

two contraries  
 forced into one orbit:  
 the unseen body,  
 fully in control,  
 meets the unseen head,  
 losing control,  
 at the neck  
 of a bronze horse.

Here are brought together two subjects — the horse, and the human figure — with a rich history in sculpture, East and West. The image in monumental form most often carries a meaning of mastery, the horse a symbol of the strength of nature and the rider representing the domination of nature by the human, and hence political or military authority. In Mak's sculpture horse and man are both in trouble, abject, in painful postures, and incomplete. In this grotesque configuration they cannot possibly belong together, yet they do, contradicting each other but constituting a single thing. And at the same time the image has a strange beauty, with its miraculous transition arrested in seamless mid-process, at the moment of the birth of something new. This is a poem of the aesthetic moment, the creation of something still, well-formed and permanent (*aere perennius*, indeed) from a process that is turbulent and violent, horse giving birth to — or consuming? — man or man becoming horse, both of them headless and sightless, unconscious of themselves or each other. This is history in the moment of its making, unable to know itself; Yeats's "uncontrollable mystery upon the bestial floor."<sup>40</sup> The birth of beauty out of conflict and violence — "a terrible beauty" — is a powerful and recurring theme in Yeats, whose "contraries" again haunt this poem: this is another case where the knowledge inscribed in English poetry has helped the Chinese poet to *see* the subject, which is nonetheless an organic expression of its own place and time — Hong Kong, and its own metamorphosis. The poem is entitled "Bronze Horse," but it is not *about* a horse (any more than the sculpture is); it is about a place of fabulous meeting, a contact point of different worlds. Pared down to a minimalist descriptive language, the poem holds its contradictions in balance to be contemplated. There are more ways than one of knowing your place.

Note: *The Incense Tree*, a volume of new and selected poems by Louise Shew Wan Ho, is in preparation with Hong Kong University Press and will be published in early 2009.

40. W.B. Yeats, "The Magi." Perhaps also apposite is the question in T.S. Eliot's Epiphany poem, "Journey of the Magi": "Were we led all that way for / Birth or Death? There was a birth, certainly, / We had evidence and no doubt, I had seen birth and death, / But had thought they were different...."

## Voices of Hong Kong: The Reconstruction of a Performance in a Teahouse

Bell Yung

### Introduction

After the handover to China in 1997, Hong Kong stepped into the uncharted territory of "One Country, Two Systems" on the one hand, and, on the other, "Asia's World City," a recent slogan that is being promoted internationally. These two designations hint at the city's dual aspirations and self-identities. On the one hand, Hong Kong recognizes that it is inextricably a part of China in terms of demography and culture to a significant degree if not completely. On the other hand, it perceives itself as different from other Chinese cities in being more cosmopolitan in outlook, with a natural urge but also a need to reach out to the rest of Asia and the world. The two orientations are certainly not mutually exclusive, yet Hong Kong's identity, self-defined or perceived, is still being debated, molded, and theorized, and is viewed by most as being inseparable from its colonial past, which is generally accepted to be bi-cultural in nature. Thus the co-editors of *Critical Zone* pose the question: is Hong Kong, after 1997, "able to continue to play the role that it has been supposed or expected to play, as a 'meeting place,' 'a contact point' between China and the 'West,' both in popular perception and in the familiar parlance of Hong Kong studies? And if so, in what sense?" To which they reply unequivocally: "Hong Kong needs to understand itself, its history, its present status, and its possibilities."<sup>1</sup> Their

1. Q.S. Tong and Douglas Kerr, introduction to vol. 1 of *Critical Zone: A Forum of Chinese and Western Knowledge*, edited by Q.S. Tong, Wang Shouren, and Douglas Kerr (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press and Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2004), 14.

message is clear: in order to chart one's future, one must know one's past and one's present: what it was and how it came to be what it was; what it is and how it came to be what it is.

But what Hong Kong was and what it is are determined not only by individual and collective memories, by the available "text" broadly defined in the anthropological sense, but also, more specifically, by representations of Hong Kong in the scholarly literature — "Hong Kong studies." This is where being bi-cultural becomes a challenge, because literary representations inevitably diverge as a result of differing perspectives, and, more obviously, the linguistic medium being used — Chinese or English in the current case. Even if writers are bilingual, they may or may not consult textual sources of both languages with equal attention, let alone the anthropological "texts" to be found within both the Western and Chinese sectors that together made and make up Hong Kong. Certainly, the quantity and quality of these literary sources, as well as their scope and depth, may vary depending upon the language being used. Hong Kong's identity may be differently perceived to a not insignificant degree due to the accessibility and the legibility of such texts.

One revealing case is the 2005 bilingual publication by Hong Kong musicologist Yu Siu-Wah with the Chinese title *Yueyou ruci* and the English title *Such are the Fading Sounds*.<sup>2</sup> The book is divided into two parts, "Chinese Music" and "Chinese Music in Hong Kong," within which are short to medium length articles on a great variety of topics organized into chapters. The book makes an admirable attempt to provide parallel Chinese and English versions for every chapter. While the chapters and the section outlines have one-to-one correspondences, it becomes clear that the content of some sections varies greatly between parallel versions; generally the English version is briefer. For example, there are 200 pages of the entire Chinese text, but only 125 pages of English. Equally revealing, though certainly not surprising, is the number of references cited at the back of the book: 173 entries in Chinese and 56 entries in English.

Ackbar Abbas, in his book about Hong Kong cinema, architecture, and writing, states that these topics are "just not recognized to be culture as such. This refusal to see what is there is an example of reverse hallucination....," which Abbas explains is one meaning of Hong Kong's "culture of disappearance."<sup>3</sup> Abbas's observation certainly contains a grain of truth, although perhaps he should qualify it by differentiating the different degrees of "disappearance" between what is documented or revealed in the two linguistic media. But his point is still broadly

valid, for not until the last two decades did many Hong Kong researchers and writers direct their attention anywhere else but towards the city they called home. It was only after 1984, with the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration returning Hong Kong to Chinese rule in 1997, that Hong Kongers realized that their future lay in their own hands and that they themselves must learn who they were. Thus areas of representation such as Hong Kong Literature and Hong Kong History, specifically in and about the Chinese sector of Hong Kong, began to flourish, and thus forever after changed the landscape of the city as a new Hong Kong slowly "appeared."

