得見著個閻王，要問下起居。順便央肯個閻王，收你作黨羽。唔係個黨人冊上，就會把你名除。到處都有君皇，你總要提出個保字。不論生和死，都要把個皇保住，就算生唔保得佢穩，死亦要保佢無慮。

Nanyüe Bao, "Ni Wuhao Sizhu" (Don't You Die Yet), twentieth-century

Wait! Don't you die yet and listen to my words.

Listen to my words and bring them to the underworld with you.

I believe the underworld today still has its despot.

Its autocracy is no different from the world of living.

You royalist! It is the utmost importance that you pay a visit to the despot of the underworld,

And ask him about his wellbeing,

Better yet implore him to take you in as an imp.

Otherwise, on his list of servants, your name will be erased.

There are emperors and kings everywhere, and you wish to protect them all.

Regardless of life and death, you wish to protect your monarch.

You couldn't protect him in life, you really should follow him to death.

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