

The Columbia Anthology of Chinese Folk and Popular Literature. 640 pages. Columbia University Press, 2011. 9780231153133. Victor H. Mair, Mark Bender. 2011

The book has extensive materials on folk rituals, epics, folk stories, folk songs, and ballads. The drama section begins with a three-page introduction to folk drama. A transcription of a 1996 hand puppet (budaixi) by Taiwan's Zhang Shuangxi Hand-Puppet Troupe translated by Sue-mei Wu follows. In storytelling or ballads we get episodes from important Chinese narratives. An eighteenth-century version of Butterfly Lovers translated by Wilt Idema is a delightfully readable version of the story: Zhu Yingtai's decision to study with Confucius disguised as a man and the affection she shares with her roommate, Liang Sanbo, who fails to recognize she is a woman, is palpable. In China, traditional drama has had a complicated and fertile relationship with other expressive arts, including the storytelling arts called quyi (art of melodies), various musical traditions, and popular literature. All told, Chinese scholars have documented more than 360 different local styles of drama within the borders of the country. Those offered by professional troupes, in particular Beijing (Peking) opera (jingju), constitute the best known of the forms, though there are vast numbers of lesser-known local styles, with varying levels of organization. The Columbia Anthology of Chinese Folk and Popular Literature is a 2011 book edited by Victor H. Mair and Mark Bender and published by the Columbia University Press. Jürg Böcker of the University of Bonn described it as "the first large-scale anthology of the folk literature in China ever published in the West". The book includes oral literature from Han Chinese and ethnic minorities. This book is intended to be an introduction to the material and was written as a university textbook.