The identification, analysis, interpretation, and representation of these "texts" are obviously necessary if Hong Kong identity is to be defined with some degree of reality. Therefore it is notable when the co-editors of *Critical Zone*, commenting on [Mainland] Chinese academia's view that "Critical theories come and go, but the text remains," state: "The call for a return to the text, therefore, is a strange spasm of the collective intellectual fatigue that ... is developed out of the continuing and doubly belated experience of the overwhelming presence of various kinds of Western 'postology' on the Chinese scene."<sup>4</sup> Whether or not the "text" is defined narrowly as literary, or as broadly anthropological, I wonder if Chinese academia's call to return to the "text" might not so much be the result of being "overwhelmed" by Western theory as it is a simple and prudent realization that text must come before theory, a view which, contrary to what some may believe, is still strongly held by a significant portion of academics in the West despite the flourishing of theory.

It is with such a thought in mind that, when the editors invited me to consider *Critical Zone* as a venue for publishing one of my research projects on the music in Hong Kong, I cautiously agreed because my work loosely fit the goal of the journal, which "is envisaged as an intellectual bridge between China and the rest of the world and as a site of scholarly and critical convergence beyond regional and disciplinary boundaries."<sup>5</sup> More importantly, since several essays in the current issue of the journal are devoted to Hong Kong, my story is one of discovery of "texts," or voices if you will, of and about Hong Kong, voices that have not been adequately represented in the literature, particularly literature in English. The main voice is that of a Hong Kong artist who lived and worked in the city from 1926 until his death in 1979. A secondary one is that of this writer by whom the artist's work is here represented and who, as an outsider, eventually found his way back to Hong Kong to search for and discover what has disappeared.

2. Yu Siu-Wah 余少華, *Such are the Fading Sounds 樂猶如此* (Hong Kong: International Association of Theatre Critics, 2005).

3. Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 6.

4. Tong and Ken, Introduction, 6.

5. Tong and Ken, Introduction, 17.

## The blind singer Dou Wun

Dou Wun (Cantonese pronunciation; Putonghua pronunciation is Du Huan) was born into a poor family in 1910 in the village of Jinli, township of Gaoyao, in the prefecture of Shiqing, about fifty miles west of Guangzhou, along the Western branch of the Pearl River.<sup>6</sup> The family made a meager living by tilling a few acres of land. When he was three months old, an accident led to blindness, although he could still sense light and darkness. In 1914, when he was four years old, the river flooded and washed away his family's land; this calamity was compounded in 1917 when his father passed away. Burdened with five children, his mother gave him away to an acquaintance of his father's, a blind man called Wong who made a living by telling fortunes. She thought that her son might learn a blind person's trade, not realizing that Wong was no more than a fraud and a con artist, as Dou, young as he was, quickly realized. No longer able to make a living, and burdened with debt, Wong fled to the metropolitan city of Guangzhou, taking Dou along with him only because Dou's eyesight was a little better than his.<sup>7</sup>

In Guangzhou Dou was abandoned by Wong, and, at age eight, he began several years of eking out a living on his own. He mostly begged for handouts by chanting a few lines of *Muyu* (木魚) songs that he had picked up by ear when he was growing up in the village. He recalled that he was no singer at the time; people took pity on him as a begging child and would give him a few coins; such daily income was enough to keep him alive. After two years of wandering he chanced upon Huanzhu Bridge, where many blind singers congregated to wait for customers. It was obviously a turning point in his young life because for the first time he found friendly and caring company. As Dou described it: "On the bridge scores of blind singers were always sitting, some old, some young, waiting to be hired. When they needed to pee, they had to walk quite a distance through very narrow streets that were crowded with people. Because I could see a little, I would be asked to lead them the way. They also asked for my help when they needed to buy opium. Therefore, I was quite popular and greatly liked because I ran errands for them." Smart, lively, eager to help and to please, Dou soon won the affection of many. It was in that context, through a series of introductions and negotiations, that Dou formally became a disciple of a singer named Sun, whose parents also took to Dou and treated him like a member of the family. For three years Dou learned from Master Sun, and often accompanied him to jobs singing in various



Photograph by Rulan Chao Pian

venues. Thus began his training as a *nanyin* (南音) singer and his life of storytelling.

Dou's life journey was drastically altered by larger events, and the decade of the 1920s was a chaotic period in China. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the founder of China's Nationalist Party (the Kuomintang) that had overthrown the Qing monarchy in 1911, made Guangzhou his headquarters. When he died in 1925, the city grew in instability as many political factions fought for power. 1925 also saw Guangzhou descend into serious turmoil, swept up by a country-wide fever of nationalism and anti-foreign sentiment. It began on June 19 with a large-scale labor strike in Hong Kong, when reportedly 250,000 strikers left Hong Kong for Guangzhou. Supporting their compatriots, Guangzhou workers also came out on strike, joined by students who marched in support. When British and French gunships fired on the students on June 23, the local event triggered a nation-wide uprising. Dou remembered well: "Guangzhou at the time was quite chaotic. There was often gunfire with opposing forces fighting on the streets. There were curfews, and stores were looted. ... Then in the autumn of 1925, there were thousands upon thousands of marchers on the street, which made life for us singers quite impossible, for we were often stuck among crowds and were late to our engagements." Hearing that Hong Kong was relatively calm, he and several fellow singers set out on March 13, 1926, and arrived in Hong Kong after a detour to Macao. Thus began his fifty-plus years of professional life until his death in 1979.<sup>8</sup>

6. Dou Wun's name 杜煥 is Romanized according to Cantonese pronunciation and will be so throughout the essay. Other names and terms will be Romanized according to Putonghua pronunciation unless otherwise noted.

7. Dou's life story, and direct quotations, were from his autobiographical song "Blind Dou Wun Remembers His Past," recorded in 1975 and 1976, part of which was published as *A Blind Singer's Story: Fifty Years of Life and Work in Hong Kong*, Digital Video Disc. (Hong Kong Museum of History), 2004. More on the autobiographical song later in this article.

8. He returned to Guangzhou for about two weeks in 1927, as he had promised his teacher Master Sun he would do. Though he does not mention this in his song, it is likely that he brought his mother with him when he returned to Hong Kong. He also spent three months in Macao in 1935.

In Hong Kong, Dou's life and work were intertwined with the larger events in the city. There were happy times: shortly after he arrived he found that his singing was greatly sought after in the many brothels and opium dens in Hong Kong, particularly in the Yaumatei area where he lived. The steady work provided him with a good living and enough money for a young man like him to have some fun. In 1929 he and a fellow singer fell in love and soon were married, producing four children. But the good times, more often than not, were spoiled by personal tragedies and professional calamities that brought misery and despair. Shortly after he began regular engagements in the brothels, the working environment, the easy availability of opium, and his ability to afford it, led him to become addicted to the drug, which plagued him for many decades to come. The outlawing of prostitution in 1934 stripped him of a steady income. None of his children survived beyond a few years; the youngest lived the longest, but died at the age of five in 1940. Later that year his mother, who had joined him in Hong Kong earlier, passed away, followed by the death of his wife the next year. Finally, the Japanese occupation from 1941 to 1945 resulted in extreme hardship, which he had to bear alone.

