

Orthographic Variants in the Cantonese Love Ballad,
Romance of the Fancy Notepaper (Huajian Ji 花箋記): 1713 to Present-Day Editions

Marjorie K.M. Chan (陳潔雯)
The Ohio State University

The Jing Jing Zhai (靜淨齋) edition of a long, Cantonese love ballad, *Di Ba Caizi Huajian* (第八才子花箋), archived at the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, is an extremely valuable source for Cantonese dialect history. Published early in the 18th century, with a preface date of the 52nd year of the Kangxi Emperor (1713 or 1714), this is the earliest extant text that makes use of the Cantonese language, thus providing us with a first glimpse into an earlier stage of the language. The work is of unknown authorship and could potentially date back to the late Ming dynasty. It is significant that this 1713 extant text predates, by more than a century, Zhao Ziyong's (招子庸) *Yue'ou* (粵謳) songs and early western missionaries' publications on Cantonese. This 1713 edition, together with later editions, are collectively referred to in this study as the *Huajian Ji* (花箋記), translated here as *Romance of the Fancy Notepaper*. This study uses the 1713 edition (obtained in autumn 2013), and some later editions, to study some of the orthographic changes that have taken place. Also studied are some cases of orthographic forms for some early vernacular Cantonese words that have remained remarkably stable throughout the past three centuries. Examples include 唔 'not' and 冇 'to not have.'