The end of Japanese occupation brought a brief period of relief to Dou's livelihood. But unbeknownst to him, technology was marching forward and the electronic mass media would soon dominate entertainment. Dou himself recalled how, in 1950, "Science killed us! There appeared something called Rediffusion. My business of singing collapsed completely. ... Every night I went out to the street where there used to be many clients, but there were hardly any now." During this period, he met another woman singer, and they decided to live together for convenience because it was cheaper than living separately. But soon afterwards they parted ways. He later discovered a spot in the King George the Fifth Park (in the Western part of Hong Kong island) where interested customers were to be found. But then after two years of steady work there, the park suddenly underwent expansion. In his words, "The 'iron horses' (road barriers) surrounded the park, blocking off pedestrians. ... It was truly my period of hopelessness."

However, his luck turned unexpectedly in 1955 when Radio Hong Kong hired him to sing a weekly program of *nanyin* on the air. For almost fifteen years he enjoyed a steady income and through this program he became widely known among *nanyin* aficionados. For example, in the late 1980s I met the writer Lu Jin who specialized in publishing reminiscences of old Hong Kong.<sup>9</sup> I asked him about Dou and played him my recording of Dou's singing; he immediately recalled listening to Dou on the radio two decades earlier, and he also remembered well that as a teenager in the 1930s he had heard Dou in the brothels when his elders took him along on their visits. Another person who fondly remembered Dou's

singing was Ho Iu-Kwong (a Romanized form according to Cantonese pronunciation which he himself used). The admiration was mutual, for Dou remembered well that he was hired to sing many times throughout the 1960s and 70s at Mr. Ho's home; Dou particularly pointed out how Mr. Ho and his family treated him with respect and kindness, unlike most of his other clients.<sup>10</sup>

But Dou's fortune turned again when in 1970 the radio station suddenly terminated his employment and cancelled the weekly *nanyin* broadcast. He was left desolate and reduced to begging for handouts on a street corner in Mongkok. He was able to survive only because in 1971 the government established a cash relief scheme to assist the very poor, and a kind-hearted person helped him to apply for and obtain assistance, providing him with a meager income.

The early 1970s was a critical period for Hong Kong, for it witnessed the colony's transformation into a truly modern and international metropolis, not only because of the rapid development of industry and the economy, but also owing to the government's progressive policies aimed at building a civil society that offered improved services to its citizenry, including the afore-mentioned cash relief scheme for the very poor.<sup>11</sup> For example, the early 1970s witnessed the first massive construction of modern public housing; the first cross-harbor tunnel began construction in 1970 and was completed in 1972; the goal of free primary education for all was achieved in 1971; the first Hong Kong Arts Festival was created in 1972; and the Hong Kong Arts Centre was established by ordinance in 1974, with the objective to "nurture creativity, and arts and cultural engagement."<sup>12</sup> While the city marched on towards modernity, Dou's songs were left behind in the byways, out of step with the gleaming skyscrapers and the modern educational system.

### The writer

My parents emigrated from Shanghai to Hong Kong in 1948, along with many of their compatriots from the Yangzi River Delta region immediately before or after the establishment of the People's Republic. Most of them were well educated, a

9. See Lu Jin 魯金, *Rises and Falls in the Performances of Cantonese Operatic Songs* 粵曲歌壇話演榮 (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Company, 1994).

10. Ho Iu-Kwong 何耀光 was the patriarch of the Ho family, one of the major real estate developers in Hong Kong today. I visited Mr. Ho in 2002 when he was a very healthy 96-year-old; he remembered Dou well and said how very much he had enjoyed Dou's singing. He passed away in October 2006.

11. One reading of the many positive actions taken by the Hong Kong government in the 1970s would see them less as an attempt to create a civil society than as a move to placate the Chinese population and to win their support and loyalty in order to prevent the riots of 1966 and 1967 from happening again.

12. The Hong Kong Arts Centre built its own 14-story building in 1976, which is still a landmark today by the harbor in Wan Chai district on the Hong Kong Island.

few quite prosperous; some spoke decent English and most had a cosmopolitan and progressive outlook. The common thread that bound them was a perception of the looming new regime on the Mainland as ruthless and threatening. In our family, my siblings and I were enrolled in Hong Kong's Christian schools even though neither of our parents was Christian; I took piano lessons and one of my younger sisters took ballet classes. We listened to the latest recordings of Beethoven and Chopin, Nat King Cole and Patti Page, and danced to the music of Mambo and Tango. Every weekend the family went to one of the downtown cinemas to see the latest flick from Hollywood. The family's social life revolved around relatives and friends who were also from Shanghai — one reason why even my youngest sister who was only one year old when we left Shanghai continued to speak fluent Shanghainese as she grew up. In short, our lives were not touched very much by the bustling Cantonese culture around us. The only close local contact was through our maid, who we occasionally noticed was listening on the radio to what I realized later must have been Cantonese opera and Cantonese narrative song.

Our main contact with the larger society was through our schools. Even there, the curriculum had little to do with local society. Besides mathematics and science, there was English literature such as *Ivanhoe*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, or an act of Shakespeare, and classical Chinese poetry and philosophical texts that we recited from memory. Geography was about other parts of the world and History simply stopped around 1911; neither touched directly on Hong Kong. My school, run by Irish Jesuits, had a choir that sang Stephen Foster and other selections from the *One Hundred and One Best Songs*, and I was once in a school play called *Queer Street* by some obscure English playwright. I was only vaguely aware that, among the half dozen or so classmates I hung out with, most were also children of Shanghai expatriates like myself, even though we used only Cantonese to converse, and never talked about anything that was particularly related to Shanghai. Still, the fact that we were drawn together must be partially attributed to our shared Shanghainese background. In short, mainstream Cantonese culture was largely absent from our lives.

Many years later when I was working as a graduate assistant in the Music Library of Harvard University, I was asked to catalogue about fifty open-reel audio tapes of Cantonese opera, dubbed from vinyl disks that had been made in Hong Kong, with photocopies of the record jackets containing Chinese lyrics and other documentation. Through the translation and cataloguing process, I began to learn about Cantonese opera, which I eventually chose as my dissertation topic, and which was my first step in re-discovering the “disappeared” culture of my childhood and youth. My choice of dissertation topic brought me back to Hong Kong to conduct fieldwork research in 1972–73 and 1974–75. It was during the second trip that I crossed paths with Dou Wan, an encounter that furthered and deepened my journey of self-discovery. But more importantly, I discovered in Dou Wan a humble and genuine local voice that many older generations of Hong Kongers had heard but had hardly registered as “local.”

When I met Dou in 1974, his life was undergoing yet another transformation, just as Hong Kong was. Because of Radio Hong Kong's weekly radio broadcast of his singing for over a decade, Dou's name and music had left an impression on some Hong Kongers. As a result, in 1973, he was “discovered” by a small number of progressive-minded young people with a newly-emerging interest in local culture:<sup>13</sup> he was invited to participate in the second Hong Kong Arts Festival in City Hall, the premier performing space at the time. This was followed in 1974 and 1975 by a series of appearances at the most unlikely places: the Goethe Institute, the Hong Kong University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Saint John's Cathedral in the financial district, where weekly lunch-time recitals were sponsored by the Hong Kong Arts Centre. For Dou, the old performing venues of opium dens, brothels, teahouses and street corners were suddenly transformed into contemporary concert stages and the hallowed halls of academia; his audience were no longer prostitutes and their customers but young intellectuals who had rediscovered an art that they realized was precious but did not quite understand. For Dou, it was simply another chapter in a story of survival.

### The Cantonese narratives songs called *nanyin*

Professional storytelling for entertainment has a long tradition in China found in practically all parts of the country. Known as *quyi* (literally “song art”) or *shuochang* (“speaking-singing”), the songs were performed by chanting or singing as well as speaking, using the language spoken in the particular region, with distinctive musical characteristics also rooted in that region. Often translated into English as “Narrative Songs,” *quyi* tell stories through the medium of poetic verses that are sung, interspersed with prose passages that are spoken. The singer often accompanies himself or herself on a musical instrument, or is accompanied by one or more instrumentalists. Rarely, *quyi* may involve more than one singer. For centuries *quyi* served two major social functions: as popular entertainment in the pre-technological age and as a form of mass education. Before the 20th century the vast majority of the Chinese people were illiterate or semi-literate; *quyi* offered them a view of the wider world, and played a major role in giving the Chinese people a shared sense of history, myths, and mores, thus forging a cultural identity.

Many kinds of *quyi* were sung in the Cantonese-speaking region of southern China. Probably the most important of these forms is the one Dou specialized in, called *nanyin* (Southern Tone), or *naamyam* in Cantonese pronunciation. In performance, *nanyin* was accompanied by a musical instrument such as the *guzheng*

13. The President's Report (1973–74) of the Royal Asiatic Society (Hong Kong) writes that “we also hope the Society might be able to do something for young people in Hong Kong who are becoming increasingly interested in local history and culture.”

(bridged zither), the *yehu* (coconut-shell bowed lute), or the *yangqin* (hammered dulcimer), together with the percussion instrument *ban* (wooden clappers). The instrument or instruments were played either by the singer himself/herself or by a fellow musician. Other kinds of *quyi* mentioned in this essay are *muyu* (木魚), *longzhou* (龍舟), and *banyan* (板眼).

Some *nanyin* songs are relatively short, taking about twenty minutes to perform; these shorter ones are generally lyrical in nature, expressing thoughts and moods rather than relating a plot-laced story. A common theme in these songs is lamentation over lost love in the houses of pleasure. These songs tend to have a relatively fixed text, very often attributed to a known author of a scholarly bent. Their texts are literary rather than colloquial in style, refined in their choice of words and phrases, and regular in verse structure. Such a *nanyin* song would be sung as a unit in one sitting, with no spoken lines. The best-known example is the song *Ketu Qiuhen* (Wayfarer's autumnal lament), in which the singer yearns for the love of a courtesan whom he has left behind in his wanderings.

*Nanyin* songs can also be very long, with hundreds or even thousands of lines, requiring dozens or more hours to perform. These songs are usually adapted from well-known works of fiction, legends, or historical events; a popular source is the celebrated Ming dynasty novel *Shuihuzhuan* (variously translated as *All Men Are Brothers*, *Tales from the Water Margin*, and *The Marshes*). In telling these long stories, the singer alternates between short, spoken passages in prose and longer sung passages in verse. These long songs are normally improvised in the course of performance, even though printed texts might be published for the consumption of readers. By not following a fixed text, the singer gains flexibility in manipulating the story through the addition, elimination, or rearrangement of plot elements. The singer also improvises at a micro level in his or her choice of words and phrases, giving more or less detailed exposition to the plot elements depending upon the amount of time he has available or simply on whim. The singer also improvises the musical material: *nanyin* consists basically of a single short tune, repeated over lines of text with variation. Under the masterful craftsmanship of an experienced singer, the single tune assumes different guises, in part dependent upon the different texts.<sup>14</sup>

In the early part of the 20th century *nanyin* was performed mainly by blind men and women to entertain a paying audience. Common venues for performance included public places such as restaurants, teahouses, brothels, and opium dens; semi-public clubs and gathering places that catered to a particular trade or craft, such as butchers or rice merchants; and private households. A singer would be engaged for a single performance or for repeat performances on a

14. For a brief discussion of textual and musical structures, see Bell Yung, "Cantonese Narrative Songs," in vol. 6 of *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: East and Inner Asia* (China section), eds. Robert Provine, Tokumaru Yoshihiko, J. Lawrence Witzleben (New York: Garland Pub./Routledge, 2001), 267–273.

regular basis over an extended period of time. The one-time popularity of *nanyin* is testified to by the large number of cheaply printed song texts published during the first half of the last century, copies of which sometimes still surfaced in second-hand bookstores in Hong Kong as late as the 1970s.

Since the middle of the 20th century, *nanyin* has rarely been performed in its traditional context. Rapid changes in society, with the exploding growth of modern entertainment, spelled the death of traditional performing genres such as *nanyin*. The only place it can still be heard live today is on the stage of Cantonese Opera, in which the *nanyin* tunes have been incorporated as a musical resource for dramatic purposes. Yet the stories of *nanyin* embody an ideology which can still resonate for modern Chinese and in which they can still find their roots; moreover, its poetic text captures the liveliness of the Cantonese colloquial language, and its haunting melody finds new audiences, however small.

### Reconstructing a performance in a teahouse

I first learned about Dou Wun from a newly met friend, Nishimura Masato, when I arrived in Hong Kong in the fall of 1974. After graduating from college in Tokyo, Nishimura came to Hong Kong in 1970 because of his keen interest in traditional Chinese culture, and particularly local Hong Kong culture, including *nanyin* singing. Introduced by a mutual friend, Perry Link, I met Nishi at the International Research Center on Argyle Street in Kowloon, a place frequented by foreign scholars taking advantage of its book collection. Nishi told me about Dou Wun and *nanyin*, and he took me to hear Dou sing at the Goethe Institute in late 1974. The audience consisted mainly of Chinese students and Westerners. The next time I heard him was at St. John's Cathedral in the early spring of 1975, where the audience consisted almost entirely of office workers from the Central district who found the Cathedral a relatively tranquil place to eat their box-lunches or sandwiches. I knew very little about *nanyin* at the time, having read only the little that had been published,<sup>15</sup> and having heard only the versions of the tune used on the Cantonese operatic stage. But upon hearing Dou, I was immediately struck both by his superb musicianship and by the ethos of storytelling. Instinctively I knew that both the Goethe Institute and St. John's Cathedral were incongruous venues for the sort of stories Dou was telling, and that, however much the audience may have enjoyed his singing, they more likely viewed *nanyin* and

15. See Fu Gongwang 符公望, "Longzhou and Nanyin" 龍舟和南音, in *Dialectal Literature* 方言文學 (Hong Kong: Xinminzhu chubanshe, 1949); Xu Fuqin 徐復琴, *The Study of Folk Literature of Guangdong* 廣東民間文學的研究 (Hong Kong: Haichao chubanshe, 1958); and Shi Jun 石峻, "A Preliminary Edition of *Wayfarer's Autumnal Lament*" 〈客途秋艸〉初校, in vol. 4 of *Miscellaneous Documents on Art* 藝林叢錄 (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1964), 294–299.



Dou as quaint curiosities from a past era instead of appreciating him as a connoisseur would. Dou himself must have sensed the inappropriateness of the curious venues and the quiet and reverent audiences. What a contrast these must have presented to his old performing environments! How lonely he must have felt as he sang those songs that he had been singing all his life to responsive listeners!

Not long before, Albert Lord had published his now classic *The Singer of Tales* (1960), a must-read for students of oral literature. Lord's study was followed shortly by Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg's *The Nature of Narrative* (1968), another influential book. Scholars began to recognize the importance of oral composition in storytelling and its high degree of spontaneity, and to realize that such oral creativity, with a long history stretching back to Homeric days, was found in many parts of the world. In the field of music, there was a growing interest in oral composition as well, particularly by scholars of Anglo-American folksongs such as Samuel P. Bayard, Bertrand Harris Bronson, and Charles Seeger (1966).<sup>16</sup> Not coincidentally, a new multi-disciplinary organization called the Conference on Chinese Oral and Performing Literature (Chinoperl) was formed in the United States with a first meeting at Cornell University in 1969, followed by annual meetings that continue until today. Led by the eminent linguist and composer Yuen-ren Chao, the founding members of Chinoperl came from diverse disciplines of literature, music, linguistics, theater, and anthropology.

Strongly influenced by the works mentioned above and by the presentations and discussions at Chinoperl meetings, I encountered Dou's singing with a new appreciation of oral composition and performance. I made the assumption that the environment must inevitably affect the form and content of Dou's performance. Specifically, how he sang must be influenced by his awareness of the audience, or rather, in the venues I heard him sing, by his awareness of the absence of a knowledgeable audience. With these thoughts in mind I decided to record as much of his singing as I could, but to do so in an environment as close as possible to those with which he had been familiar in his earlier life. After his performance at St. John's Cathedral, I approached him and asked if he would be willing to let me record his singing over an extended period of time.<sup>17</sup> He was more than happy to oblige. My challenge was to find a venue in which he could sing and I could record, and to secure funding to compensate him for his time and effort. I wrote a grant proposal to Dr. Frank King, at the time the

16. Samuel P. Bayard, "Principal Versions of an International Folk Tune," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 3 (1951): 44-50; Bertrand Harris Bronson, *The Ballad as Song* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969); and Charles Seeger, "Versions and Variants of 'Barbara Allen' in the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress," *Selected Reports* 1, no. 1. (1966): 120-167.

17. In his autobiographical song, Dou remembered meeting me for the first time at City Hall rather than at the Cathedral.

Director of the Centre of Asian Studies of the University of Hong Kong, to seek funding for this work. Not only was my request immediately granted, but Dr. King also provided me with a member of the Centre staff, Mr. Shiu Koon-shing, to assist me with the project.

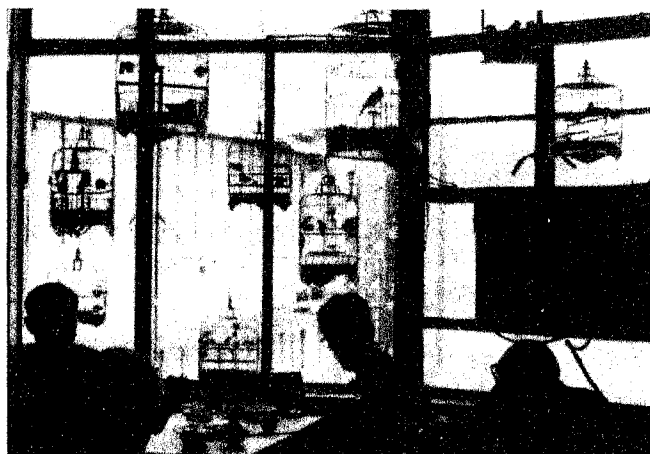
Although I had grown up in Hong Kong, I was still a relative outsider to local culture. I wouldn't have known of Dou had I not by good fortune met Nishi. How could I begin to find an appropriate venue for Dou to sing in? It was through my discussions with Nishi that I eventually decided on an old-fashioned teahouse where there were still likely to be old-fashioned customers of the sort who might appreciate *nanyin*. It wasn't easy to find such a teahouse. Although drinking tea (*yam cha* to the Cantonese) while nibbling both savory and sweet delicacies (*dim sum*) such as dumplings and tiny buns was, as it is today, a favorite pastime of local Hong Kongers, by the mid 1970s most of the many teahouses were in fact fancy restaurants that catered to the *yam cha* crowd in the mornings and at lunchtime on weekends. They had contemporary décor, shapely waitresses in tight *cheungsam*, and the latest popular songs piped into the halls. None of these establishments would serve my need.

It took some research, with help from local friends, to find Fu Long Teahouse at 382-386 Queen's Road Central at the corner of Possession Street (Cantonese name Sui Hang Hau), in the Shueung Wan district on Hong Kong Island (the building has since been torn down). According to Zi Yu in his book *Old Hong Kong*, Fu Long Teahouse opened for business in 1897, and by the 1970s it was one of the two or three oldest teahouses in the city.<sup>18</sup> Zi Yu writes that the area near Possession Street at the end of the 19th century was a thriving commercial neighborhood jammed with pleasure-seekers. It was densely populated, with streets lined cheek by jowl with shops, and a concentration of brothels and other houses of pleasure. By the mid-1970s the older buildings in most neighborhoods of Hong Kong had been torn down and replaced by gleaming skyscrapers. Queen's Road Central in the Sheung Wan district was one of the few remaining urban areas that had not been rebuilt; it was narrow and winding, lined on either side with somewhat dilapidated three or four-storeyed buildings. The ground floors were invariably shops, the upper floors residences. Giant shop signs jutted out from the upper floors into the street, seeming almost to touch those opposite. In 1975 Queen's Road Central at Possession Street was still very crowded and filled with shops, but the city's center of activity had moved elsewhere by that time. Fu Long Teahouse and its neighborhood had the look of a forgotten era.

The Fu Long Teahouse was in a four-storey building. The ground floor opening on to the street was the takeout section, where various kinds of *dim sum* could be bought; the seating areas were on the second and third floors, each one accommodating up to fifty or sixty customers. *Yam cha* and *dim sum* were the

18. Zi Yu 子玉, "On the Fu Long Teahouse and Possession Street" 話說富隆茶樓和水坑口, in vol. 1 of *Old Hong Kong* 古港掌故 (Hong Kong: Shanghai shuju, 1979), 132-138.

mainstays in both the breakfast and the lunch periods, catering mainly to those living or working in the neighborhood. The lunch hour was particularly busy, when simple noodle, rice, and *ho fun* (flat rice noodle) dishes were also served. The age of the teahouse was quite apparent from its furniture and general ambience. The fancy but broken rosewood chairs, some of which still had mother-of-pearl decorations on their backs, suggested the elegance of the place in former days. There was no air conditioning; a few electric fans hung from the ceiling or perched on tall stands. Spittoons were still placed beside each table, and tea was served in the old-fashioned way in rice-bowl-shaped containers with small lids instead of teacups.



Photograph by Rulan Chao Pian

Most significantly, Fu Long was one of very few teahouses existing at the time in which customers still followed the old tradition of bringing along their tiny songbirds in their ornate cages. As their masters enjoyed tea and read newspapers at leisure, the birds, their cages hung on windowsills, chattered among themselves. During the busiest lunch hours when the rooms were filled, the windows too were almost filled with as many bird cages as there were customers. This custom of bringing pet songbirds to teahouses, like the performance of *nanyin*, belonged to a bygone era, and was fast disappearing amid Hong Kong's fast-paced modernity. The fact that these customers still followed the old tradition convinced me that Fu Long was a place where Dou Wun would find an appreciative audience.

When I first mentioned to Dou that I was arranging for him to sing in a teahouse, his reaction was one of surprise and reluctance. He said that it would be more difficult to sing there than at, say, Hong Kong University, because he had not performed in such a setting for many years. He expected the teahouse customers to know his songs, and this would put him under greater pressure to sing well. This reaction only confirmed my assumption concerning the importance

of the environment — that is, the audience — in Dou's creative process. But finally he consented to the location.

The manager of Fu Long Teahouse, Mr. Liao Sen, was surprisingly sympathetic to my rather unusual request. I proposed to him that a singer would perform in his teahouse for about an hour during the busiest lunch time period. There were to be three one-hour sessions per week, for a total of fifteen weeks. I asked Mr. Liao to place a large sign outside of the teahouse announcing the event as a way of attracting the attention of customers. The large red poster read "Dou Wun Performs *Nanyin*, 12 noon to 1:30 pm every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday." There was of course to be no extra charge to his customers, and nor did Mr. Liao charge me for this intrusion into his regular business. He merely requested that I tip the two waiters for the extra service they were likely to be putting in. I have always regretted not having tried to get to know Mr. Liao better because I was so involved in the project. But I shall always remember his kind and unquestioning support, which enabled me to carry out the project with relative ease.

My assistant Shiu and I set up a performance area in a strategic corner of the teahouse where everyone could see and hear. The table where Dou would place his instrument (the *zheng*) was large enough for us to add three microphones, two connected to an open-reel tape recorder and the third to a small cassette recorder. Dou had his own amplification system consisting of a microphone and a portable speaker—indispensable technology that he used when he sang at the street corner—which added to the clutter on the table. Those were days of relatively primitive technology: our main tape recorder, on loan from the Centre of Asian Studies, was a bulky contraption that used 1/2-inch open-reel tapes. Mr. Shiu would haul it to the teahouse and set it up before each session. I took along my own much smaller cassette tape recorder to supplement the open-reel tapes.<sup>19</sup>

On the first day of the series, March 11, 1975, Shiu and I arrived early so as to have everything set up in time. Shortly before noon, Dou came in, accompanied by a woman friend Ah Sou. He carried his instrument in one hand and his personal amplification gear in the other. He quickly set up his instruments, microphone, and speaker, and tuned the sixteen strings on the *zheng*, while at the same time he and I were chatting of this and that. One of the waiters placed a pot of tea and a teacup in front of him. At 12 noon sharp, his public performance began, with a short introduction of both speech and song that went:

19. The recording sessions at the Fu Long Teahouse have been reported elsewhere. See Bell Yung, "Reconstructing a Lost Performance Context: A Field Work Experiment," *Chinoperl Papers* no. 6 (1976): 120-143; translated into Chinese by Chen Shouren and Yun-dei Pun and published in *Fieldwork and Research in Chinese Opera* 實地考察與戲曲研究, ed. Sau Y. Chan 陳守仁 (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Yueju yanjiu jihua, 1997), 297-318. See also Kong Hong Zeng 榮鴻曾 [Bell Yung], "Collecting Contemporary Folk Performing Literature: Singing *nanyin* in Fu Long Teahouse" 當前民間演唱文學的搜集: 富隆茶樓唱南音, *Chinese Studies* 漢學研究 no. 1 (1990): 61-65.



[Speaks] Okay! I wish everyone success in all ventures. Your humble servant sang on the radio for many years some time ago. No more now. My songs are very old-fashioned. But hearing them will bring you joy and happiness through the year, and everything will come as you wish. Let me start by singing this old song about the undying love of a man. What is it? It's the very same one that the famous Baak Keui Wing recorded, called "A Man Burning Garments." After hearing it, you'll have success in everything.

(Tuning the instrument)

[Speaks] Okay! I'm going to begin now. Wishing everyone good spirits, prosperous looks with potential for riches.

(Instrumental prelude, in which he plucks the strings of the *zheng* with his right hand and plays the clappers with his left.)

[Sings]

Now I begin my singing; wishing you safety as you go in and out of your house, Men and women, old and young, the entire family together.

After you hear my words, you'll enjoy prospects of wealth and prosperity, For I'll sing how this man falls in love.

First, let me describe this love of his,  
After hearing it, everything will go your way.

(Begins singing the song proper)

Thus he began the first of his 43 performances at the teahouse that lasted until June 26. After the first 30 minutes, he stopped and took a few sips of tea, and chatted with me for a while. He told me that, during his younger days, he could sing non-stop for several hours; but he didn't have the energy (his word was *jingshen* [精神]) now. The intermission lasted some ten to fifteen minutes before the resumption of the performance. After about another 30 minutes of singing, he ended the day's performance. I would try to keep him for a few more minutes and urged him to have another cup of tea while I asked him about the olden days. Then he would say "Time to go." Holding on to Ah Sou and carrying his various things, they would take a bus to the Hong Kong and Yaumatei Ferry Pier (Cantonese Tung Yat Ma Tau), cross the harbor on a ferry to the Jordan Pier on the Kowloon side, and then walk home. At the time he was living at 996 Canton Road, mezzanine floor (Cantonese *gok lau*).

The teahouse was normally half empty at noon, but quickly filled up within 20 minutes and stayed quite full until shortly after 1 pm. The windowsills would also quickly fill up with birdcages. As soon as the singing began, the little birds would themselves sing even louder, providing quite a sonic backdrop in the teahouse and in the recording. During his performance most of the customers went about their usual business of chatting, reading the newspaper, or admiring the birds, but a few were obviously paying close attention to Dou. Before, in

between and after the sessions, some of them would come up to compliment him on his singing, ask him questions, and reminisce about the old days. One of the steady customers even wrote a poem to commemorate a performance. It is true that many customers paid more attention to me because of my obviously out-of-place appearance, and even more attention to the recording machines, than to Dou. But the few who did respond actively to Dou undoubtedly exerted an influence on him. He would begin each session by first wishing the listeners good fortune and happiness, or using other congratulatory expressions appropriate to the day. For example, if it happened to be a day of horse racing, he would wish the audience luck in their betting. Obviously this indicated that Dou was aware of their presence and that he had not lost his professional touch. I believe that such awareness and professionalism, which of course had existed when he worked as a real performer years before, must have been instrumental in the shaping of his songs in 1975.

The entire list of songs, including a few that were not recorded in the teahouse as noted, is as follows:

- A Man Burning Garments<sup>20</sup>
- A Love-Obsessed Prostitute (also known as A Woman Burning Garments)
- King's Farewell to Concubine Yu
- Wayfarer's Autumnal Lament
- The Haunting of Guang Chang Long, five episodes
- Second Sister You Dies
- Laments Through the Night by He Hui Qun
- Stealing the Poetry Manuscript (an episode from The Jade Hairpin)
- The Story of Liang Tian Lai, ten episodes
- The Birth of Guan Yin, three episodes
- Wu Song Kills the Tiger, 16 episodes
- Stealing the Poetry Manuscript, repeat
- Killing the Tiger at Jing Yang Gong (an episode from Wu Song Kills the Tiger), repeat
- Bi Rong Offers Sacrifices (an episode from The Haunting at the Home of County Magistrate Mei)
- Meng Li Jun Has Her Pulse Checked (an episode from Romance in a Second Life)
- Returning Home to Mourn His Brother (an episode from Wu Song Kills the Tiger), sung in longzhou style
- Slaughtering His Sister-in-Law (an episode from Wu Song Kills the Tiger), sung in longzhou style
- The Fight at the Lion's Pavilion (an episode from Wu Song Kills the Tiger), sung in lungzhou style
- Drafted into the Army (an episode from Wu Song Kills the Tiger), sung in longzhou style

<sup>20</sup> The title could be translated as "A Man Mourning His Love." "Burning garments" is to offer sacrifices to a loved one.

Beating the Door God when Drunk (an episode from Wu Song Kills the Tiger), sung in longzhou style  
 The Eight Immortals Send Birthday Greetings  
 The Heavenly Official Bestows Blessing  
 Rotten Big Drum, sung in the banyan style, sung at the home of Nishimura  
 Second Uncle Chen, sung in the banyan style, sung at the home of Nishimura  
 Blind Dou Wun Remembers His Past, twelve episodes, the last four of which were sung in 1976 at the Centre of Asian Studies at the University of Hong Kong

The last song was left unfinished when we ended the performance at the teahouse because I had to return to the United States. Eventually, my friend Nishi, who knew Dou well because he was very much involved with the project, completed the recording of the song on my behalf on March 6 and 13 of 1976 at the Centre of Asian Studies. It may also be observed above that, besides *nanyin*, I asked him to sing another kind of Cantonese narrative song called *longzhou* (Cantonese *Longzau*), "dragon boat," which has a different musical style in which the singer accompanies himself on a small gong and a small drum.

In my conversations with Dou, I learned that one kind of song he sang was the type called *banyan* (Cantonese *baan'ngaan*). These songs were risqué in content, often describing sexual acts, and were sung exclusively in brothels. In textual and musical style they were completely different from *nanyin*. Understandably, he absolutely refused to sing these songs at the teahouse because they were completely inappropriate in such a setting. But he agreed to sing them in private. On May 31, I recorded two of his *banyan* songs, approximately two hours total, at the home of Nishimura.<sup>21</sup>

### Voices of and about Hong Kong

With the exception of the last item, all the songs on the above list belong to the standard repertory of *nanyin* (and *longzhou* and *banyan*). Of those, *Wayfarer's Autumnal Lament*, *A Man Burning Garments*, *A Love-Obsessed Prostitute*, and *Laments Through the Night* by He Hui Qun were widely sung and known to audiences, and the text in each case was relatively stable from one singer to another. These songs are less narratives than emotional outpourings of loss and longing, almost always concerning an illicit liaison between a prostitute and her young lover.<sup>22</sup> The three

pieces *The Birth of Guan Yin*, *The Eight Immortals Send Birthday Greetings*, and *The Heavenly Official Bestows Blessing* are ritual songs sung for special celebratory occasions. Their texts are also relatively fixed.

A second group of songs are nationally or regionally known: the Wu Song story is from the afore-mentioned *Shuihuzhuan* and the related novel *Jinpingmei* (The Story of Golden Lotus); the story of Second Sister You is from the novel *Hongloumeng* (Dream of the Red Chamber); *Yuzhanji* (Story of the Jade Hairpin) is a celebrated Ming dynasty drama; and *Zaishengyuan* (Romance in a Second Life) is a Qing dynasty verse epic that has been widely performed in many narrative genres in other parts of the country. The remaining two, *The Story of Liang Tian Lai* and *The Haunting of Guang Chang Long* are regional Cantonese tales.

The songs in this second group shared one thing in common when Dou sang them: they were highly improvisatory. Instead of following a fixed text, Dou exercised great flexibility on two different levels. First, Dou manipulated the story by adding, eliminating, or changing the order of appearance of one or more plot elements. Secondly, on the level of expression, Dou expanded or contracted the time required for performance by his choice of words and phrases, giving more (or less) detailed exposition to plot elements. A good example is *The Story of Liang Tian Lai*, for which I possess a printed version, published in the early 20th century, which has 173 pages and consists of six chapters, each chapter containing eleven to fourteen sections, and each section over a hundred lines. In short, the printed version is itself a lengthy epic of roughly seven thousand lines, plus spoken prose sections interspersed among the verses. When Dou was singing it, I tried to follow the written text but had a difficult time tracking where he was because of his extensive improvisation. After five recording sessions (about five hours), he was still on page 20, only three quarters of the way through chapter one. Extrapolating from that sample, it would take him roughly fifty hours to reach the end of the story.

The improvisatory nature of his performance is further evidenced by what Dou told me one day. When I expressed surprise and admiration at the large number of songs that he claimed to know, his response was something like this: "I don't really know all these songs by memory. Most of them are quite similar to one another, sharing standard episodes like weddings, quarrels, or love scenes. All I need to remember are these episodes, and I use them whenever they are suitable. My singing is like cooking. A chef has a limited amount of ingredients and spices. He mixes them in different ways and sequences, and can produce a very large number of dishes."

Dou's improvisatory abilities became critical when, during his active years as a professional singer, he would often make up a song on the spot based upon some news items he had heard a few hours earlier that day. When I asked him to try doing this at Fu Long Teahouse, he laughingly declined and said that he no longer paid any attention to the news around him. It was then that I came up with the idea of asking him to sing about his own life. I said to him: "Surely you

21. The recording of *banyan* 板眼 was reported in *Chinoperl Papers*, no. 11 (1981) and no. 12 (1983), with the complete translation of one of the two songs, "Rotten Big Drum."

22. These four songs, along with a fifth one *King's Farewell to Concubine Yu*, have been issued as a double CD set called *Naanyam Songs of Love and Longing: Live Recordings of the Legendary Blind Naanyam Singer Dou Wun at the Fu Long Tea House in 1975*, Hong Kong (Chinese Music Archive, Department of Music, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1975).

know your own life well, and could make up a new song based on that." After some hesitation, he finally and reluctantly agreed, and that was how "Blind Dou Wun Remembers His Past" came about. The entire song lasted more than six hours, consisting of 1812 lines of text interspersed with many spoken segments, and took four days in the Fu Long Teahouse plus two more one-hour recording sessions in the following year to complete.<sup>23</sup>

Of all the songs recorded in the course of this project, "Blind Dou Wun Remembers His Past" is the most important for several reasons. First, unlike the others, it is an "original" song that no one else sang, or could have sung, before. It reflects Dou's creative genius in his organization of the material, his choice of words and phrases, and his technique of timing. Its originality, and indeed, the unusualness of the content, is shown in the way Dou began each performance at the teahouse. For example, at the very first session of this song, his normal introductory chatter went like this:

Hello, esteemed listeners, today is Thursday, and here I am again. I shall be taking up another hour of your precious time, to impose upon your fortune-generating ears with my noisy chatter. As to the story, you already know all kinds. So for today, my story will be neither about the past, nor about the present. You'll never guess! And I bet you'll never understand why I'm doing this! There! I'm going to sing about myself! Ha ha. Everything about me, the whats and the whys — nothing will be held back. If I don't sing well, please, esteemed listeners, don't judge me harshly. For this is not your normal song. No singer has ever sung about his own life, isn't that so? So, here I go, giving it a try. Your humble servant is called Dou Wun, that's my name when I sang on the radio, isn't it? Let me give this song a name. I'll call it "Blind Dou Wun Remembers his Past." All right, with your permission, here's my humble offering. Let me sing.

In the three subsequent sessions at the teahouse, his introductory chatter always hinted at the fact that he was a little embarrassed to be singing this song, and was doing so only because he had been cajoled into it. Significantly, for the last two sessions, recorded at the Centre of Asian Studies at the Hong Kong University, he did not begin with such chatter because there was no live audience to whom he felt responsible.

The second reason why this song is particularly important is because it is an autobiographical song by a musician whose life was both ordinary and extraordinary: ordinary because, like many Chinese people of the mid-twentieth

23. An excerpt of this song, 164 lines, was translated and published, along with the corresponding recording, as a DVD entitled *A Blind Singer's Story: 50 Years of Life and Work in Hong Kong*. The entire song, both the Chinese text and its English translation, will be published in the future.

century, he lived through displacement, alienation, trials and triumphs; extraordinary because, unlike others, he was the last surviving professional singer of an important genre of music that would never be heard again as it once was, and because he happened to be a talented and experienced story-teller. Since the song was about himself, including episodes of intense emotional upheaval of a personal nature, he performed it with a particular poignancy. The brief sketch of his life story given earlier in this essay was extracted from the song.

Lastly and most significantly for this essay, the song is important because it is about a particular place, Hong Kong, and a particular period of time, from 1926 to 1975. This turbulent period of the city's history is "seen" through the eyes and told through the voice of a lowly citizen and folk artist. Like hundreds of thousands of others, Dou struggled to survive in a rapidly changing city, where the traditional and the modern, and East and West, were in a constant shuffle.

Even though Dou came to Hong Kong half-formed at age sixteen, he fitted in easily because he was born and spent his childhood in a physical environment and a cultural milieu of which Hong Kong had been very much a part for centuries, despite its colonial interlude. The vast majority of Hong Kongers feel a link of kinship with the Pearl River Delta region linguistically, socially, culturally, and often personally. The constant movement of people across the boundary has forged a historical connection between the two regions. The fact that Dou's songs were accepted here is a small but significant indication of these feelings of affinity. His is a personal manifestation of Hong Kong's self identification with the "motherland" to the north, and his voice should be taken as an essential text for our understanding of what the city is and who the people in it are. The story of his life and the stories he sang, in particular the biographical song, are "texts" that validate the "oneness" in the slogan of "One Country, Two Systems."

My path crossed Dou's fortuitously in 1974-75, and I had the opportunity to relay Dou's stories through my perspective. I was also an outsider to Hong Kong, but from a Chinese subculture that was substantially more different from mainstream Hong Kong than Dou's was. Even though I spent my formative years in the colony, the social circumstances were such that I was touched very little by local culture, at least at the conscious level. It was not until I had spent almost fifteen years abroad that I found my way back and discovered the subliminal imprints from my days of youth. I returned after receiving a Western education, and I brought back a personal and professional view of the world that had been molded largely by Western thoughts. If Dou validates "One Country Two Systems," might I not be considered to exemplify the counterpart slogan of "Asia's World City"?

But the main story is Dou's, a voice of China in Hong Kong, and let it be acknowledged that his story has been refracted through my voice, as I was the one who arranged to have him sing in Fu Long Teahouse and pressured him to create the original song of himself and of Hong Kong. More importantly, I am telling his story through the English language, a voice utterly foreign to him and to his world.

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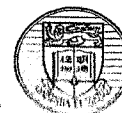
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